

Diversity Initiatives to Recruit and Retain Academic Librarians: A Systematic Review

Janice Y. Kung, K-Lee Fraser, and Dee Winn

Libraries across Canada and United States are adopting diversity initiatives to encourage inclusive library environments and services. Many policies and frameworks have a user-centered approach. However, there is little focus on encouraging diverse service providers in the library. The aim of this study is to determine the strategic approaches that academic libraries are using in their efforts to recruit and retain diverse librarians. Systematic review methodology involved searching Library & Information Science Abstracts, Library & Information Science Source, Gender Studies Database, Race Relations Abstracts, Google, and grey literature composed primarily of information from library associations' and organizations' websites. The primary search terms (and their variations) include diversity, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, academic library, librarians, recruitment, and retention. Publications were included if they were about the recruitment and/or retention strategies used by academic libraries to improve diversity among librarians. Nineteen publications and one ALA website were included in the review. All 20 publications were based in a North American context, and the interventions included targeted recruitment strategies, internship or residency programs, mentorship, and professional development opportunities. Using a modified version of the CASP Qualitative Checklist, the publications were critically appraised to evaluate the validity of the findings. Fifty percent of the publications included an assessment component to determine the value of the intervention. Although a number of programs exist to recruit minorities to academic librarianship, the number of visible minorities in the field has remained stagnant for decades.

Introduction

It is common knowledge within librarianship that academic librarians do not reflect the demographics of their users. This is troubling not only because researchers consistently find that diverse workplaces have innumerable advantages for both library employees and users but also because statistics indicate that Canada and the United States are becoming increasingly diverse.¹ For the purpose of this review, diversity is defined as difference based on race, ethnicity, gender, and/or class.

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The benefits of having a diverse workplace are well documented. Research indicates that, although diverse groups may initially experience more conflict, they are usually better than homogeneous groups at recognizing issues and providing more creative solutions to problems.² Phillips, Liljenquist, and Neale also found that diverse groups outperform homogeneous groups in analyzing information and tasks involving problem solving.³ Within libraries, diverse librarians can improve library and information services by serving as role models, advocating for diversity in library practices, and sharing the information needs of their communities.⁴ It is important to note that this work is usually carried out in addition to the work outlined in their professional workload letters and functions as an added burden for minority librarians. Aside from all of the advantages of diversity noted above, the following statement by James O. Freedman, a former president of Dartmouth College, succinctly explains the critical need for diversity: “the fundamental reason that diversity is important is that we are a diverse country...”⁵

The most recent data available for the number of visible minorities living in Canada are from 2016; it indicated that 7,674,580, or 22 percent of the Canadian population, are racialized.⁶ A 2016 survey of nearly 15,000 first-year students at 34 Canadian universities found that 40 percent self-identified as visible minorities, 3 percent self-identified as Aboriginal, and 22 percent self-identified as having a disability.⁷ These data indicate that people of colour in Canada represent an increasingly large percentage of the nation’s university students. This finding is in stark contrast to the demographic who leads and holds the majority of tenured faculty appointments at Canada’s universities, which remains overwhelmingly White and male.⁸ It is difficult to determine the extent to which minority faculty and librarians are currently underrepresented on Canadian campuses, because most universities do not disclose data on the number of visible minorities that they employ.⁹ The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) published the most recent data available in 2013–2014, and those figures indicated that, in 1996, 11.5 percent of university teachers were visible minorities. The percentage increased minimally to 12.5 percent in 2001 and to 14.9 percent in 2006.¹⁰

According to demographic data available from Statistics Canada’s most recent census in 2016, of the 9,570 people employed as librarians in Canada, 1,055 identified as visible minorities. This represents 11 percent of all librarians, at a time when 22 percent of the population are visible minorities.¹¹ It should be noted that the figure identifying 11 percent of librarians as racialized does not distinguish between academic and public librarians. As a result, the percentage of racialized academic librarians in Canada is less than 11 percent. In a 2005 Canadian library human resource study, researchers noted that the underrepresentation of minorities in academic librarianship was an ongoing concern for the profession. This study further concluded that 79 percent of librarians are women, 93 percent are White, and 65 percent are over the age of 45.¹²

