SLR School Library Research
RESEARCH JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

Volume 29, 2026
ISSN: 2165-1019

Approved June 2026
www.ala.org/aasl/slr

"So they know the library is a space for them": School Librarians' Understandings and Perspectives on the Significance of Diverse Representation in Book Collections

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Abstract

This exploratory survey distributed to Texas school librarians was designed to gain insight into the significance of diverse representation in school libraries based on school librarians' understandings and perceptions. Rudine Sims Bishop's metaphor of books as "mirrors and windows" was a foundation for this study. Foundational and critical literature related to this metaphor and diverse representation as well as an interpretivist approach were used to guide the methods and analysis. Conclusions from this study support a narrative of school libraries related to diverse representation through four themes: librarians center students in practices and decision-making; librarians believe in the power of books; they are deliberate about the message they are sending students, and they know libraries can continue to improve in service to communities. It is recommended that these librarians' voices be considered when critically examining policies and developing equitable and just practices within libraries that explicitly show that libraries seek to affirm, uplift, and include the identity and experiences of all students.

Introduction

Rudine Sims Bishop developed the idea of books within a classroom or library that can represent mirrors and windows. In calling for the deliberate curation of book collections that include both, Bishop described books as mirrors that reflect a reader's identity or experiences and windows that provide a glimpse into identities and experiences with which the reader may be unfamiliar (1990a). Bishop also included sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990a, 1990b, 2012) as a part of this metaphor. This study focused on the mirrors and windows aspects. While sliding glass doors are an important part of the metaphor, this was an exploratory study to enhance a foundation of understanding from school librarians' perspectives related to books as mirrors and windows, with opportunity to build on that understanding.

Bishop, along with other scholars from many fields, including education, library science, and critical studies, have discussed and analyzed the meaning of diverse representation in book collections. However, very little has been published about what school librarians believe about diverse representation and what meaning it holds within school libraries. The current societal context (e.g., restrictive state legislation; book bans) in the United States threatens diverse representation in school libraries. At the same time, scholarship continues to emphasize the importance of diverse representation and professional standards for librarians stress the need for diverse representation. Therefore, research is needed about librarians' perspectives. This study helps contextualize the meaning and significance of diverse representation specifically in the school library from the perspective of school librarians. Through a larger research study (Krutka, 2025), I have gained insight on school librarians' understanding of books as mirrors and windows, how this concept plays a role in school libraries as a part of librarian practice, and to what extent this concept holds significance for the study participants. In this article I focus solely on the larger study's findings related to librarians' understandings of this concept and how diverse representation in library collections holds significance for school librarians in Texas.

Research Problem and Study Objectives

Bishop explained that when books representing mirrors are absent, students "receive a powerful message about how they are undervalued in both school and society" (1990b, p. 561). For those whose experiences and identities have traditionally filled the shelves of libraries, books that represent mirrors are abundant. Bishop warned against this, explaining that if students "see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism" (1990a, para. 5). Considering Bishop's work and her analysis related to representation, the books that are on the shelves of a school library, and those that are not, send a message to students and communities. In a school library, the librarian can play a significant role in the curation of a collection and, therefore, the message. The Library Bill of Rights includes a policy to develop book collections with diverse representation (American Library Association, 1996) and the study of multicultural literature is included in masters' programs and professional development. As will be discussed further in the literature review, there is an abundance of professional writing and academic discourse related to the meaning and significance of diverse representation in book collections in general. Yet, there

is a lack of studies focused on school librarians and research exploring what books as mirrors and windows mean to school librarians and how these books play a role in school libraries.

In addition to filling the need to better assess what practitioners believe about books as mirrors and windows, insights from this research can be one part of understanding the story of school libraries and evaluating their current state. While "the number of books reflecting lives and complex identities of children, teens, and families today continues to grow," the upward trend has flattened in recent years (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2024). In addition, current social and political contexts, including book ban efforts (Baêta & Meehan, 2023) and oppressive state and local legislation (EveryLibrary, 2023), have restricted and minimized the representation and validation of the diverse lives of students. The American Library Association (ALA) summarized that in 2023, book "titles representing the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals made up 47 percent of those targeted in censorship attempts" (Garcia, 2024).

Knox (2014) has documented the discourse of book challengers who have claimed that schools have fallen short of their responsibility to protect children because they allow inappropriate books to have a place in schools. Book ban supporters have put forth a narrative of librarians doing harm. These book ban advocates are "insisting there are pornographic and unsafe books that violate the Penal Code" and state that students are being "indoctrinated slowly and methodically by people who have an agenda" (Krutka, 2024). Librarians have been fired for refusing to censor their book collections (Kuhn, 2024), had municipal criminal charges brought against them due to the books in their libraries (Harris & Alter, 2022), and have been labeled as pedophiles, groomers, and heretics (Harris & Alter, 2022; Park, 2022). Several states have passed legislation that would result in "years of imprisonment and tens of thousands in fines for providing sexually explicit, obscene, or 'harmful' books to children" (Natanson, 2023).

During the 2025 legislative session, Texas considered legislation replacing the local librarian as the collection development expert. Instead, parents and community members would be able to challenge books that are reviewed by the State Board of Education and could then be removed from every public school library in the state (Patterson, 2025). The 2025 Texas legislative session also included bills (e.g., HB267; HB947; HB995; HB1012; HB1025; HB1434; HB2030; SB89; SB242; SB412) that would lead to the criminalization of educators, including public school librarians (EveryLibrary, 2025). Texas Senate Bill 13 did pass, which allows for the creation of a library advisory council, with the majority of voting members being parents in the district, who have the ability to advise the district's board by "approv[ing] or reject[ing] the list of library materials that have been donated to or that are proposed to be procured by a school library" (Texas 89th Legislature, 2025). School librarians could be appointed to that council but could not vote. Even when legislation has stalled in some instances, EveryLibrary (an organization in the U.S. dedicated to research and action related to public, academic, and school libraries) remains concerned that state legislators "will reintroduce language in [the next] session and anti-access activists will be inspired to sponsor their own regressive initiatives" (EveryLibrary, 2023).

A survey conducted by School Library Journal in May 2023 found that a quarter of school librarians experienced harassment "related to books or displays in their library" (Ishizuka, 2023).

The percentage increased to 30% when only high school librarians were asked. These factors have created an atmosphere that has the potential to limit students' access to books and develop a story of school libraries that may or may not be supported by the experiences of school librarians themselves.

This sociopolitical context generates a certain story of school libraries. It depicts school libraries as unsafe places where professionals are unable or unwilling to care for students and do not have the knowledge to carry out the responsibilities of their jobs. This context continues to restrict practices of librarians, limit and discourage diverse representation in libraries, and convey a powerful narrative that these restrictions and exclusion are necessary within libraries. If insight is gathered from school librarians about diverse representation, could it disrupt these exclusionary and oppressive conditions and share a more accurate and insightful narrative of school libraries related to diverse representation?

To this end, I was guided by these research questions in this study:

1) Do school librarians understand the mirrors and windows concept?

2) What do school librarians believe the significance of books as mirrors and windows is in a school library?

