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Evidence Summary

Women of Colour and Black Women Leaders are Underrepresented in Architectural Firms Featured in Key Trade Publications

A Review of:

Mathews, E. (2021). Representational belonging in collections: A comparative study of leading trade publications in architecture. *Library Resources & Technical Services*, 65(3).
<https://journals.ala.org/index.php/Lrts/article/view/7486>

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Abstract

Objective – To measure how well women are reflected, specifically women of colour, in architectural trade publications.

Design – Quantitative diversity audit.

Setting – Architecture field.

Subjects – Architectural firms whose work appeared in four trade publications (*Architectural Record*, *Architectural Review*, *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, and *Detail*) in 2019.

Methods – A diversity audit was selected to analyze the representation of various subsets of women within the architecture core collections. The Avery index was used to identify architectural firms featured in four trade publications. The quantitative study collected demographic data from 354 firms,

featuring 726 women. Within these firms, the author sought to identify women leaders and how many of those were women of colour. The author then used four guiding questions to analyze the journals: (1) individual journals' coverage; (2) size of the firm; (3) type of firm, and (4) firms which issued a statement in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the likelihood of a woman of colour being in a leadership role.

Main Results – The key results for the studies guiding questions were: (1) the overall average of women leaders in the firms covered in the journals was 24% and for women of colour 6%. *Architectural Record* featured the highest proportion of firms with women in leadership roles (28%) and those with women of colour as leaders (9%); (2) women leadership was higher in smaller firms (large 24%; medium 20%; small 31%) as was women of colour in leadership (large 3%; medium 6%; small 9%); (3) insufficient data was found for meaningful analysis of the representation of women according to specialization within the architectural field; and (4) the firms that issued clear BLM statements were highest in the US (15%) overall. *Architectural Record*, a US publication, featured the highest percentage of firms that made clear BLM statements (27%).

Conclusion – The study concluded that there was an underrepresentation of women, women of colour, and Black women in architectural trade publications. The author's position is that collection development practices should adequately reflect the library users they serve with acquisition actions that increase a more equitable representation. The author stated that the practical implications for this study fall under the rubric of remediation in the following areas: (1) balance inequities in architectural programs by increasing enrollment of women; (2) identify collections which lack inclusivity, balance them with curated electronic resources; and (3) collection policies should reflect readership and encourage a sense of professional belonging. In future studies, the author acknowledges that a qualitative study based on responses from architects would complement the current study.

Commentary

The author's study demonstrates the current trend in library literature to use diversity codes to analyze collections. A study by Ciszek and Young (2010) on diversifying collections in large academic libraries uses this methodological approach to critique the categorization of what academic libraries select. This selected sample of architectural trade journals provided a description of the current landscape for women as practicing architects as well as women in leadership positions. Further, the author points out that the lack of gender and race parity in journals that are used for precedent research impacts the representational belonging of professionals who use these sources. Precedent research is a corpus of information which documents architectural projects widely used in the field. The Evidence Based Librarianship (EBL) Critical Appraisal Checklist was used to evaluate this study (Glynn, 2006). This tool determined that the quality of the evidence was high. The Avery index is a recognized tool for architectural researchers and was used to narrow down the core publications within the field. Some of the strengths of this study were how the firms were chosen and what demographic data was collected. To ensure the integrity of the data collected, architectural students were used to assemble the information from the firms because of their familiarity with specific industry terms. Additionally, the author incorporated anti-racist methodology to limit the researchers' bias.

The author acknowledges that visible identification of race and gender is not perfect. Consequently, ten minutes was allocated to each woman leader to glean additional demographic information from their company websites, published interviews, and social media sites. The article does not fully discuss how the study participants whose race and gender was coded as probable were processed. The author did not address how racial identity differs by country; they do suggest that a qualitative study on self-identification is being considered. Visual inference to racial and gender identifications and some tendencies toward U.S. centricity existed in the methodology. The study examined U.S. and non-U.S.

firms and found that the statements issued in support of the Black Lives Matter Movement were higher in the United States. The author discussed data comparisons within the subset of women of colour and Black women; however, they acknowledge that specific data for the four research questions were not always available for all.

The author makes helpful recommendations for librarians who make collection decisions in order to acknowledge the diversity of their readership, particularly from marginalized populations. The broad impact of this study underscores the importance of role models in architecture with special reference to the inclusiveness for subsets of women. The author posits that it is important for collections to reflect the diversity of their students to attract and support more women of colour to the discipline. They suggest that increasing the balance in the digital and print collections will remedy the nuances of maintaining a diversified collection, but they also point to the need for deeper systemic change within libraries.

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