Estimates from census data collected in the United States continue to confirm that approximately 80 to 90 percent of academic librarians are White and the remaining 10 to 20 percent are composed of all other ethnic minority groups.¹³ In 2007, the American Library Association released a report titled *Diversity Counts*, which provided comprehensive data on the demographics of American librarians.¹⁴ The statistics reported in *Diversity Counts* provide indisputable evidence that racialized academic librarians are severely underrepresented in the United States. Chang conducted research to compare the percentage of academic librarians of certain ethnicities to the percentage of students from the same ethnicity in each region

of the United States.¹⁵ Research findings indicate that within Academic Research Libraries (ARL) located in New England, the Mid-Atlantic, East North Central, West North Central, and Mountain Regions, Black and Hispanic librarians are significantly underrepresented and American Indian librarians are underrepresented. Furthermore, Black librarians are also underrepresented in libraries in the South Atlantic and East and West South Central Regions.¹⁶

The recruitment and retention of visible minorities has been a concern for the profession since the 1920s when the American Library Association (ALA) established the Board of Education for Librarianship. The Board was an influential supporter of library training and education for African-Americans and helped sponsor the Negro Teacher-Librarian Training Program, which ran from 1936 to 1939.¹⁷ Despite these early attempts to encourage diversity within the profession, progress has been minimal. The 1990s saw a resurgence of initiatives to recruit traditionally underrepresented groups to the profession; however, retention rates persistently remain low, especially for academic librarians who are African-American or Latinx.¹⁸

In 1990, the Association of College & Research Libraries determined that three main issues were responsible for the inadequate recruitment and retention of minority academic librarians: “lack of institutional commitment to change and accountability, personal and institutional racism, and barriers to advancement and retention.”¹⁹ Even though these issues were identified nearly 30 years ago, very little progress has been made toward achieving diversity among academic librarians in Canada or the United States. Ndumu and Betts-Green summarize the situation best: “Recent data by the ALA substantiates that racial and ethnic representation among North American LIS professionals and educators have not reached parity with combined Canadian and US demographics.”²⁰ Recent literature explores diversity in librarianship through different lens such as reinforcing the importance of diversity, examining the experiences and observations of racial microaggressions, and promoting diversity through the implementation of a library diversity plan.²¹ However, there is little current literature that addresses the recruitment and retention practices of diverse academic librarians.

Objectives

This systematic review provides a review of all Canadian and American practices that enhance diversity recruitment and retention in academic libraries. Specifically, this study is interested in answering the following questions:

- a. What are the current and historical practices to recruit diverse librarians into academia?
- b. How are university libraries supporting librarians from diverse backgrounds?
- c. What initiatives are in place to encourage diverse librarians to remain in academic librarianship?

Methods

A systematic review methodology provides a comprehensive summary and evaluation of relevant literature to answer specific research questions.²² Authors searched LISA: Library & Information Science Abstracts (ProQuest), Library & Information Science Source (EBSCO), Gender Studies Database (EBSCO), and Race Relations Abstracts (EBSCO) using a combination of controlled vocabulary and key terms including, but not limited to, *workplace diversity*, *ethnicity*, *race*, *gender identity*, *socioeconomic factors*, *academic library*, *recruitment*, *retention*, *initiatives*, and *training* (see appendix A for a sample full search strategy). To ensure the search strategies were comprehensive and

