

University of Nevada, Reno

**Perceptions of Social Justice Education in
Rural Nevada Public Libraries**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
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ABSTRACT

Social justice education is a critical practice as it confronts and challenges existing inequities within society and helps equip participants with the tools to change them. With a growing number of conservative book bans and censorship occurring nationally, social justice education is at risk, as the bans often target books involving themes of racism, sexuality, gender, and history. Though most bans and censorship are occurring in K-12 schools, public libraries have not been immune. In 2022, every state, but Nevada, had some type of book challenge or implemented bans or censorship. Because most conservative bans are occurring in Republican dominated regions, this research will specifically explore Nevada's Republican voting counties, all of which are in rural Nevada, and why bans have not been as prevalent.

This research is guided by two main research questions. *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* and *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* Additionally, this study will examine who Nevada's librarians are and what additional resources and means of community support are provided through rural Nevada libraries that may indirectly contribute to advancing social justice efforts. This research uses a mixed methods approach, including in-depth interviews with six Nevada librarians and results of a demographics survey. Findings show that rural Nevada librarians perceive the importance of these books to be equal to other types of texts, yet the demand for them is low, thus the availability of them is low as well. This study contributes to extant literature on the purpose of a public library, the role of perception and bias in decision making, and social justice education in public libraries while also providing a further examination of how these all influence the current debate of book bans and censorship in public libraries.

Keywords: Social Justice, Public Libraries, Nevada, Rural, Books, Bans, Censorship

I acknowledge that the University of Nevada, Reno is situated on the traditional homelands of the Numu (Northern Paiute), Wašiw (Washoe), Newe (Western Shoshone), Nuwu (Southern Paiute) peoples. These lands continue to be a gathering place for Indigenous Peoples, and I recognize their deep connections to these places. I extend my appreciation for the opportunity to live and learn on their territory.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a resurgence of book bans and censorship in K-12 schools and public libraries throughout the United States. This has brought into question the role of libraries in communities, and to what extent texts with potentially controversial themes and content should be available to the public. Proponents of book bans have largely argued that they ensure that children do not have access to sexually explicit content, but through that argument, many books on racism, sexuality, gender, and history have been removed from library shelves (Meehan & Friedman 2023). Currently there are two initiatives to remove books from libraries, often viewed through a conservative or liberal lens. Books being removed from a liberal position often include books now considered to have inappropriate language or insensitive imagery of racial stereotypes; while conversely, books being removed from a conservative position include books with topics on race, sexuality, and gender (Alfonseca 2023).

Opposition to the latter form of bans and censorship is a form of social justice work as it increases access to social justice education by keeping books about racism, sexuality, gender, and numerous other topics dealing with themes of social justice on the shelf. Moreover, numerous liberal book ban initiatives argue that their bans are in the name of anti-racism work. Both instances are show that social justice education is a critical practice as it confronts and challenges existing inequities within society and helps equip participants with the tools to change them. According to Adams and Zúñiga (2016),

Social justice education focuses attention on the ways in which social group differences of race and ethnicity, national origins, language, religion, gender, sexuality, class, disability, and age interact with systems of domination and subordination to privilege or disadvantage difference social group members relative to each other (41).

With this knowledge, those who live at intersections of oppression can learn about the structures that exist to maintain their subordination and begin to gather the tools to challenge them. Additionally, those with privileged identities can learn about the experiences of others and begin to aid in the effort to create more equitable communities through their partnership in social justice work. Many public libraries offer access to key social justice texts that facilitate this type of knowledge building. However, complete access to these texts is often hindered by location, budget, community political beliefs and affiliations, and numerous other factors (Betts-Green 2020; Garcia 2023; Swan et. al. 2013). When looking to where there may be an underserved need for social justice resources and materials, identifying locations that fit an intersection of all these factors is key. One such set of locations are in rural communities, who are likely impacted at least by location, budget, and community political beliefs and affiliations.