Literature Review

The current context, which includes book banning, restrictive legislation, and other threats, continues to adversely affect diverse representation and can be further understood in relation to this study by examining library origins and a background of literature examining libraries and diverse representation. Most of this scholarship primarily concentrates on the context of the United States, with Hudson (2017) offering a broader North American context. Libraries, including academic, public, school, and special libraries, have oppressive origins that continue to plague our systems, practices, and spaces. As products of communities, libraries have reflected the oppressive and inequitable practices and policies of society (Ettarh, 2018; Honma, 2005; Mehra, 2021; Mehra & Gray, 2020; Peterson, 1996; Prescott et al., 2017). This includes oppressive and exclusionary library classification systems (Kumasi et al., 2020), subject headings (Morales & Williams, 2021), library science masters' programs (Brown et al., 2018; Gibson et al., 2018; Pawley, 2006; Stauffer, 2020), book collections (Hughes-Hassell, 2013), and "racialized knowledge production" (Hudson, 2017, p. 23) within libraries and librarianship.

Historically, school libraries specifically have reflected and perpetuated discrimination and bias, including disparities in funding, resistance to books that are deemed contrary to community values, and a lack of diversity in staffing (Wiegand, 2021). School librarians, who guide the collections and programs of school libraries, continue to be overwhelmingly White, female, and middle-class (Wiegand, 2021).

Researchers and practitioners have further analyzed foundational issues related specifically to diverse representation. In 1965 Nancy Larrick assessed the landscape of children's literature and pointedly stated that "integration may be law of the land, but most of the books children see are

all white" (p. 63). She discussed contributing issues, including the role of White creators and publishers in continued exclusion of stories with Black characters, or if included, their problematic representation. Thomas (2016) traced this history; this scholar recommended a commitment to including and highlighting creators of works that include cultural diversity, critically evaluating texts that are used and shared, and advocating for greater production by publishers and booksellers. Walter Dean Myers wrote about starting his writing career in 1969 and how the "field was nearly empty" and that in 2014 "when about 40 percent of public school students nationwide are Black and Latino, the disparity of representation is even more egregious" (2014, para. 12). The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC, 2026) of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has documented the presence—and lack—of various elements of diverse representation in newly published books. While the scope of the work has evolved over time, since 2018 the CCBC has documented and analyzed the content of books published by and about Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as well as other aspects of identity, including LGBTQ+, religion, and disability. Lugo Vázquez (2021) analyzed White-dominant narratives within libraries, utilizing Patricia Hill Collins domains of power framework to identify how "collection development processes play a role in upholding or questioning racial inequities in materials available" (p. 179). An underlying factor within libraries and book collections is how "children's library collections were created and shaped by 'educated' middle- and upper-class White women who focused on reproducing White Supremacy" (Lugo Vázquez, 2021, p. 181).

Before the work of these scholars, authors, and organizations, some librarians, such as Pura Belpré, Charlemae Hill Rollins, and Augusta Braxton Baker, had been working to disrupt this all-White world of books—especially children's books. From the start of Pura Belpré's career at the New York Public Library in the 1920s, she worked to disrupt oppressive ideas of what stories had value, diligently working for decades to bring Puerto Rican culture and stories, in the oral tradition and on the shelf, to libraries (Jimenez-Garcia, 2015). August Braxton Baker became children's librarian in New York Public libraries in 1937 and committed to a critical evaluation of the collection to better and more fully represent Black children and stories. Her work included writing a bibliography The Black Experience in Children's Books to help guide others to do the same (White, 2025). In 1941, Charlamae Hill Rollins developed strategies for evaluating literature for distorted or harmful depictions, understanding and advocating for representation of Black children in book collections (Tiedt, 2018). This overview of a history of libraries in the context of diverse representations provides a foundation for understanding the mirrors and windows concept and its significance in this study.

Mirrors and Windows

While I will use the terms mirrors and windows, scholars and practitioners may refer to this concept using other terms, including multicultural literature or diverse representation in book collections. Hudson (2017), Peterson (1996), and Honma (2005) problematized both multicultural and diverse, pointing out the ways that the terms can be superficial, ineffectively addressing inequities within libraries and can be used as general terms that promote librarian neutrality and inaction. Within this context and recognizing the issues related to these terms, it is necessary to explain the use of terms related to books and book collections in this study. This study focuses on librarians' perspectives and practices related to books as mirrors and windows

within school libraries. In the process, I will also use the terms multicultural literature or diverse representation. However, I do not use the term multicultural literature to refer to a single book, such as a book about a Black character or a queer relationship, as doing so would reinforce the idea of Whiteness or heterosexual relationships as the norm. Instead of using these terms to "ascrib[e] difference and otherness… affirming that whiteness is the neutral, normal way of being in libraries" (Brook et al., 2015, p. 248), I use them to describe a collection with books that reflect the diversity of identities and experiences in our communities.

Meaning and Significance of Books as Mirrors and Windows

Bishop placed great importance on the books in a school's collection, emphasizing how books can normalize certain identities and experiences, and devalue or exclude others (1990b). Bishop saw the potential for books to disrupt social norms that perpetuate discrimination and bias, focusing on the reading experiences of Black students in a multicultural world that privileges dominant narratives. If schools choose to provide only some students with reflections of their identities and experiences, students "see no need for change; thus, current societal attitudes and wrongs are entrenched for yet another generation" (Bishop, 1990b, p. 561). It is essential to note this critical element of Bishop's metaphor. Books as mirrors and windows are necessary both for the experiences of individuals and for working toward more just communities.

In addition to Bishop's seminal work, other scholars have added to or refined this concept. In developing instructional supports for educators and librarians, Murillo and Sanders (2025) analyzed 17 metaphors related to diverse and inclusive representation that had a foundation in Bishop's work. In 2016 Reese explained the need for Indigenous authors to refrain from writing about certain things. From her perspective, instead of providing a book as a mirror or window, some things should be kept behind curtains. Based on previous experiences and historical context, she emphasized the threat that shared information "will be exploited and used against us… it will be misunderstood." Taking a different approach, Toliver (2020) focused on the lack of representation of Black women in science fiction. She examined the need for not only books as mirrors but also pointed out that within books, "Black women are also trying to find their telescopes as they explore identities beyond the past and present and claim space in a future that has told them to keep out" (p. 329). As an author of children's books as well as a teacher, Krishnaswami (2019) considered how books as windows have the potential to engage the reader in a variety of ways, envisioning books as prisms.

Since Murillo and Sanders' (2025) publication, Adam et al. (2025) extended Bishop's metaphor with a framework grounded in the idea that a book as a mirror can vary in the type of reflection. Similar to goals of critical multicultural analysis to "analyze how dominant ideologies function in text and images" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009), Adam et al. (2025) looked at how their framework enabled students to critically engage with the texts in considering the type of mirror. Mason et al. (2025) contended that there was a need to reconsider Bishop's metaphor in the context of increased homophobia and transphobia because "visibility is not and cannot be the primary means through which we seek queer and trans liberation" (p. 8). Through insightful analysis of this context, Bishop's metaphor, and other related scholarship, Mason et al. called for curtains, blinds, and closet doors.

The work of the authors and researchers mentioned above demonstrates the ways the concept of mirrors and windows continues to be contextualized and utilized to evaluate the lack of representation as well as the types of representation in book collections.

Within the literature related to the meaning of books as mirrors and windows the critical concept of counter-storytelling also emerges. Richard Delgado's 1989 work on this concept is foundational to understanding how stories can "build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings" (p. 2413) and how counter-stories can "open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live" (p. 2414). This tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT) recognizes that certain experiences and identities are systematically privileged and how this serves to marginalize others. It also acknowledges the "experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). Utilizing CRT, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) identified "a majoritarian story is one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference" (p. 28) and pointed out how counter-stories can be a "method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told...also [be] a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 32).