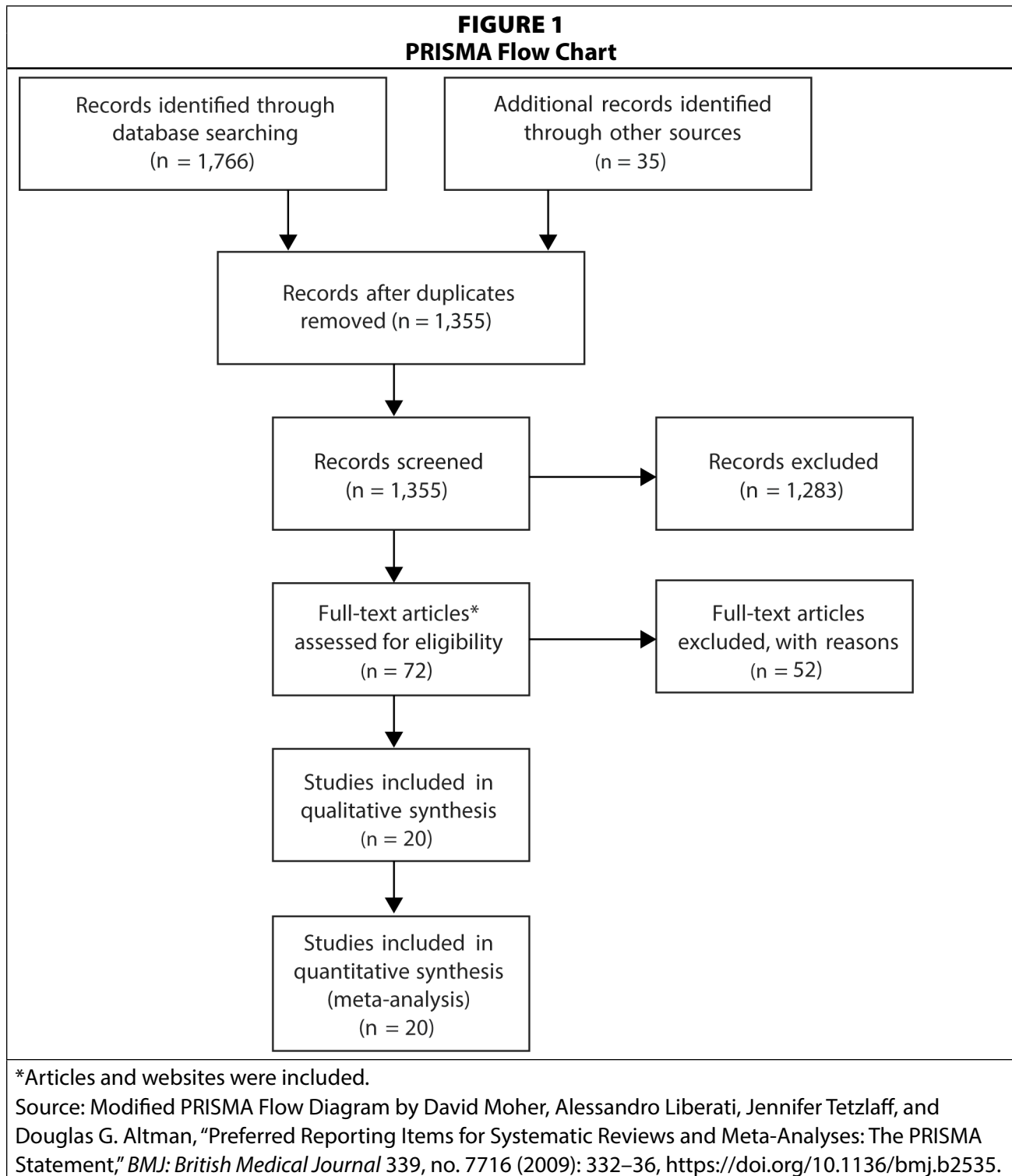
robust, the initial search was peer-reviewed by a librarian outside of the project team. The inclusion criteria requirements for this study were: a) academic libraries and academic librarians only; b) recruitment and retention strategies to enhance diversity among librarians; c) any initiatives, programs, or services to support librarians from diverse backgrounds, which included awards, scholarships, and professional development support; d) associations with a focus on academic libraries; e) all countries; f) English language; and g) all publication types. Initial searches were conducted on January 2, 2018. The search retrieved 1,766 records. After duplicates were removed, 1,355 articles remained for initial title and abstract review (see figure 1). One coauthor (DW) conducted the initial screening and identified 72 publications (articles and websites) for full-text review. Two coauthors independently reviewed each of the included publications. Following the full-text review, the bibliographies of included articles were hand-searched for citations within the articles that meet the inclusion criteria. In addition to electronic databases, authors searched grey literature via Google (the first 100 results) and key library association and conference websites for relevant documents (such as the American Library Association).