Using Nevada as the community of observation, this research explores the importance of social justice texts throughout rural communities and the perceived demand for social justice education in rural public libraries. I approach my examination of perceptions of social justice texts in rural Nevada's public libraries through two principal research questions: *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* And *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* In addition to these questions, this research will briefly examine access to additional community resources and means of support through public libraries such as information literacy, computers and WIFI, health kits, etc. to explore the praxis of social justice efforts beyond simply providing social justice texts. Through a mixed methods approach, including quantitative survey analysis and in-depth interviews, this research explores several components of social justice education and how it shapes rural Nevada libraries.

Regarding the first research question, this research establishes how social justice is defined through a liberal lens and a conservative lens in existing scholarship and introduces and compares how rural Nevada public librarians define it. Though I will compare their definition with that which has been established in social justice education scholarship, how it is defined within rural communities will have an exceptionally influential impact on the types of books and resources librarians provide in their libraries. Additionally, how they conceptualize social justice will impact how they interpret demand in their community, the challenges they see to access of these sorts of texts, and the extent to which they address these challenges. The second research question asks how perceived demand of social justice texts impacts the availability of these types of texts in public libraries, which is addressed both in the interviews and survey results. Because research participants are exclusively librarians and not library patrons, it is only the perceived demand that will be measured. Argued later, it is this perceived demand that is most important as it is what facilitates decision making and library curation. Though not a direct research question, the additional resources that are made available through public libraries that contribute to social justice work will create a holistic understanding of the needs of rural Nevada and how their libraries help address them.

Lastly, this work also surveys who Nevada librarians are and how their demographics compare to that of the communities they serve, which contributes to the relationship they share with their patrons and how it influences the way they serve their community. These questions come together to directly inform what importance social justice education has in rural Nevada on behalf of its librarians, those with the most power to decide how it shows up in library spaces.

Positionality Statement

In my second semester of Graduate School, I took a Social Justice Colloquium class that was arguably the most important class I took throughout my academic career. It was in this class that I came to realize that several of the assigned books were not available at my public library in Reno, Nevada (Washoe County Library System). Intersecting with my personal and academic interest in the accessibility of education, I explored to what extent these texts were available throughout the entire state. Simultaneously, a conservative group within Washoe County began speaking at board meetings about their opposition to certain texts and programs within the region. Indeed, throughout the country, discussion and implementation of bans and censorship was growing. I believe that the issue of book bans and censorship is a critical issue in current times, as it directly conflicts with the liberties of living in a truly democratic society, where access to all literature should not be infringed upon. However, I think that collaboration and understanding across the political spectrum is essential to addressing this issue.

In addition to analyzing the current trend of bans and censorship, I also view my field of sociology through a critical lens. Sociology itself is a product of colonization and continues to prioritize the Western centric canon of the founding fathers of sociology: Marx, Weber, Durkheim, etc., (Alatas & Sinha 2001). Sociology classes continue to teach based off scholarship and theory from Euro-American scholars, leaving non-white scholars on the periphery. Many sociology scholars are encouraging intellectual decolonization of the field, but much work still needs to be done (Go 2017; Meghji 2021). This issue is insidious to the social sciences as evidenced by ongoing conversations about how to address the broken relationship that result from histories of unjust ethnographic work, unethical research studies on marginalized groups, and erasure of indigenous knowledges. As sociologists, we must make individual and field wide

commitments to listening, learning, and including the work of scholars beyond the global north, and it is in using a decolonial, social justice, and feminist informed theoretical framework, that I commit to doing this work.

As of the finishing of this paper, I am currently twenty-three years old. I am a white, able bodied cis-gendered queer woman. I was born in Reno, Nevada, grew up middle-class, and I am a Quaker. I received modest funding for this research project from the American Friends Service Committee as part of their Emerging Leaders of Liberation program.