Much of this critical literature within education and library and information science (LIS) examines the need to push beyond the presence of diverse representation to disrupt the status quo of oppression and injustice. Directly referencing counter-storytelling and applying it to young adult literature, Hughes-Hassell (2013) spoke to the power of multicultural literature to help students identify, discuss, and potentially disrupt social injustice. Mabbott (2017) saw this potential as well, gaining insight and inspiration from Charlemae Hill Rollins to understand and advocate for the incorporation of diverse and authentic representation "to create a more equitable and democratic world for everyone" (p. 521). Adam (2021) recognized the harm that comes from students seeing mostly books from dominant stories, or privileged identities, and how that can give a "sense of White being normal and of greater value" (p. 15). Considering more specifically transgender children's experiences and intersectional representation within picture books, Crawley (2017) noted "hostile school climates" and how "it is imperative that educators counter this devastating narrative" (p. 29). This imperative is directly connected to understanding the power of counter-stories (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and the need for critical evaluation and action related to books as mirrors and windows within school libraries.

Application of the Mirrors and Windows Concept in Schools and Libraries

Authors and researchers have analyzed how books as mirrors and windows matter to students, including how the books impact students pertaining to specific identities and experiences (Crawley, 2017; Newstreet et al., 2019; Stewart, 2017) and as a general call to better curate and share books that represent mirrors and windows in schools (Adam, 2021; Colby & Lyon, 2004; Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Mabbott, 2017).

Studies have also examined what this metaphor looks like in practice, both in classrooms and libraries. For example, Newstreet et al. (2019) found texts offered some students a window experience and others a mirror when incorporating text sets related to Muslim people, culture,

and experiences. Along with response activities, these deliberately curated text sets helped "[contribute] to understanding, reducing intolerance and discrimination" (p. 562). Those authors also noted the continued predominance of White and female teachers, emphasizing the need to be critical and intentional in developing book collections with diverse representation. Adam (2021) also recognized the significance of the teacher in not only including diverse representation in book collections but having the skills to effectively incorporate them into learning and mindfully discussing them with students. Even when including books that represented both mirrors and windows, teachers othered groups that have been traditionally marginalized as their teaching practice "was found to reinforce dominant culture ideologies and viewpoints" (Adam, 2021, p. 10). In analyzing the impact of books as mirrors and windows on individual students, Stewart (2017) showed how a multilingual refugee adolescent girl's reading experiences were validating and enjoyable using books the student could connect to. Looking at educators' roles, Enriquez (2021) recommended an evaluation of how books as mirrors and windows are incorporated into classrooms, including encouraging the development of stronger relationships with students, a questioning of whose story is centered in curriculum units, and an integration and commitment to diverse representation throughout learning experiences. Rook (2024) used Bishop's metaphor as a literary device in classrooms she described as multi-ethnic or that included students who were learning English as another language or dialect. Rook included a checklist of questions for teachers to consider when choosing texts that effectively use the metaphor and "enhance English language knowledge and skills" (p. 70). Incorporating Bishop's framework, tenets of CRT, and the work of Charlemae Hill Rollins, Mabbott (2017) analyzed the We Need Diverse Books campaign and how the LIS field and library professionals must make "a diverse collection [a] naturally occurring phenomenon" (p. 520).

While researchers have examined the use of books as mirrors and windows in educational settings, fewer studies have focused on the insights and perspectives of educators' understandings and experiences (e.g., Brinson, 2012; Clark & Fleming, 2019; Mongillo & Holland, 2017). Even rarer were studies focused specifically on school libraries and school librarians. Ahlborn (2020) and Oltmann (2016) did both explore school librarians' perspectives and experiences related to diverse representation in book collections. Ahlborn's study focused on biracial identity in literature and Oltmann's on LGBT resources. Oltmann (2016), Clark and Fleming (2019), Mongillo and Holland (2017), and Ahlborn (2020) elaborated further the need for books to be one part of an educator's dedication to having practices and spaces that explore, include, validate, and celebrate student identity and experiences. These studies concluded with calls for improvement in educators' practices related to books as mirrors and windows.

Methods

As a part of my effort to disrupt the trend when "privileges generally remain unacknowledged by the privileged groups and continue to perpetuate" (Singh, 2022, p. 280), I acknowledge the position I hold related to my identity. I am a White, cis, heterosexual, middle-class, Christian, nondisabled woman. As I examine and critically evaluate the concept of books as mirrors and windows, it is important to recognize my position as a person who embodies many of the identities and experiences that are privileged and centered in school libraries. In addition, I have worked as a school librarian for ten years, both in elementary and secondary settings. Based on these professional experiences, I believe books that function as mirrors and windows are an

essential and powerful part of a school library. This is part of the reason I conducted this study, and through intentional methods and reflexive journaling, I will identify and reflect on how it is part of my perspective as I analyze the research.

Research Method and Design

My approach to this study was shaped by an interpretivist understanding (Williamson, 2007) that recognizes the role of individuals in the construction of social experiences. I surveyed current public school librarians in the state of Texas utilizing a convenience sample. The convenience sample enabled surveying people who were potentially more accessible and willing participants, even though they are geographically dispersed (Qualtrics, 2021). Additionally, the respondents were somewhat easy to contact due to professional online email distribution lists and online forums. Potential participants had professional responsibilities often requiring internet connectivity and access to a device. Convenience sampling is an appropriate approach for an unexplored research topic, and I was guided by the aims of an exploratory experience survey in order to "[gain] provocative ideas and useful insights" (Connaway & Powell, 2010, p. 109) that can inform a foundational understanding of practitioners' perspectives on this topic. Content analysis (White & Marsh, 2006) and descriptive statistics (Jones & Goldring, 2021) were utilized to analyze data.

Instrument for Data Collection

I referred to Czaja and Blair's (2005) questionnaire development steps as a guide to create the survey instrument (see Appendix A). The survey included open- and fixed-response questions and was organized into three sections: Section 1: Understanding of Books as Windows and Mirrors; Section 2: Practices Related to Books as Windows and Mirrors; and Section 3: Significance of Books as Windows and Mirrors. A set of demographic questions was at the end of the survey.

The three fixed-response questions in Section 1 and the one fixed-response and one open-response questions in Section 3 directly addressed the research questions regarding school librarians' understandings of the mirrors and windows concept and their beliefs about its significance. The two open-response questions in Section 2 also provided an opportunity for participants to share information about their understandings and the concept's significance in their practices.

Respondents were able to skip any question, as well as write in answers for demographic questions. Likert-style questions were employed to assess understanding of the mirrors and windows concept, practices related to books as mirrors and windows, and the significance of the mirrors and windows concept. In addition, open-ended questions provided an opportunity for respondents to express in their own words their practices and beliefs concerning the significance of books as mirrors and windows.

Distribution and Population

This survey was open to current Texas school librarians. While "no single formula provides the 'correct' sample size for a qualitative study" (Connaway & Powell, 2010, p. 214), previous LIS studies (Attebury and Finnell, 2009; Perret, 2016) informed this study's goal of 100 respondents. I employed deliberate and focused distribution efforts to survey as many Texas school librarians as I could in this exploratory study. I identified organizations and individuals within those organizations where the survey was shared through online email distribution lists and online forums, such as the Texas Association of School Library Administrators (TASLA) email list; Texas Library Association (TLA) online forum: TLA Engage; and the Texas Computer Education Association (TCEA) Members Online Community. Refer to Appendix B for an example of a recruitment letter disseminated through these channels. In addition, individual emails were sent to school librarians in my professional network who I knew from professional associations and professional online communities.

After initial emails to online email distribution lists and individuals, I followed up twice with reminders and a notice about the survey closing. In the discussion forums, I posted once at the start of the survey window and again as a notice that the survey would be closing soon. Throughout the design and distribution, I maintained the goal of "obtaining data from as much of the selected sample as possible" (Blair et al., 2014, p. 14).