During the full-text review, data from the articles were entered into a spreadsheet, coded, and evaluated. Codes included, but were not limited to, country of study, type of intervention, type of diversity, and reported barriers. Data was evaluated using a modified version of the CASP Qualitative Checklist developed by the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme.²³ This checklist evaluated the impact of the initiative and its evidence of support for the initiative implemented. Data from each publication (article or website) were extracted by a coauthor and independently verified by another coauthor. Once coded, all three authors reviewed the discrepancies until consensus was reached. Once coded, the three authors verified and agreed on the included documents. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel.

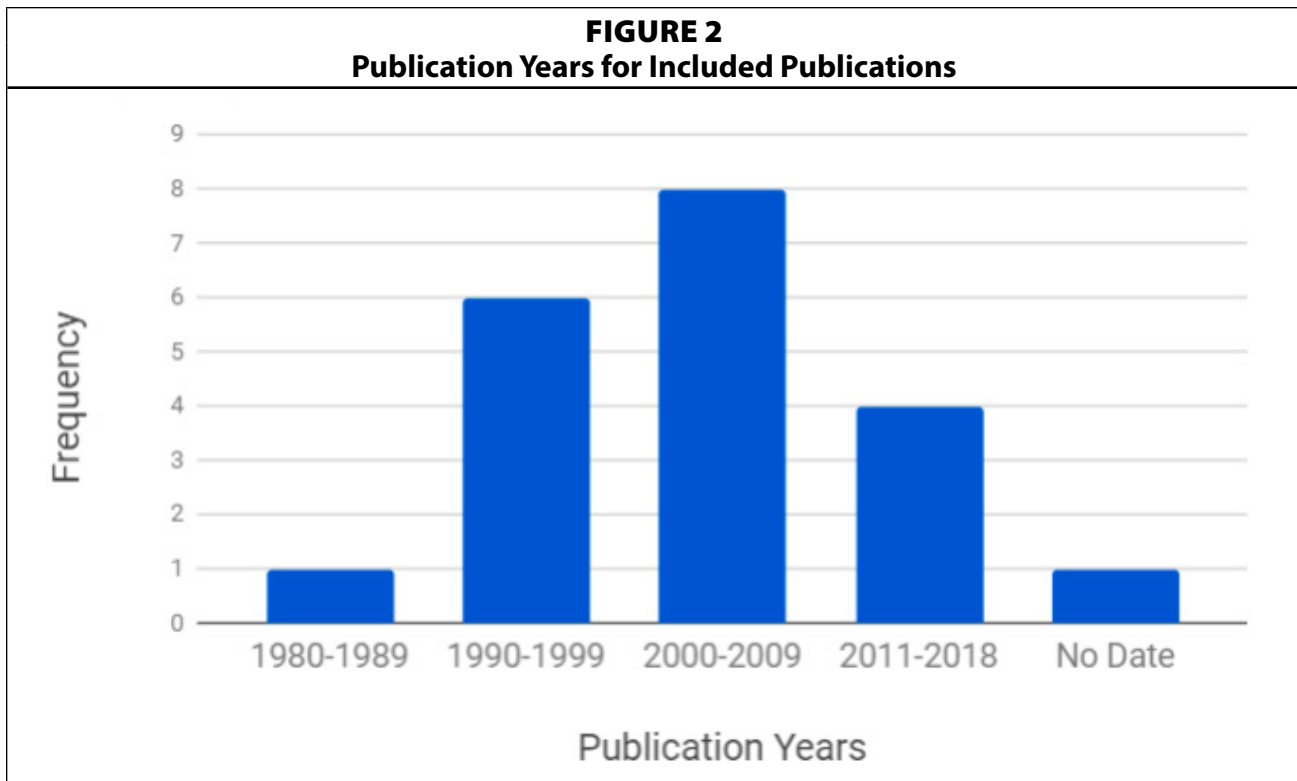
Results

After screening 72 publications (57 full-text articles, 15 websites), 19 articles and one website (Association of College and Research Libraries) met the study's inclusion criteria.²⁴ The 20 publications included were all based in a North American context, with 2 papers published in Canada, 17 papers from the United States, and one website published by the American Library Association (ALA). Based on the publication dates, seven articles were published in the 1980s and 1990s, while more than half of the papers were published since 2000 (60%; $n = 12$), which suggests that there has been an increased interest in the topic of diversity among academic libraries since the early 2000s (see figure 2). The primary objective of the review was to examine the practices in academic libraries that promote the recruitment, retention, advancement, or support of their minority librarians. A strong majority of the interventions focused on recruitment strategies (75%; $n = 15$), followed by retention (40%; $n = 8$), support (25%; $n = 5$), and advancement (10%; $n = 2$). Some interventions were broader in scope and covered more than one area, such as libraries offering both recruitment and retention strategies.²⁵ In many of the cases, the interventions were designed for early-career librarians (65%; $n = 13$), whereas three articles supported mid-career (15%), and one article focused on interventions for late-career librarians (5%). Five publications (25%) did not specify the type of librarians they supported in terms of career length, but it was not surprising to see the focus directed to newer librarians.

Six common themes emerged for the types of interventions outlined in the 20 publications. Some publications applied more than one type of intervention; they are summarized



in figure 3 in alphabetical order. They include internship/residency programs, mentorship, professional development, recruitment strategies, and surveys. Six publications disseminated surveys, and the project team agreed that surveys were used as tools to evaluate a particular program or initiative, which implied that a particular intervention took place and therefore was relevant to the review. For example, Boyd and colleagues administered a survey targeting former residents and residence program coordinators across the United States.²⁶ Their primary