With this context in mind, as a researcher, there still exists a pressure to create objective research. To some extent this is needed, to ensure a holistic and replicable understanding of the topic at hand. Yet, in the social sciences, there is also a call for sociologists to address positionality within their research, remaining reflexive and transparent about biases that might influence their work. Our understanding of Sociology is often grounded in the experiences of people, which is largely subjective and unique. This research strives to create a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. My lived experiences and educational training shape the theoretical frameworks that inform this research; however, personally, and professionally I am committed to hearing and incorporating a diverse range of opinions into my work, especially those that conflict with my own. This paper strives to include a comprehensive understanding of the historic and contemporary nuances of book bans and censorship and argues that social justice and social justice education is a key tool in the debate. I hope you will join me.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I situate this study in the relevant literature on social justice education in public libraries. To do so, I divide this chapter into two primary parts. First, I review theoretical contributions on social justice, decolonial theory, and feminist theory, which allows me to present my theoretical framework and the epistemological lens with which I analyze my data and make a case for the importance of social justice education. In the second part of this chapter, I briefly introduce the history of book bans and censorship, review the existing literature on the purpose of libraries as social institutions for accessing knowledge and supporting literary freedom, perceptions and bias in decision making, and conclude with social justice education in public libraries. Overall, this literature shows that public libraries have both aided and infringed on social justice work overtime and that the purpose of a public library is now endangered amid the current wave of book bans and censorship. However, the literature does not help us to understand the role of social justice education in aiding in social justice efforts in public library settings, especially during times of heightened books bans and literary censorship. Additionally, there is little discussion on how rural libraries fit into the conversation. Thus, this study contributes to extant literature on the purpose of a public library, the role of perception and bias in decision making, and social justice education in public libraries while also providing a further examination of how these all influence the current debate of book bans and censorship in public libraries.

Defining Social Justice and Social Justice Education

Social justice is a complex term to define due to its ever-evolving nature. On the one hand, it has emerged as a powerful force, embodied by the work of millions of activists who have put a worldview of equitable opportunity and resource distribution into action. On the other

hand, a few theoretical definitions have emerged in human rights documents and academic texts since at least the mid-twentieth century. A widely accepted definition of social justice from The International Forum for Social Development (2006) states that, “social justice may be broadly understood as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth” (7). However, this definition professes a worldview but not an actionable project to seek to accomplish it. Additionally, it neglects to include access to resources and fair treatment beyond economic growth. An alternative definition from the San Diego Foundation (2022) strives to create a simplified definition of social justice stating that, “social justice means equal rights and equitable opportunities for all.” Again, this definition helps fill in some gaps but also does not give direction as to how this world view can be put into action. Social justice penetrates multiple spheres of theorization, whether it be in community settings, academic settings, and beyond. It also encompasses varying spheres of focus, such as race, gender, sexuality, immigration, environmental justice, and so forth. Thus, although there are myriad definitions, I primarily draw from the work of Fraser (1998) and Bhugra (2016). Nancy Fraser (1998) defines social justice as the intersection of distributive justice and recognition justice. Distributive justice theory questions how societies or groups should allocate often scarce resources among those in their community, based off the varying needs of each individual (Fleischacker 2004). Recognition justice involves a “politics of recognition” which includes a goal of a “difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect” (Fraser 1998, 1). By looking at this intersection, Fraser honors the proper distribution of resources and recognition of differences between social identities and groups as a key component to social justice and presents a vision that is actionable, filling in a gap from previous definitions. Additionally, Bhugra (2016) points out that an intrinsic characteristic of social justice is that, “it

is aimed at promoting a society which is just and equitable, valuing diversity, providing equal opportunities to all its members, irrespective of their disability, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion, and ensuring fair allocation of resources and support for their human rights” (336). Again, Bhugra also provides a few ideas of how social justice can be put into action but adds that there is a multiplicity of identities that need to be considered and supported in this work as well. Thus, both definitions are necessary to how I use the concept of social justice in this study.