A participant in this study had to be a current Texas public school librarian. The first page of the survey outlined the study's definition of a school librarian and asked the respondent to select if they were a current school librarian or not. Only two respondents selected "no" and exited the survey. The 142 respondents who selected "yes" and continued the survey had an average of 10 years experience as a school librarian. Most were at elementary schools (n = 63; 40%), followed by those at middle schools (n = 42; 27%) and high schools (n = 39; 25%), and 9% (n = 14) described themselves as district librarians, as working only with certain grades, or as lead librarians. Some participants worked at more than one level. A majority were librarians at suburban schools (n = 94; 66%), with others at urban (n = 31; 22%) and rural schools (n = 17; 12%). The overwhelming majority of respondents were White (n = 118; 81%), then Hispanic/Latinx (n = 17; 12%); American Indian or Alaska Native (n = 2; 1%); African American or Black (n = 1; 1%); Asian American or Asian (n = 1; 1%). One person self-identified as Native American, Indigenous to North America; and six (4%) chose not to answer the question about the race/ethnicity with which they identify. Almost all respondents identified as female (n = 137; 96%), then male (n = 3; 2%); 1% (n = 2) preferred to not say, and 1% (n = 1) self-identified as queer.

Data Analysis

I used descriptive statistics to analyze the fixed-response questions from the survey. For the qualitative analysis of open-ended questions, I was guided by content analysis, which aided my goal to "move from the text to the answer to the research questions" (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 27). I developed a coding process based on conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2006, p. 1279) and utilized NVivo qualitative analysis software to develop codes, categories, and concepts interpreted from the data. Although these codes were emergent, I recognize that they

were "not genuinely inherent in the data alone…[my] perspective, experience, research questions, and expectations interact with the data to create them" (Connaway & Powell, 2010, p. 228).

Limitations could include sampling bias since participants opted in and received the survey through digital means. If librarians happened to be more involved with professional organizations or participated in professional social media environments, they might have been more likely to know about and engage with the survey, thus providing data for this study.

Trustworthiness: Credibility and Dependability

Through intentional data collection and systematic analysis, I aimed for trustworthiness so that "when readers interpret the written work, they will have a sense of confidence in what [I have] reported" (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). I also used techniques to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the research methods and findings. I engaged in reflexive self-analysis through memoing and journaling by questioning findings, noting opinions that come into descriptions or analysis, and detailing the reasoning for coding and categories (Stahl & King, 2020). The reflexive journal aided in identifying and understanding the impact of my "bias, perspective, and expectations" (Connaway and Powell, 2010, p. 233). The reflexive journal log had four columns: the date; actions/steps on that date; issues or questions; and suggestions, considerations, decisions. I also utilized memoing alongside the development of the code book to "create a lucid explanation of each code and category" (Connaway and Powell, 2010, p. 229). I wrote notes about current coding decision-making, things to consider, and my thinking for certain codes. The memoing guided decisions as I iteratively cycled through the data.

Findings

Overall, 100% of participating school librarians reported at least some understanding of the mirrors and windows concept and believed it has significance in the school library. Following the findings related to librarians' understandings, I will detail librarians' reported beliefs about the significance of diverse representation in school libraries. (See Appendix C for the codebook I developed during the analysis.)

School Librarians' Understandings

The survey began with two questions about participants' understanding of the mirrors and windows concept (see Appendix A, Section 1 of the survey). All study participants (n = 142) responded to these two questions, and 100% reported understanding of the concept. When rating their understanding, 98.6% selected good or very good regarding the window concept, and 96.5% selected good or very good regarding the mirror aspect. In addition, responses to the three open-ended survey questions helped refine this insight into their understanding of the concept (see Appendix A, Sections 1, 2, and 3 of the survey).

Five participants responded with phrases or sentences I coded as *Possible Misunderstanding* or *Uncommon Use* of the mirrors and windows concept. This data suggested a misunderstanding of

an aspect of the mirrors and windows concept or an uncommon use of the concept that would need further explanation for me to comprehend the participants' understanding. Yet overall, the librarians in this study reported understanding the mirrors and windows concept, and almost all were able to reflect that understanding in their open-ended responses. With this foundation, data was gathered and coded to gain insight on the significance of this concept within school libraries.

Significance: Reasons to Incorporate the Mirrors and Windows Concept

In a fixed-response question in Section 3 of the survey, all 142 rated the significance of the mirrors and windows concept in a school library, ranging from average significance (n = 11) and very significant (n = 28) to absolutely essential (n = 103). In responses to all three open-ended questions, I coded 312 references to Reasons to Incorporate the Mirrors and Windows Concept. This code described why the participating school librarians felt they should apply this concept to their practices because of its significance. Within this larger code, *Reasons to Incorporate the Mirrors and Windows Concept*, I applied eleven subcodes.

Students Feel Seen in the Books (n = 69) was used as a subcode and applied to explanations such as, students "should be able to see themselves" and "all students deserve the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the books they have to read." Survey respondents also noted the role school librarians play, saying "[librarians] have to provide books that all students can see themselves in." Others identified student characteristics to keep in mind, such as "students need to see themselves, their values, culture and identity in books" as well as specific identities, "it's so important for [BIPOC students] to find books that represent who they are and value their life experiences." One librarian explained with details of their current context:

> "I felt the racial diversity was very lacking [in the school library I inherited] when compared with the racial diversity in the school. As I emphasized [diversity] in my collection development, I found my readers MUCH more engaged and excited about finding books where the character on the cover looked like them. Now, I often have kids say "She looks like me!" and they are able to find characters they love."

The subcode *Widen Perspectives and Expand Understanding* (n = 61) was applied to librarians' descriptions of the mirrors and windows concept in their practices and in the library that furthered understanding of people unlike the reader. For instance, librarians wrote they "believe students need to see other cultures, genders, ethnicities, and social situations in books so they can better understand someone else's point of view." Several librarians explained this reason within their own experiences and their hopes for their students to have these same experiences, including:

> "We have a recently open population of trans students who were looking for books they could see themselves in so I made some orders… a CIS boy was curious about what life was like for his trans femme friend and we chose to read a particular book together. It was very eye opening for both of us and especially when the trans friend mentioned that she really enjoyed it because it felt like she had gone through all of the same things."

Participants also described a book's unique role in bringing about this understanding and perspective, with one librarian explaining "we may never know how someone different from us feels, outside of reading a book about different people."

Foster Empathy (n = 43) was a code applied to related reasons to incorporate mirrors and windows and to explain the incorporation's significance in the school library. This subcode is related to *Widen Perspectives and Expand Understanding* but was used to describe responses that included more of an emotional element versus an intellectual one related to comprehending facts or perspectives. A participant stated, "Reading creates empathy. It's easy to have empathy for those who are like you. It's harder to feel empathy for those who are different … by exposing my students to 'window' books, I give them the opportunity to cultivate empathy." Librarians explained that the mirrors and windows concept in their library helped "teaching empathy for people who may not look and act like [the student]" and that "we don't have to agree with others' perspectives, but [books as mirrors and windows] can help us understand them."

Subcode *Support Self-Identity and Validation* (n = 26) was used to code responses when librarians expressed a reason for taking actions related to the concept and its significance for a student's identity, their experiences, and their feeling of validation. A participant stated that books as mirrors ensure "the ability to see yourself as the main character—to know that your ideas/thoughts/stories are worth telling/reading." Seeing "themselves in books allows students to see that there is nothing wrong with them" and "they learn that their feelings are valid." Another librarian described a specific example with one of their students, explaining that "she was worried about coming out to her family. She checked out a book from the library about that very thing, and it helped her feel more confident in planning and doing so."