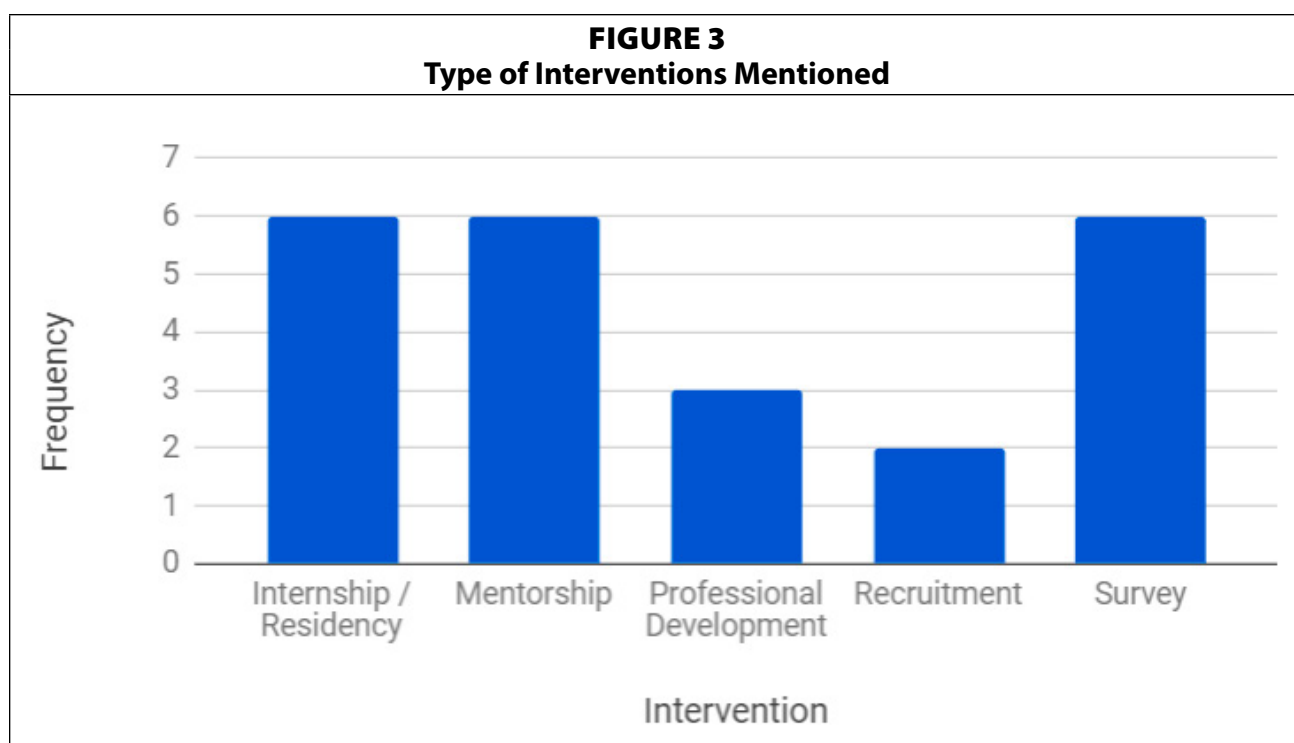


goal was to identify residency programs that were successfully recruiting and retaining visible minority librarians. Through their evaluation, they identified characteristics of successful residency programs for recent library graduates such as offering formal mentoring, assigning rotations across different library departments in the system, and increasing leadership training. Six publications incorporated internship or residency programs for new librarians. Six other publications used formal or informal mentorship programs such as pairing a senior librarian as a mentor for new librarian hires.²⁷ Professional development was key in three of the 20 publications, such as offering leadership and career development opportunities.²⁸ Two publications outlined proactive measures taken to align with the Affirmative Action Plan of the academic institution (or Affirmative Action legislation) to recruit women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minority groups.²⁹

There is a strong body of literature that defines diversity, and the four frequently used dimensions are race, ethnicity, gender, and class.³⁰ This framework was used to categorize the type of diversity outlined in the included publications. The race dimension was predominant, appearing in 19 publications, while 6 papers indicated that gender was an important factor. While some papers supported more than one type of diversity (such as race and gender), there were no papers that covered ethnicity or class.

The CASP Qualitative Checklist was designed to evaluate and critically appraise qualitative publications, and the checklist needed to be modified to fit the needs of this review. Since not all publications were considered qualitative publications, the following questions were used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the articles to examine the validity of the findings.

- Is there a clear statement of the aims of the intervention?
- Is there an evaluative component to the intervention? If yes, what kind of evaluation was done?



- Is there evidence (such as data) to support the outcomes (in other words, “success/failure”) of the intervention? If yes, identify what kind of evidence is provided.
- Is there a clear statement of findings?

Approximately half of the publications fulfilled the quality appraisal criteria across all four components, and 80 percent of publications had a clear statement of aims for their projects. Only 50 percent of the 20 publications included an evaluative component for their intervention such as administering surveys or conducting interviews to obtain feedback from participants. Fifty-five percent of publications provided some data to support the fact that their interventions were successful such as by obtaining positive feedback from participants regarding their experiences through residency or mentorship programs.³¹ In one instance, the authors followed the interns’ career paths to discover that they were successful in finding subsequent academic librarian positions.³² Fifty-five percent of the publications succinctly presented a clear statement of findings on how the interventions addressed the need to support diversity in academic librarians. However, one paper found it difficult to correlate the variable of participating in a program with direct impact on a career.³³ Table 1 summarizes the findings.