When invoking the concept of social justice in this study, I combine the work of previous scholars and institutions to provide the following definition: *Social justice is the ongoing education of all peoples' lived experiences, and the act of trying to make them better by providing equitable access to resources, opportunities, and love regardless of and in celebration of all aspects of their identity.* This definition allows me to incorporate Fraser's attention to the necessary culmination of redistribution, recognition, and participation to think intersectionally and holistically about what social justice is and Bhugra's emphasis on providing opportunity and equal resources considering a diversity of identities. Finally, I incorporate a feminist vision of love, as articulated by bell hooks, as a necessary component of social justice work to heal individuals and to heal a nation (hooks 2001). Later, I will address conservative definitions of social justice, and how they compare to mainstream scholarship's definitions.

An additional component of social justice that is pertinent to its role in public libraries is the partnership of social justice education and social justice literature. Much like social justice, social justice education and literature have myriad definitions and contributions by numerous scholars. Social justice education is an actionable project of social justice as it creates literature and dialogue on themes of social inequities, stratification, and injustices that bridge communities

together. Social justice education can exist as a classroom, a textbook, a novel, a podcast, or any other medium that facilitates conversation on these dynamic topics. As part of social justice education, social justice literature is distinguished as written material discussing and exploring social justice topics. As an educator, Kafele (2021) suggests that,

Social justice education is the ongoing student-centered exploration, examination, and assessment of the world in which your students exist through their own lens. It's an interdisciplinary critical analysis of the world around them with respect to their relationship with it and how they fit in it via their own self-expression relative to issues of social justice, social injustice, and overall systemic, institutional, and individual racism, implicit or explicit (93).

Kafele introduces in this definition the introspective nature that is adopted through social justice education, as both a reflection of the world around us, and our place within it. Offering additional sites of oppression to this definition, Maurianne Adams and Ximena Zúñiga (2016) explain that social justice education, “focuses attention on the ways in which social group differences of race and ethnicity, national origins, language, religion, gender, sexuality, class, disability, and age interact with systems of domination and subordination to privilege or disadvantage difference (sic) social group members relative to each other” (41). Social justice education is just one tactic used under the umbrella of social justice work to share ideas and build movements of change. In sum, the mission of social justice education is to, “enable people to develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behavior in themselves” (Mthethwa-Sommers 2014, 10).

Social justice education is a vital tool available in public libraries, so long as they have books and other materials on social justice literature. Key concepts of social justice education you might find as a key topic in a public library book include critical thinking and critical theory, prejudice, discrimination, oppression and power, ableism, sexism, racism, classism, and white supremacy (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2017). Social justice education may also be available in public libraries through programming, such as author guest lectures or movie viewings, or perhaps through needs-based services that bring attention to local inequalities (Pateman 2011). As explored more thoroughly in the *Social Justice Education in Public Libraries* section, it is not social justice efforts in the form of greater access to social workers or mental health resources that are necessarily being challenged in public library settings. Instead, it is social justice education and literature that is receiving backlash throughout the country both through the form of overt book bans or more covert forms of censorship. According to PEN America, a non-profit focused on awareness for the protection of free expression and the advancement of literature and human rights, the top five topics being banned from July 2021 to June 2022 were: LGBTQ+ characters or themes, protagonists or secondary characters of color, sexual content, discussions of race and racism, and themes of rights and activism (Pendharkar 2023). All these topics often fall under the umbrella of social justice scholarship, proving that it is at risk by proxy. Additionally, though there is plenty of research on social justice in public libraries, there exists a gap on how access to social justice education and social justice literature are involved in these debates. This research uses rural Nevada public libraries as the sample to understand all the intersections of social justice in a rural library setting, and what sort of importance and perceived demand there is for this type of education from the librarians and their community.

