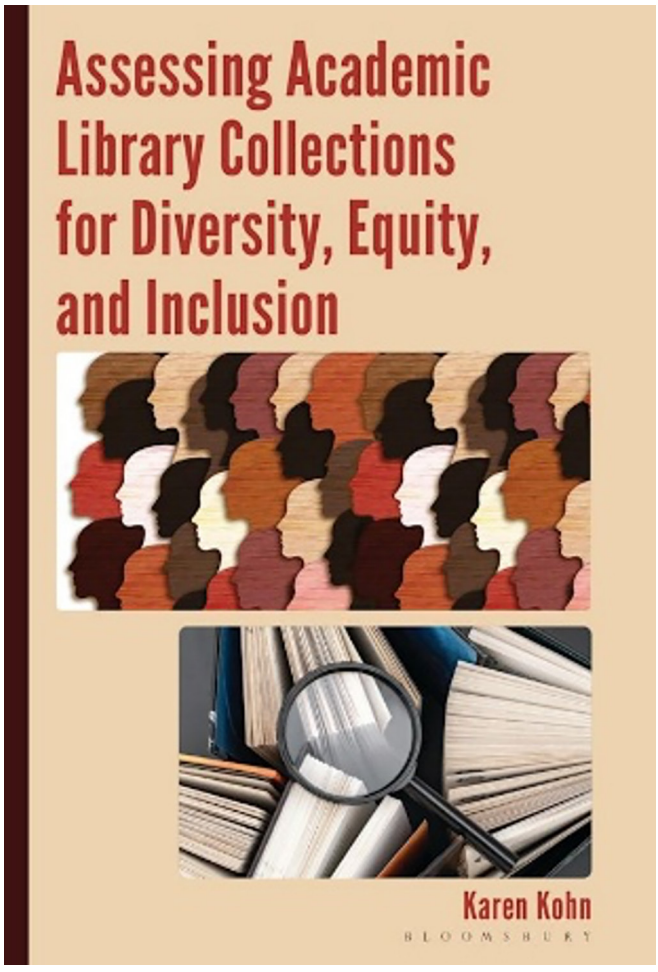
Assessing Academic Library Collections for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Karen Kohn, Bloomsbury, 2025. 208 pp. Softcover, $36.00. 9781538195741.

Academic librarians with collection development responsibilities often look for ways to diversify their collections, either when acquiring new items in a specific subject area or assessing their existing collection to find gaps. In *Assessing Academic Library Collections for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,* Karen Kohn provides a very practical, and informative approach to shift equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work in libraries from intent to measurable assessment, with a focus on diversifying collection development. Prior to starting a large collection project, Kohn suggests considering "how you will define diversity, which parts of the collection you will assess, and what the goals of your assessment are" (p. 9). These are important questions to ask, and this book guides readers through the process by using Kohn's three lenses framework, which explores subject matter, authorship, and institutional efforts in collection development. Kohn also provides several collection assessment methods, which include list checking, metadata searching, and diversity coding, explaining how to approach each. Furthermore, Kohn includes several case studies of libraries that have used these approaches and shares insight on how to apply them in other academic libraries. This book is suitable for academic librarians who would like to learn more about the different approaches to diversify their own collections.



According to Kohn, each librarian's motivation to build a diverse collection can influence the method used to evaluate it. Some rationales shared in the book includes helping White, able-bodied, non-immigrant readers learn about people different from themselves, while others emphasize ensuring that readers from a wide range of races, orientations, and abilities can see their own identities reflected in the collection (p. 4). In other words, the librarian should themselves decide whether the goal of the project is to educate a dominant group of learners, or is it to support marginalized learners' sense of belonging? Both goals are important, and the approach taken depends on the librarian's intent and understanding of why diversifying a collection is necessary before selecting an appropriate approach to the project.

The author does an excellent job steering readers in defining the scope of an EDI assessment by clarifying what is meant by "diversity" and encouraging reflection on

the motivation behind evaluating a collection. Before introducing specific methods, Kohn emphasizes the importance of approaching the project through one of the three lenses: subject matter, author identities, and/or institutional efforts. Viewing a collection through the subject matter lens is helpful when considering how well the library supports courses focused on specific academic disciplines or when aiming to increase visibility of diverse topics, which is often more apparent to patrons than author identities (p. 25). Conversely, assessing a collection through author identities matters as it allows readers to see themselves being represented in the collection as they encounter perspectives shaped by lived experience. The third lens, institutional efforts, allows libraries to reflect on all of their activities that affect user experience of the collection, such as "how your library selects books, purchases, catalogs, and creates displays" (p. 27), which could potentially influence the culture of the library and impact overarching institutional goal-setting.

Kohn's three lenses help readers breakdown a problem that many librarians face when deciding on an approach for collection development projects. Kohn states that "multiple methods can be used for assessing subject matter, though only one method is appropriate for investigating author identities. There is no specific method associated with assessing organizational efforts, though there are some common approaches" (p. 28), which shows that each method provides flexibility. This is one of the main strengths of this book as it not only clarifies how to approach EDI collection assessments, but it also offers a structured and adaptable way for librarians to align their methods with their goals in collection assessments.

The remaining chapters of the book are dedicated to each of the methods, including list-checking, metadata searching, and diversity coding. Each of these chapters presents explanations on the processes, strengths, and limitations of each method. Additionally, each of these chapters is paired with case studies from academic libraries to help readers understand how EDI assessments have been implemented in other institutions. Each case study was written by a librarian who led a project at their institution, offering an overview of the project's background, planning process, chosen method, results, and lessons learned. These chapters can help readers generate ideas for their own collection assessment projects, learn from challenges encountered in the examples, and access recommended resources highlighted in the case studies.

Across these methods of assessment, Kohn draws attention to the ethical and practical challenges that exist in EDI assessments. Kohn notes that questions about how to define and measure identity, how to avoid misrepresentation, and how to respect individuals' privacy can complicate some collections projects. For example, the difficulty in accurately identifying authors' racial or gender identities, especially when identities have not been publicly disclosed, illustrates some of the limitations for this approach. Furthermore, there are some practical constraints as well—such as time, staffing, and access to tools—that can influence the feasibility of the project in each institution. Methods like diversity coding may be theoretically ideal but difficult to sustain in practice. Sharing some of these challenges illustrates that EDI assessment requires ongoing reflection, critical judgement, and institutional support and cannot simply be a one-time project. These complicated quandaries help strengthen the book's credibility, even though answers to how libraries can overcome some of these barriers are not always provided.

Overall, *Assessing Academic Library Collections for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* represents a resource that many librarians are seeking to best apply equity, diversity, and inclusion in

their collection practices. Each chapter in this resource provides literature to support specific approaches along with practical examples illustrated in the case studies to help librarians visualize how these methods could be used in their own institution. The book is a solid resource and a practical guide that could help many librarians start their journey applying EDI in their collection development strategies. — *Victoria Ho, Science Librarian, University of Toronto Mississauga*