Findings suggest that there are indeed programs in academic libraries to foster diversity in librarianship. They primarily support visible minority librarians who are early in their careers. Based on the CASP Qualitative Checklist, the quality of the publications reported were mixed. Of the papers that provided data to support their findings, there is evidence to support the benefits of the aforementioned interventions for improving diversity among academic librarians.

Discussion

The current study reviewed Canadian and American initiatives to recruit, support, and retain diverse academic librarians. After evaluating all documents in this study, it was not a

surprising finding that academic libraries had a heightened interest in diversity in the new millennium. In 1998, the American Library Association (ALA) Council made a strategic commitment toward five key action areas including diversity.³⁴ This provided American and Canadian academic libraries with the strategic direction to improve diversity initiatives and evaluate their library environments.

This led to a dominant focus on racialized diversity, which was also not surprising due to the emphasis placed on recruiting people of colour into librarianship in ALA's key action for diversity: "*Diversity is a fundamental value of the association and its members, and is reflected in its commitment to recruiting people of color and people with disabilities to the profession...*"³⁵ The majority of documents focus their diversity efforts on race predominantly, which may be perceived as an easier target to reach. Few studies examine gender and most completely neglect how multiple identities intersect to impact experiences.³⁶ When information professionals view diversity as one-dimensional, this dismisses the complexities of historical and current experiences of diverse groups.³⁷ This becomes an issue when it is implemented into hiring processes where diversity is poorly defined and narrowly interpreted.³⁸ Although recruitment programs currently exist, there is not enough evidence to indicate that there is a significant increase in the number of diverse librarians entering librarianship or supported career advancement over time. If the goals of diversity in librarianship are to enhance services and the profession, then librarianship must move toward a strategically larger view of diversity recruitment and retention that would welcome and acknowledge all dimensions of diversity to avoid these limited hiring practices.³⁹ If current models continue, diversity recruits will remain stagnant in librarianship and rarely have opportunities to reach their full potential.