Theoretical Frameworks

My methodology is couched in a theoretical framework of social justice, meaning I ground my research in a goal of understanding what sort of inequities and systemic oppressions exist based on different identities, how this may shape individual needs, and what can be done to work towards equity and healing. This framework is heavily aided by that of decolonial and feminist theory which redirect my attention to the literary contributions of scholars beyond the Global North on social justice scholarship and consider how women and other marginalized identities may have varying experiences within rural Nevada. Specifically, this research explores rural communities' marginalized groups and how libraries provide support and/or inhibit access via the resources they provide, be it through access to social justice education, or a plethora of other community resources. This framework is essential in my exploration of my two research questions: *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* And *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* My framework will ensure I account for all people within rural communities, their intersections of identities, and how the questions in the interviews and surveys might be differently answered depending on who the librarians are and how they identify their community members. Although my research epistemology and practices are grounded in social justice, feminist, and decolonial approaches, the major insights and contributions of this study are situated within social justice studies. However, I include a brief review of decolonial and feminist approaches as they informed my research process.

Social justice as a theoretical framework exists as a critical pedagogy, encompassing many of the ideas already explored so far when defining social justice. "Social justice-oriented

approaches in education refer to standpoints and scholarly traditions that actively address the dynamics of oppression, privilege, and isms, recognizing that society is the product of historically rooted, institutionally sanctioned stratification along socially constructed group lines that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability” (Sensoy & DiAngelo 2009, 350). Using social justice theory as a framework for this study creates an accountability of action and praxis throughout the research process, as opposed to exclusively observing social justice work from the outside. This research centers book bans and censorship, an issue currently infringing on equity and access, as the main topic of the paper, and provides suggestions on how to combat it. It uses a social justice framework by focusing on a multitude of identities throughout rural Nevada, especially those historically and contemporarily marginalized. Social justice as a concept and practice is ever evolving and is always in reflection of how it can change to better serve people. By using a social justice framework, this research makes the same commitment to constantly be reflecting on how it can grow and evolve to better serve the research community, communities impacted by bans and censorship, and those in danger of being impacted as well. Lastly, as a researcher, I am transparent about my positionality and biases, and always include as many perspectives as possible to create a representative understanding of the research.

Two additional theoretical frameworks that influence this research are decolonial theory and feminist theory. Though they may fall under an umbrella of social justice, or at least explore similar concepts, they are distinct theoretical frameworks that deserve their own focus.

Decolonial theory provides three main tools as a theoretical framework, best addressed by Duvisac (2022),

The first tool is the analytical lens of coloniality to examine the ways in which colonialism continues to shape modern political, economic, cultural, social, and

knowledge systems. Second, is the call to delink from coloniality. Third, decolonial theory advocates for individuals and institutions to center and cede power to the knowledge, voices, and experiences of people marginalized by colonialism and coloniality (3).

Each of these tools come together to recognize how colonization is still an acting factor in everyday life, and how we can challenge these influences by breaking colonial ties and centering the voices and knowledges of Indigenous peoples and other communities oppressed under colonialism. These projects are then actionable in research and throughout the academy by decolonial theory.

Decolonial theory is essential to this research as public libraries today are still impacted by a colonial history, and rural Nevada libraries are no exception. Decolonial theory was first introduced into mainstream academic circles through Aníbal Quijano's (2000) paper "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." Indigenous peoples have been committing decolonial acts of resistance since colonial powers infiltrated Indigenous lands, whether in the Americas or other parts of the world. However, these acts were not properly recognized by the academy until "the decolonial turn" (Grosfoguel 2007). The decolonial turn is a project to, "epistemologically transcend, decolonize the Western canon and epistemology" (Grosfoguel 2007, 211). Scholarship such as that introduced during the decolonial turn brings attention to the numerous institutions that were built on colonial legacies, for example public education and public libraries (Fitzpatrick 2008; Odi 1991; etc.).