Another subcode was applied when librarians provided reasons and explanations for how the mirrors and windows concept was significant by explaining *It Is Essential, Necessary* (n = 22). Several librarians identified the role of the library specifically, explaining the concept is "essential in school libraries" and that "students absolutely must see themselves reflected in the books in their library. It is essential." Others identified situations or identities specifically in explaining this reason; one wrote, "Books as mirrors and windows are essential for LGBTQ student identity because they offer both validation and exploration in ways that are crucial for self-discovery, self-acceptance, and empathy." Others succinctly described the essential nature of the mirrors and windows concept as related to books, stating: "Books quite literally can save lives," and "Representation is paramount."

Some respondents described how implementation of the concept helped students see the identities or experiences of others, without necessarily describing how it might further students' understanding (e.g., *Widen Perspectives and Expand Understanding*) or have an emotional impact (e.g., *Foster Empathy*). *Students See People Different from Them* (n = 20) was applied to descriptions of "stories that are 'windows' into worlds that are different than their own" and "books about people with different looks, actions and languages." A librarian stated that the mirrors and windows concept as applied in the library is helpful for "readers who get to see characters that do NOT look like them & they have a better glimpse into the lives of their classmates."

Participants also recognized the unique ability of libraries, librarians, or books to incorporate the mirrors and windows concept, which I included in the subcode *Because Libraries Can* (n = 18). One librarian stated, "If visiting a school library is one of the only chances in which students can personally select a book, then it is imperative that students be able to find books that they can identify with." Acknowledging the unique ability of books to incorporate the mirrors and windows concept and why that matters, librarians noted that "for some students a book may be the only place they can see someone like themselves" and "many of our students live in a world where they are surrounded by sameness. Books may be the only opportunity for them to consider a new perspective." Safety was referenced as well; librarians wrote that "books provide ways for students to experience other lifestyles and cultures in a safe manner" and can help students "learn about the world in a safe space, among the pages of a book."

Related to Marginalization described a subcode I applied to 17 librarians' responses. Included were explanations that identified or explained reasons to incorporate the mirrors and windows concept, or its significance, related to experiences of marginalized and dominant identities. For instance, "[books] are sometimes the only exposure children of a dominant cultural or economic group have regarding children who are different from themselves." Others detailed purchasing "books that reflected the underrepresented groups" and including "books that feature different backgrounds, experiences, cultures because those stories have historically been underrepresented." This connected to other librarians' description of marginalized and underrepresented groups. One wrote, "When LGBTQ students see themselves reflected in books (mirror books), they experience the affirmation of their identities in a world that often marginalizes or misrepresents them."

Some participants explained why the concept should be incorporated and how it is significant because it helped *Avoid a Negative Impact on Students* (n = 13), and I applied this subcode. A librarian explained that "when the majority of books represent only a narrow set of experiences, it limits students' exposure to diverse perspectives, potentially reinforcing stereotypes and making some students feel less visible or valued." Students could then "grow up shortsighted," "lack empathy," and be unable to "dispel stereotypes."

Twelve librarians described *Help a Student Feel Less Alone*, and I applied this subcode to explanations of the way that books as mirrors can help students "feel less alone when they meet a character just like them," even "when they may feel no one understands them" or that they are "alone in their struggles and differences." One librarian specifically explained this regarding LGBTQ students, saying, "Seeing characters who share their experiences—whether it's coming out, navigating relationships, or simply living openly as LGBTQ—can help these students feel understood and less alone."

Build a Sense of Belonging (n = 11) was a subcode that included responses showing ways that the mirrors and windows concept created this feeling of belonging in the library or the school in general. Different from the code *Help a Student Feel Less Alone*, the *Build a Sense of Belonging* subcode was used to identify descriptions more specifically related to a student's feeling about the school and library setting. Books that are mirrors can help them "feel valued within the school community," and it "builds a sense of belonging within the library space." Stated clearly,

one librarian explained, "Everyone needs to see themselves in a book so they know the library is a space for them."

Significance: Ideas About the Role of the Library or Librarian

Separate from, but related to, the *Reasons to Incorporate* major code, *Ideas About the Role of the Library or Librarian* ($n = 21$) was applied to the ways participants explained the significance of the mirrors and windows concept by describing characteristics, responsibilities, or the role of the library in response to the survey's three open-ended questions. Some librarians explained its importance within libraries in general, saying that implementing the concept is "necessary in school libraries because it fosters a balanced and inclusive environment that both affirms students' identities and broadens their perspectives." Explaining how this balanced and inclusive environment ties to the librarian's role, one respondent said, "It is my belief that school librarians set an example of how to view the world in which we live through caring, empathy-building, and understanding of the many ways in which people live." Emphasizing the impact of this example, one librarian explained, "Children's use of a library, feeling that freedom to explore and discover, starts in elementary school. We have to provide windows and mirrors so they can begin to understand the power of a library."

Responses about the library's role in relation to the community were also included in *Ideas About the Role of the Library or Librarian*. Librarians described a need "to provide a collection that meets the needs of the community we serve" and that "a school library needs to serve the entire school community, which includes a wide variety of perspectives, experiences, and beliefs." Sometimes community was described as a barrier to participants' idea of the role of the library. One librarian stated that they "work to find a happy medium between what needs to be represented in the library and what the community will tolerate." This could also be seen in another librarian's response that discussed restrictive community expectations, explaining:

> "Librarians are left to tell a student who tries to check out one of these books [with trans or non-binary characters], that they are unable to until their parent notifies the registrar they have permission. Some students are not comfortable asking their parents to give them access. Librarians are left being the gatekeeper of a gate they do not believe should exist."

One respondent gave an extensive explanation of how important the concept of mirrors and windows was to the role of the library, as well as how other factors restrict it:

> "When certain books are removed or restricted, it diminishes the library's ability to serve as a comprehensive and inclusive resource for the community… these bans compromise the library's mission to support lifelong learning and a well-rounded education."

Discussion

Because of the contributions of these 142 school librarians, I have been able to develop a story of school libraries derived directly from their understandings and perspectives on diverse representation. This story, based on the perspective of this sample of Texas school librarians, has four themes:

(1) Students are centered by librarians in their practices and decision making.
(2) Librarians believe in the power of books.
(3) Librarians are deliberate about the message they send students.
(4) Librarians know we must do better.

Throughout this story, I considered how this study aligns with or offers new insights related to previous scholarship. While the presence of diverse representation and the meaning of books as mirrors and windows has been discussed widely, this story is uniquely centered on the insights and experiences of school librarians.

I have written this story to reflect the knowledge and experience these librarians have shared and to enhance understanding of the significance of diverse representation within school libraries. Learning from and relying on the work of CRT scholars who have employed counter-storytelling (e.g., Cooke, 2016; Delgado, 1989; Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), I also write it to counter the narrative that some community members, administrators, and political figures promote. That powerful, harmful narrative has the power to influence policy and practices related to diverse representation within school libraries. According to that narrative libraries are places of harm, librarians lack the ability or willingness to do their job, and books of certain identities and experiences serve to indoctrinate students. There is a different story to tell. This story is informed by those who work within school libraries and have clearly communicated why diverse representation matters specifically within those spaces.

This discussion reflects the established codes and explanations from the findings of this study. I have chosen to incorporate some new quotes from the data as I tell this to continue to center and emphasize the voices of the school librarians in this study.

Students Are Centered by Librarians in Their Practices and Decision-Making.