Diversity interventions triggered by the ALA's new strategic direction provided an increase of new librarians and new opportunities. Many of the interventions examined were successful in their main pursuit to increase the number of librarians of colour entering the profession.⁴⁰ However, there remains a large gap in these interventions between diverse librarians' entrance into the field and whether they are encouraged to stay. There is limited commitment to supporting and retaining mid- to late-career diverse librarians, many of whom face barriers when striving to advance their careers beyond entry-level positions.⁴¹ For instance, a sole focus on librarians' diversity (in most cases it is one's race) creates norm-versus-other binary, which becomes problematic in workspaces where the librarians of colour are the only representation of diversity and feel that they do not belong or are isolated.⁴² Diverse librarians are also engaging in high levels of service roles, which are deemed less important than research; and their research interests are often dismissed, which decreases their opportunities for funding and tenure.⁴³ There is a great responsibility for academic libraries to move beyond recruiting and create inclusive spaces for diverse librarians to excel; thus, the academic library must make a shift toward identifying and eliminating the barriers caused by privilege and power.⁴⁴

Evaluating an intervention contributes to the success of current and future interventions. Based on the included studies, the initiatives appear to be short-term rather than long-term

Modified Quality Appraisal Checklist	Yes	No
Clear statement of aims	16	4
Evaluative component present	10	10
Data to support outcomes	11	9
Clear statement of findings	11	9

commitments, and many of the programs lack significant detail on how they were carried out. Although the majority of studies documented clear purpose statements that emphasize the need to increase diversity in academic librarianship, it is unclear whether half of these programs, without an evaluation component, were fully committed to exploring the benefits of a diverse workforce.⁴⁵ Whereas short-term goals rarely provide opportunities for critical reflection and improvement to further explore diversity supports, long-term efforts would identify larger systemic issues that need to be addressed in hiring and retention. On the other hand, it is also possible that authors neglected to mention assessment practices that may have been in place or future plans for increasing diversity support. Those who assessed their diversity interventions demonstrated the high impact that these programs have on librarianship by creating opportunities for advancement such as mentoring programs and leadership opportunities.⁴⁶ Without the assessment of these programs, they become one-shot diversity plans that have no lasting influence on academic librarianship or for the diverse librarians entering this field.

Limitations

The main limitation of this systematic review is that only published documents could be included. It is possible that other interventions to recruit minorities into academic librarianship exist; but, since they have not been published, they could not be included. This review did not include recruitment strategies used by library schools to increase the diversity of the students enrolled in their programs. As this is an important factor in improving diversity within the profession, it holds strong potential for future publications. The coding and data extraction performed by the project team were based on their experiences as well as how they interpreted the literature. Others may identify different themes and conclusions from the publications. This review only included publications written in English. This is a limitation if any non-English language publications met the review's inclusion criteria.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that academic librarians have been concerned about the lack of diversity within the field since the 1920s, the number of diverse librarians in the profession remains low to this day. Although recruitment programs currently exist, they are not significantly increasing the number of visible minorities entering librarianship or advancing in their careers. Based on the results of this review, the authors recommend that librarians looking to establish recruitment interventions include a clear statement of their program's goals and an assessment component that allows them to evaluate their program's success. Additional areas requiring research include applying multidimensional diversity plans to recruitment and retention efforts and identifying programs targeted at mid- to late-career librarians.

Additionally, the majority of interventions focus exclusively on early-career librarians, and little is being done to address the unique needs and experiences of mid- and late-career librarians. The authors located few publications about efforts to retain diverse librarians once they enter the profession or about career advancement initiatives to recruit them into leadership positions. Future research could encompass a broader definition of recruitment that includes initiatives targeted at attracting minorities to the profession when they are undergraduate—or even secondary school—students.

