

PRIORITISING MARGINALISED VOICES

Exploring new methods of diversity assessment in our popular reading collection

Meg Ecclestone & Carli Agostino
meccle@uoguelph.ca & carli.agostino@carleton.ca

GRYPH READS



GRYPH READS @ UG

Gryph Reads is the University of Guelph's leisure reading collection and includes popular fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, DVDs, video games and more. It contains approximately 1,000 items.

The collection development policy includes a diversity statement:

"In all cases a priority focus is on diversity and the inclusion of all user voices. We endeavor to make purposeful selections to ensure a plurality of user voices and interests are represented in the collection."

Why do we have this policy?

- Oppression is systemic and operates on individual, institutional and cultural levels
- Libraries are not neutral
- Libraries are built on colonial and euro-centric values and are often sites of oppression

HOW HAVE WE BEEN DOING THIS WORK?

- Created a dedicated sub-committee that researches and selects for diverse titles
- Developed book displays that highlight marginalised voices (e.g. Indigenous Reads, Black History Month, Pride Month) and use these titles to identify diversity coverage in the collection
- Fostered campus partnerships with equity mandates (i.e. Black History Month Organizing committee, campus book club) to generate title recommendations
- Enhanced weeding policies to ensure diverse titles are not deselected based on low circulation statistics.

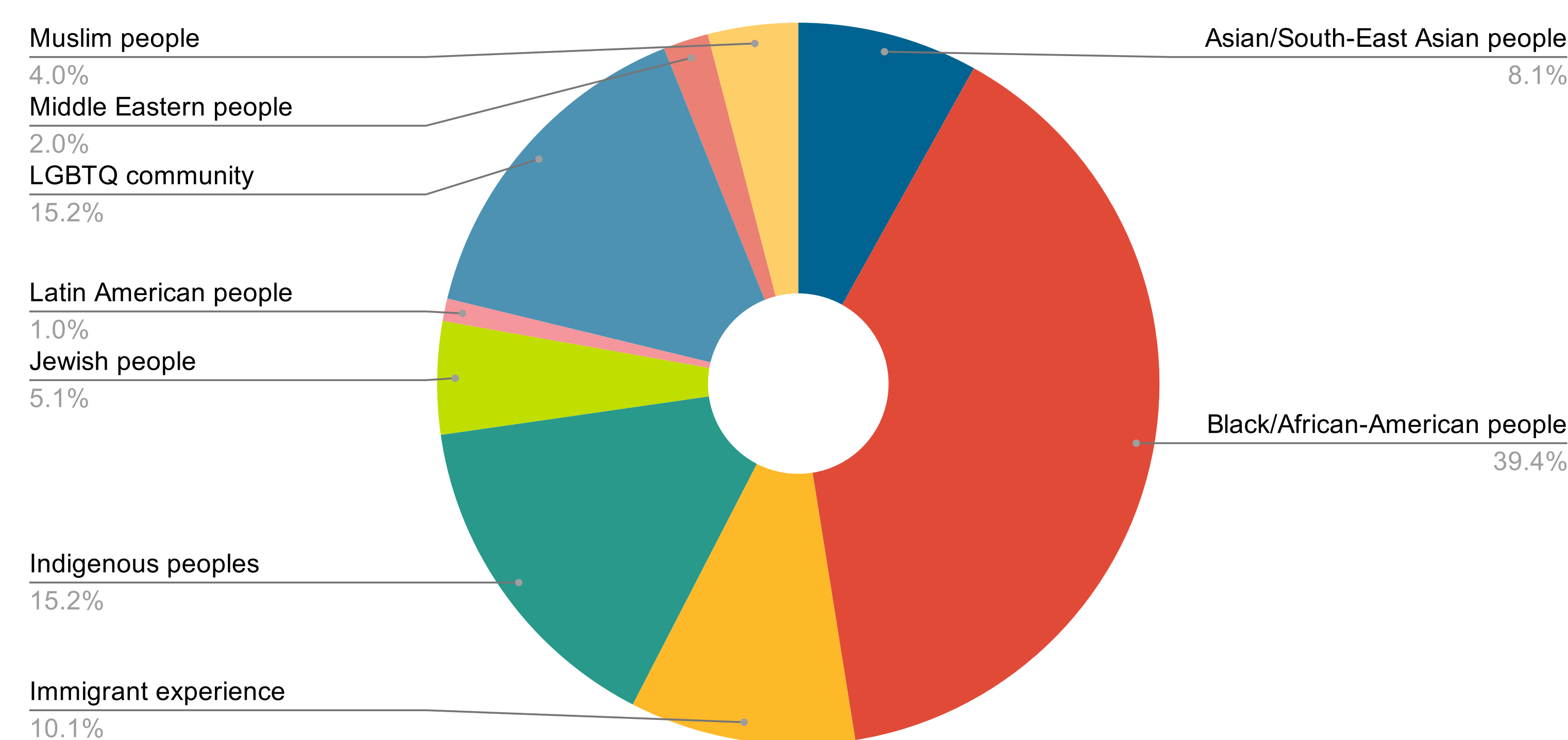


DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was primarily completed through subject heading analysis.

10.8% of titles were identified as being diverse.

Distribution of titles by identity category



Diverse books by subject heading

Size denotes word frequency among subject descriptors for diverse books.



FINDINGS

- Under-representation of Canadian experience
- Over-representation of tragedy narratives (e.g. slavery & holocaust stories)
- Subject headings are deeply problematic, limiting, and reflect an anglo-american bias
- Identities are complex and do not fit into tidy categories
- We want to ensure that our collections represent our diverse users, but does this type of work contribute meaningfully to broader equity efforts?
- Success is unclear and difficult to measure.

MOVING FORWARD

There are larger challenges that need to be addressed, including:

- Decolonization of library classification systems and more dynamic metadata schemas
- Collection development and library services that prioritize diversity from the start
- Greater diversity within the library profession
- Recognition and dismantling of systemic inequality and oppression in libraries (and beyond)

DIVERSITY ASSESSMENT

Diversity assessment is the set of practices, either qualitative or quantitative, that determine what portion of a library collection is written by those outside of traditionally dominate groups: white, cis-het, able-bodied men. A *diversity audit* is the gold standard for collection assessment work, but is labour-intensive. Here, we explore other possible avenues for assessing diversity in collections.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Library Journal. (2019). Evaluating, Auditing, and Diversifying Your Collections: LJ Professional Development. Online course.
 Jensen, Karen. (2018). "Library Journal's Equity in Action: Doing a Diversity Audit." School Library Journal.
 Hathcock, April. (2015). "White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS." *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*.
 Collins, Anastasia M. (2018). "Language, Power, and Oppression in the LIS Diversity Void." *Library Trends*. 67:1, pp. 39-51.