When librarians explained their understanding of the mirrors and windows concept and why it is significant, it often revolved around how it affects their students. This centering of students aligns with the work of many scholars in the education field (Bishop, 1990a, 1990b; Crawley, 2017; Enriquez, 2021; Newstreet et al., 2019; Stewart, 2017). Librarians explained the importance of their students feeling validated, that they mattered, and that they were appreciated for their "full and authentic self." For these librarians, representation in library collections matters, because it matters to their students.

Librarians in this study provided additional insight into diverse representation, as several participants reflected an understanding and recognition of the significance related to their students' intersecting identities. For instance, one librarian stated, "[During] my Black History

Month focus on Black history and Black authors and their books, I make sure that I include books by and about Black people who identify as LGBTQIA+, disabled, etc." Librarians relied on their understanding of the mirrors and windows concept and their belief in its significance for their students as the participants resisted barriers, as well. They explained how they "refuse to let the state dictate what reading materials should be available to my student population" and how they "work to keep [their] LGTBQIA books available for students against district cautions, teacher and parent objections."

Librarians Believe in the Power of Books.

Scholars across various fields have examined and highlighted the necessity of diverse representation, emphasizing that books hold significance and possess power. Relying on their understanding of the mirrors and windows concept and its significance, librarians explained how curating a book collection guided by the concept can impact the entire school environment and develop acceptance and appreciation of differences throughout the campus. These participants recognized the potential for a book to fill a void, such as gaining perspective about other people and having a place to explore problems or issues if "you aren't yet comfortable discussing it with others."

Reflecting components of the critical aspects of Bishop's metaphor and counter-storytelling (Delgado,1989; Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), some librarians discussed the marginalization of identities and experiences, and the centering and privilege of others in the context of the power of books and the significance of the mirrors and windows concept. Many librarians provided examples related to their LGBTQ students and students of color (e.g., students who identify as BIPOC, Mexican American, Latinx) and how books can affirm identities and experiences. School librarians explained why the mirrors and windows concept is significant, even essential, to LGBTQ students. Reflecting Bishop's claims (1990a; 1990b), some participants emphasized books can "raise consciousness" and help the reader "see how a lack of privilege…affect [sic] the people they interact with on a daily basis." School librarians expressed a belief that a book provides the essential opportunity "to know that your ideas/thoughts/stories are worth telling/reading."

Librarians Are Deliberate About the Message They Send Students.

Through explanations of participating librarians' understanding and perspectives on the mirrors and windows concept, many directly connected the books on their shelves with a student's sense of belonging in the library and in the school, saying, for example, "Everyone needs to see themselves in a book so they know the library is a space for them." Previous studies and scholars also discussed how educators' practices and their physical spaces can promote validation and a celebration of students' identities and experiences (Ahlborn, 2020; Clark & Fleming, 2019; Mongillo & Holland, 2017; Oltmann, 2016). When a collection contains books that can be both mirrors and windows for students, it tells students that their own experiences and identities are worthy of space in the library and that "other people's ideas/thoughts/stories are worth reading and understanding." Librarians also referred to traditionally marginalized or oppressed identities (e.g., being Latinx, speaking Spanish, being trans, being queer) and how, in the words of

participants, the library can provide a "counter positive narrative" by ensuring "students see their culture, cultural practices, families represented in a positive manner."

Recognizing the significance of the mirrors and windows concept, many librarians explained that when this concept is not considered a negative or harmful message could be sent to students. Participants explained how when books "represent only a narrow set of experiences" that circumstance can "[make] some students feel less visible or valued." Participants noted that they have the option to help students feel "affirmation of their identities in a world that often marginalizes or misrepresents them" or to send a message that further oppresses them by not having those books. The role of the individual, each librarian, in creating and sharing an affirming message with students helps further understanding related to why diverse representation matters within school libraries.

Librarians Know We Must Do Better.

As in much of the previous research and scholarship, school librarians in this study identified obstacles as they explained their understanding of the mirrors and windows concept and its significance within the library. Many recognized that they, and other educators and decision-makers, must do better. Some librarians discussed the privilege experienced by dominant stories (e.g., White; male; cis; heterosexual; English speaking; affluent; housed) and the need to disrupt that pattern. This aligns with the work of many critical scholars who recognize the historical and current context of schools and libraries, privileging some identities, experiences, and ways of knowing (e.g., Ettarh, 2018; Mehra, 2021; Peterson, 1996; Wiegand, 2021). Some librarians demonstrated an understanding that certain people or groups (e.g., conservative boards, holders of specific values in a community; local and state policymakers) have privileged positions in determining who could be included and represented in the stories, displays, and programming of their school libraries. A librarian noted the impact of this reality, saying it "undermines the library's role in providing 'mirror' experiences, especially for marginalized communities, who may already feel underrepresented or misunderstood."

Implications

Through this study, school librarians have demonstrated an understanding of the mirrors and windows concept and provided insight specifically on why it is significant within school libraries. Because of this insight, we must consider how we might improve and maximize this concept's impact in school libraries. Guided by these librarians' insights on diverse representation in school libraries, the recognition of the historical marginalization and exclusion that libraries contribute to, and the understanding that oppression and exclusion come from a "structural phenomenon that exceeds attitudinal error" (Hudson, 2017, p. 17), I suggest *Expectations for School Libraries as an Institution* (Table 1) and *Developing Institutional Policies & Procedures: Questions to Consider* (Figure 1).

I believe in the foundational purpose of libraries to serve their communities, but a more important standard, which at times could contradict a community value, should inform our practices in school libraries. Our responsibility to students and to what libraries should be, must

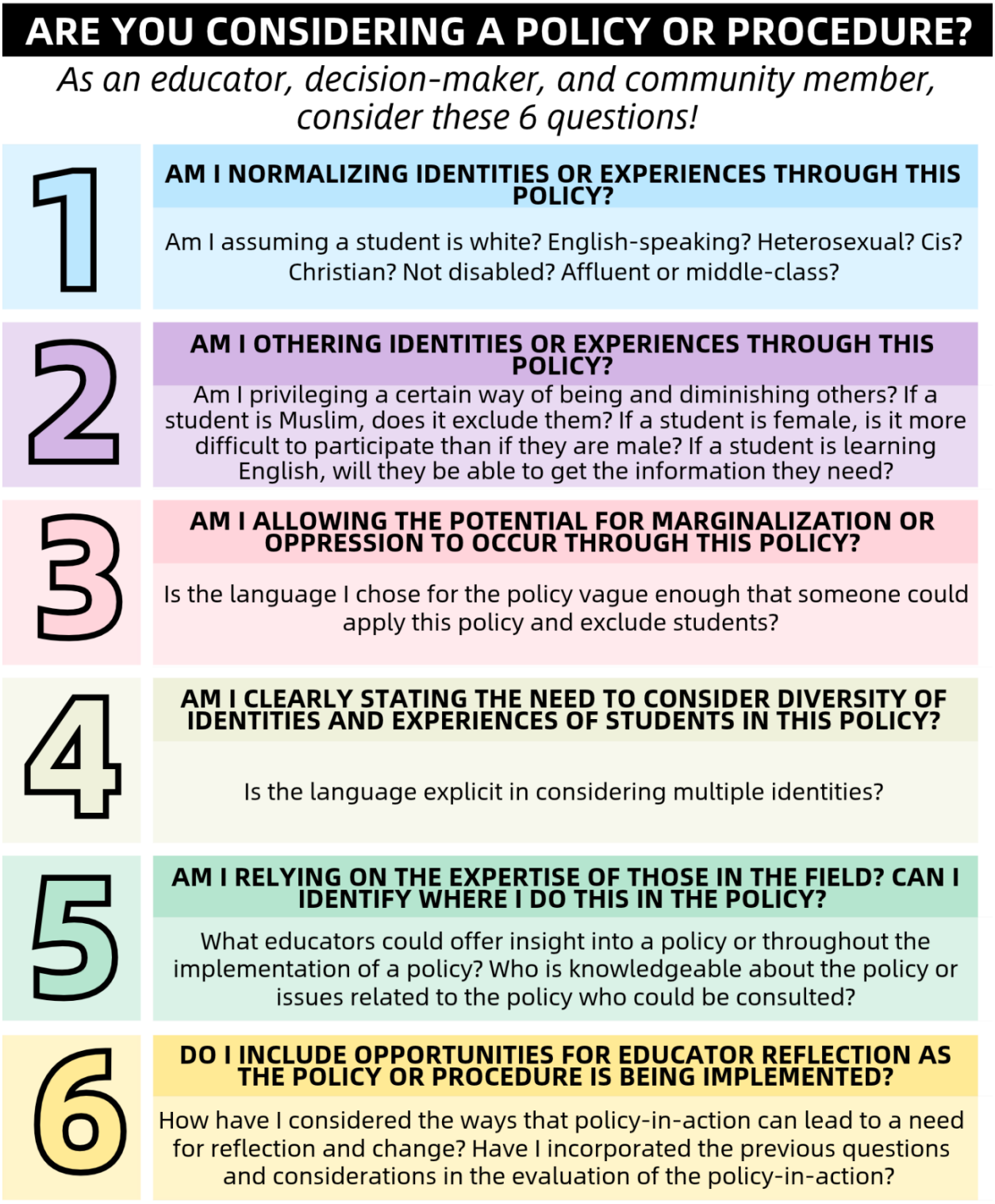
be our guide. So, what should public school libraries be? They should be institutions that uphold these expectations and consider these questions.