APPENDIX A. Sample LISA Search Strategy

S1	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Workplace diversity")
S2	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Minority & ethnic groups") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Ethnicity")
S3	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Native North Americans") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Native peoples") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Inuit") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Metis")
S4	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Race")
S5	ti(ivers* OR intersectional* OR ethnic* OR underprivileged OR underrepresented OR disadvantaged OR transient* OR migrant* OR immigrant* OR marginali*ed OR race* OR minorit* OR racial* OR biracial* OR bi-racial* OR "wom*n of colo*r" OR "people of colo*r" OR "ethnic group*" OR "Native American*" OR "Native North American*" OR "American Indian*" OR Indigenous OR Aboriginal* OR Aborigine* OR "Native people*" OR "First Nation*") OR ab(ivers* OR intersectional* OR ethnic* OR underprivileged OR underrepresented OR disadvantaged OR transient* OR migrant* OR immigrant* OR marginali*ed OR race* OR minorit* OR racial* OR biracial* OR bi-racial* OR "wom*n of colo*r" OR "people of colo*r" OR "ethnic group*" OR "Native American*" OR "Native North American*" OR "American Indian*" OR Indigenous OR Aboriginal* OR Aborigine* OR "Native people*" OR "First Nation*")
S6	ti("Alaska* Native*" OR "Polynesian people*" OR Marshallese OR Samoan OR Tahitian OR Tongan OR "Pacific Islands American*" OR "Pacific Islander*" OR "Native Hawaiian*" OR African* OR Black* OR "Afro-Canadian*" OR Asian* OR Latino* OR Latina* OR Arab* OR Chinese OR Filipino OR Japanese OR Korean OR "Latin American" OR hispanic*) OR ab("Alaska* Native*" OR "Polynesian people*" OR Marshallese OR Samoan OR Tahitian OR Tongan OR "Pacific Islands American*" OR "Pacific Islander*" OR "Native Hawaiian*" OR African* OR Black* OR "Afro-Canadian*" OR Asian* OR Latino* OR Latina* OR Arab* OR Chinese OR Filipino OR Japanese OR Korean OR "Latin American" OR hispanic*)
S7	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Gender identity") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Gender equity") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Gender differences") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Transgender persons")
S8	ti(gender* OR female* OR male* OR wom*n OR m*n OR transgender* OR trans-gender* OR age OR ages OR ageist OR ageism OR mature) OR ab(gender* OR female* OR male* OR wom*n OR m*n OR transgender* OR trans-gender* OR age OR ages OR ageist OR ageism OR mature)
S9	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Socioeconomic factors") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Upward mobility") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Social classes") OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Cultural capital")
S10	"early career*" OR "mid-career*" OR "late* career*" OR "recent graduat*" OR "older people" OR "young adult*" OR "economic status*" OR "socio-economic*" OR socioeconomic* OR "middle income*" OR "low* income*" OR "high* income*" OR "upper class*" OR "social class*" OR "working class*" OR class* OR wealth* OR "cultural capital" OR "upward mobil*" OR "social status"
S11	1 OR 2 OR 3 OR 4 OR 5 OR 6 OR 7 OR 8 OR 9 OR 10
S12	ti((academic OR universit* OR college* OR "higher education" OR "post-secondary" OR CEGEP) NEAR/2 librar*) OR ab((academic OR universit* OR college* OR "higher education" OR "post-secondary" OR CEGEP) NEAR/2 librar*)
S13	MAINSUBJECT.EXACT("Academic libraries")
S14	12 OR 13
S15	ti((recruit* OR hire* OR hiring OR program* OR service* OR support* OR initiative* OR "professional development*" OR train* OR retention OR retain* OR mentor*) NEAR/3 librarian*) OR ab((recruit* OR hire* OR hiring OR program* OR service* OR support* OR initiative* OR "professional development*" OR train* OR retention OR retain* OR mentor*) NEAR/3 librarian*)
S16	11 AND 14 AND 15
	Limit to English language
	Limit to Source type "Scholarly Journals"

Notes

1. "Canada [Country] and Canada [Census Profile] 2016 Census," Statistics Canada, available online at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> [accessed 30 May 2018]; "Percentage Distribution of Population in the United States in 2015 and 2060, by Race and Hispanic Origin," Statista, available online at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270272/percentage-of-us-population-by-ethnicities/> [accessed 27 August 2018].
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