Table 1

Expectations for School Libraries as an Institution

Expectation 1	Develop policies and practices explicitly affirming and including diverse ways of being and knowing
Expectation 2	Recognize that some community members may be racist, anti-gay, anti-trans, sexist, etc., but within a public school as an institution, there will not be policies or practices that reflect or reinforce those beliefs
Expectation 3	Understand the difference between someone's beliefs being contradicted by school policy and educator practice, and someone's identity being devalued by school policy and educator practice
Expectation 4	Consider the historical and current context of privilege and marginalization when developing and assessing policy and practices

Figure 1
Developing Institutional Policies and Procedures: Questions to Consider



For future research, a foundational component of our understanding related to diverse representation in school libraries must also include the voice of our students. Findings from this study and previous studies (e.g., Ahlborn, 2020; Oltmann, 2016) could guide future research examining students' perspectives on diverse representation in school libraries. Additionally, librarians often discussed their school demographics when explaining the impact of the mirrors and windows concept in their libraries (e.g., affluent community; mostly White community; emergent bilingual). Some participating librarians focused on how important a book as a mirror was for their campus, while others emphasized books as windows for their students. Future studies could look more specifically at factors that influence practices that reflect the mirrors and windows concept or the concept's significance, including school demographics. This understanding could help guide and inform librarian practices.

Conclusion

Librarians in this study understand the mirrors and windows concept and believe it is significant in their school libraries, even essential. Their voice has informed my conclusion that the story of school libraries is one in which librarians center their students, believe in and utilize the power of books, compassionately curate the messages they are sending their students, and recognize that we school librarians can continue to improve. To resist the current sociopolitical context that restricts access to books and limits diverse representation, I recommend that librarians and other stakeholders consider the expectations articulated in Table 1 and the questions in Figure 1.

As previously mentioned, future research could include students' perspectives on diverse representation in school libraries and if and how demographics play a role in a librarians' perspectives on the meaning and application of this concept. Previous research, scholarly contributions from many fields, and these 142 school librarians have contributed to understanding that diverse representation in book collections matters. As members of communities, as educators, and as decision-makers, we all play a role in the messages we choose to send our students. I recommend we listen to the voices of those who have championed—and continue to fight for—diverse representation, critically examine our libraries, and develop equitable and just approaches that explicitly show we care about and want to affirm, uplift, and include the identity and experiences of all students.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Looking into Mirrors and Windows: School Librarians' Perspectives on Diverse Representation in Book Collections

To participate in this study, you must **currently be a school librarian** in a Texas public school.

- This **includes** school librarians who cover a single campus, multiple campuses, or a district.
- This **includes** those who are school librarian certified, those in the process of certification, and those lacking certification.
- This **does not include** those who are a classroom teacher or paraprofessional who periodically cover the library but do not hold the role of school librarian.

Are you currently a public school librarian in Texas?

- Yes, I am a current public school librarian in Texas.
- No.

[If a respondent selected No, the following text would be displayed and the survey exited]

Thank you for your time. You do not meet the requirement for Texas school librarian for this survey. Have a good day!

Section 1: Understanding of Books as Windows and Mirrors

This study is interested in school librarians' perspectives on diverse representation in book collections. This section of the survey is about *your understanding* of the concept of books as "windows and mirrors."

There are no right or wrong responses.

Rate your understanding of a **book as a mirror** that reflects the identity or experience of the reader.

- very poor
- poor
- fair
- good
- very good

Rate your understanding of a **book as a window** that provides a look into an experience or identity that is different from the reader.

- very poor
- poor
- fair

- good
- very good

This study uses Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop's description of the concept of books as windows and mirrors. This description includes:

- A book as a mirror reflects the identity or experience of the reader
- A book as a window provides a look into an experience or identity that is different from the reader
- Book collections should include both windows and mirrors
- Educator practices, such as lessons, programming, and displays, should incorporate both mirrors and windows
- Windows and mirrors can provide an opportunity to disrupt social injustices that perpetuate discrimination and bias

Other terms are often used to refer to this concept, including multicultural literature or diverse books. For the rest of this survey the words "mirrors and windows" will be utilized to refer to this concept.

Rate to what extent each component has been a part of your understanding of books as windows and mirrors as a school librarian.

	not at all	slightly	moderately	very	extremely
a mirror as a reflection of the reader					
a window as a look into an identity or experience different from the reader					
library book collections need to include both windows and mirrors					
librarian practices should incorporate windows and mirrors					
windows and mirrors can be tools to disrupt social injustice					

Section 2: Practices Related to Books as Windows and Mirrors

This section of the survey is about your librarian practices related to the concept of books as windows and mirrors.

There are no right or wrong responses.

Considering librarian practices as "what we do as school librarians on a daily basis" (Church, 2002, p. 52), how frequently do you believe the windows and mirrors concept guides your school librarian practices in general?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Very often
- Always

Rate the frequency that the windows and mirrors concept guides your school librarian practices related to:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always
Collection development					
Books to recommend					
Books to display (3)					
Books to use in lessons					
Books to use in library programming					
Books to introduce difficult or complex issues					
Books to help facilitate discussion about social justice issues					
Books to use in professional development with teachers					
Books to use in professional development with librarians					

[If a respondent selected Never for all practices, the following question would be displayed. If the respondent selected Rarely, Sometimes, Very often, or Always for any practice, the respondent skipped to Describe one example of how the windows and mirrors...*]*

Do you believe the concept of windows and mirrors plays a role in any of your librarian practices?

- Yes
- No

[If a respondent selected Yes, the following question would be displayed. If No is selected, the respondent skipped to Many aspects of identity and experiences*...]*

Describe one example of how the windows and mirrors concept has played a role in your librarian practices.

_____

Describe one example of how the windows and mirrors concept has played a role in your librarian practices. Your description could relate to one of the examples in the previous question or not.

_____

Many aspects of identity and experiences can contribute to diverse representation. To what extent does each aspect of identity impact your practices related to books as windows and mirrors?

	Not at all	Little	Somewhat	To a large extent	To a great extent
Race or ethnicity					
Gender					
Sexual orientation					
Age					
Nationality and origin					
Language spoken					
Physical ability					
Mental ability					
Religious or spiritual beliefs					
Socioeconomics					
Other, please add below					

Rate the extent to which you feel the following factors influence your practices related to books as windows and mirrors in your library.

	Not at all	Little	Somewhat	To a large extent	To a great extent
My personal beliefs					
My professional responsibilities					
My students					
Parents of my students					
Teachers at my school					
My school administrators					
My district administrators					
My district's board of trustees					
Local, state, or national politicians					

[If a respondent selected Little, Somewhat, To a large extent, or To a great extent for any factor, the following question would be displayed]

Describe how one or more of the factors listed in the previous question influence your practices related to books as windows and mirrors.

Section 3: Significance of Books as Windows and Mirrors

This section of the survey is about y*our perspective on the significance* of books as windows and mirrors in a school library.

There are no right or wrong responses.

How significant do you believe the concept of windows and mirrors is in a school library?

- Not significant at all

- Of little significance
- Of average significance
- Very significant
- Absolutely essential

[If a respondent selected Not significant at all or Of little significance, the following question would be displayed]

Explain why you believe the windows and mirrors concept lacks significance in school libraries.

_____

[If a respondent selected Of average significance, Very significant, or Absolutely essential, the following question would be displayed]

Explain why you believe the windows and mirrors concept is significant in school libraries. If possible, include an example.

_____

Demographics

This final section of the survey asks about basic demographic information.

Counting this school year, how many years have you been a school librarian?

_____

What is the school level of your current school librarian position? Select all that apply.

- Elementary School
- Middle school
- High school
- Other; please specify below

  _____

In your own words, describe the demographics of the student population at your school or schools.

_____

What is the district type for the school you are currently employed by?

- Urban
- Suburban
- Rural

Which race/ethnicity do you identify with? Select all that apply.

- African American or Black
- American Indian or Alaska Native

- Asian American or Asian
- Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian
- White or European American
- Prefer to self-identify as: _____
- Prefer not to say

Which gender identity best describes your gender? Select all that apply.

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary / third gender
- Transgender
- Prefer to self-identify as: _____
- Prefer to not say

Appendix B

Example of Recruitment Letter: Texas Library Association Engage Discussion Post

Hello, TLA Engage members!

Thank you for taking the time to read this post! I am a Texas school librarian and doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas. Through my dissertation study I hope to gain insight into **school librarians' perspectives on diverse representation in book collections**. If you are a current school librarian in Texas, please continue reading, because I want to know what you think!

I am looking for current Texas public school librarians to participate in a research study conducted by the University of North Texas' Department of Information Science titled "Looking into Mirrors and Windows: School Librarians' Perspectives on Diverse Representation in Book Collections." Participation is voluntary, you will not receive compensation, and it will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

Link to survey: bit.ly/survey4librarians

This study's goals revolve around the insight and perspective of school librarians, so if you know other current Texas public school librarians, **please share this survey with them**. The attached flier also contains study details and the survey link.

For more information about this study or if you have any questions, please contact me at KimberlyReichenbach@my.unt.edu.

Thank you for your time and your insight. It is truly valued!

Kim Reichenbach Krutka, doctoral candidate
Email: KimberlyReichenbach@my.unt.edu

Principal Investigator: _____
Email: ____

Appendix C

Codebook

Code	Description	Exemplar	References
Ideas About the Role of the Library or Librarian	characteristics, responsibilities, or the role of the library and how the windows and mirrors concepts is a part of that *respondent 64 has 2 codes	"a library should be a place students can come to and feel accepted no matter what. The diversity of books within the library should foster that feeling"	21
Possible Misunderstanding or Uncommon Use	Suggest misunderstanding of an aspect of the concept or uncommon use of the concept that would need further explanation to understand the application	"you could make a case that all books are mirrors because we are all human and share the same condition."	5
Reasons to Incorporate the Windows and Mirrors Concept	why librarians felt they should apply this concept to their practices as well as how it is significant This included these subcodes:		312
Avoid a Negative Impact on Students	impact varied, but was negative for students or community; this could refer to a harmful impact	"when the majority of books represent only a narrow set of experiences, it limits students' exposure to diverse perspectives, potentially reinforcing stereotypes and making some students feel less visible or valued"	13
Because Libraries Can	recognizes the unique ability of libraries, librarians, or books to incorporate the windows and mirrors concept; could explain that other entities (classroom or homes) are not doing it; there is something unique or beneficial about the school library/librarian/books; includes being a safe place to learn about other people	"for many children, the school library is the only place where they will have access to books as windows and mirrors"	18

Code	Description	Exemplar	References
Build a Sense of Belonging	build a sense of belonging in the library space or school	"feel valued within the school community"; "builds a sense of belonging within the library space."	11
Foster Empathy	books and practices can encourage the development of empathy	"By exposing my students to "window" books, I give them the opportunity to cultivate empathy"	43
Help a Student Feel Less Alone	this could include the words "less alone" or a description of the reader finding something in the book that otherwise they are alone in experiencing or talking about	"seeing characters who share their experiences—whether it's coming out, navigating relationships, or simply living openly as LGBTQ—can help these students feel understood and less alone"	12
It Is Essential, Necessary	the word "essential" and/or describes the need for libraries to have windows and mirrors for students; this code can overlap with other codes, but the respondent has made it clear there is no option but to ensure having books that represent mirrors and/or windows	"students absolutely must see themselves reflected in the books in their library. It is essential"	22
Related to Marginalization	related to dominant identities as well as marginalization and the need to counter it	"it is very important that privileged students see how a lack of privilege, connected to economics or race or religion, affect the people they interact with on a daily basis"	17
Students Feel Seen in the Books	respondent used the word "see" or "seen"; the need for representation or to read books with people that are like the reader	"readers deserve to see themselves and their communities represented in literature"	69

Code	Description	Exemplar	References
Students See People Different From Them	they see or look into, but not anything about how it furthers understanding, is a learning experience, or some other explanation of why it matters to see others	"have a look into other cultures, and backgrounds	20
Support Self-Identity and Validation	related to student's identity, their experiences, and their feeling of validation; this includes building confidence	"the ability to see yourself as the main character- to know that your ideas/thoughts/stories are worth telling/reading"	26
Widen Perspectives and Expand Understanding	to understand others unlike them, includes expanding worldview	"believe students need to see other cultures, genders, ethnicities, and social situations in books so they can better understand someone else's point of view"	61

Cite This Article

Krutka, K. R. (2026). "So they know the library is a space for them": School Librarians' Understandings and Perspectives on the Significance of Diverse Representation in Book Collections. *School Library Research* 29. <www.ala.org/aasl/slr/volume29/krutka>.

School Library Research (ISSN: *2165-1019*) is an official journal of the American Association of School Librarians. It is the successor to *School Library Media Quarterly Online and School Library Media Research. The purpose of* School Library Research *is to promote and publish high quality original research concerning the management, implementation, and evaluation of school libraries. The journal will also emphasize research on instructional theory, teaching methods, and critical issues relevant to school libraries. Visit the SLR website for more information.*

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