Because this research centers public libraries as a potential center for social justice change, decolonial theory provides a critique of how public libraries throughout the world have colonial origins as well. Since there is a dearth of history on the impact of public libraries on

Indigenous peoples in Nevada, several other examples of public libraries instituted by colonial powers provide insight into how their oversight has been devastating to Indigenous communities throughout time. The Netherlands East Indies colonies, for example, imposed “Western” values through the building of over 2,500 public libraries in the early twenty-first century (Fitzpatrick 2008), and was part of the push of colonial and imperialistic bifurcation of the elite and mass cultures throughout Africa through the institution of public libraries (Odi 1991). Lastly public libraries provided, “an institutional framework for a range of intersecting ideological disputes, from debates about self-governance and citizenship, to racial hierarchies and the acculturation of Indigenous peoples, to questions of taste and cultural capital,” throughout the British colonial southern hemisphere (Atkin et al. 2019, 2). Today, colonization and imperialism still have lingering influence on public libraries through their cataloging codes and classification schemes (White 2018), prioritization of Global North authors, the erasure of the Native American Holocaust from genocide studies (Dudley 2017), and the overall claim of making systematic change in the real manifestation of tokenism. These influences are challenged by Indigenous peoples, and specifically within the academy through decolonial theory.

It is common for researchers to jump on the “decolonial bandwagon” (Moosavi 2020) and claim to be committed to decolonial work without actually decolonizing their research and research practices. An effort this research takes to properly incorporate decolonial theory into its structure is the maintenance of decolonial reflexivity (Moosavi 2022) and praxis throughout the research process. This is reflected in the incorporation of non-Western-centric scholarship from researchers beyond the global North, engagement with research materials beyond that created in the academy, the constant reflection of how colonization and white supremacy is reflected in research, and throughout Nevada. Decolonial research requires constant reflection and

recognition of how one's research may be a benefactor of colonization. This research is not immune to this, but rather strives to contribute to decolonial efforts by every means possible and remains thoughtful that decoloniality is a journey and not a destination (Mossavi 2022). To truly achieve postcolonial scholarship would require radical change within the academy and in society at large. Moreover, combatting colonial legacies that continue to impact global communities and using decolonial theory as a theoretical framework is just one step in that direction.

In addition to social justice and decolonial theory, feminist theory informs the roles of gender and patriarchy in public libraries. Feminist theory, as a branch of sociological knowledge production, is guided by a core set of conflict approaches which view society as a power conflict between men and women. Additionally, there is a general belief that women are oppressed and/or disadvantaged by various social institutions (Guy-Evans 2023). Feminist theory impacts this research through more implicit ways, as I have received much of my research methodology training through a feminist lens. However, in more explicit ways, feminist theory aids in the exploration of the impact of gender norms on the roles of women as public librarians and the critique of patriarchal influence and power within public libraries, and in an understanding of public libraries as patriarchal actors in their communities.

In sum, social justice, decolonial, and feminist theory are interlinked. Not only do I prioritize them as a scholar, but they are essential frameworks to position this research in larger discussions of inequality, injustice, and threats to literary freedom currently happening throughout the country. These frameworks hold researchers accountable for exploring a multitude of perspectives, being reflexive throughout the research project, and in building community collaboration both within and outside of the academy.

Public Libraries' Purpose and Policies

Though book bans and censorship are happening predominately in the public school system, public libraries are not immune. However, there are numerous bureaucratic factors that many public library systems adopt to protect the autonomy of a library and the content within them. This section outlines how existing scholarship delineates the purpose of a public library, the policies put in place to protect the library and the materials inside it, and how these factors both support and infringe on literary freedom and accessibility based on how the policies are or are not carried out by library staff members.

According to The Public Library Service from The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)/The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for Guidelines Development

A public library is an organization established, supported, and funded by the community, either through local, regional, or national government or through some other form of community organization. It provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status, and educational attainment (Gill 2013, 1).

Additionally, the primary purposes of the public library are to, “provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure” (Gill 2013, 2). It is helpful to have a clear definition that is widely recognized to refer to when exploring whether public libraries, especially in rural Nevada, are upholding this original institutional mission. Additionally, this

definition serves as a direct tie to social justice as it centers the access of public library materials to all members of a community equally, regardless of identity.

In addition to providing knowledge resources, public libraries are rapidly evolving into community centers that provide direct or indirect connection to mental health support and resources, community-based programming, support for unhoused peoples, social workers, and numerous other social resources (see Reid & Howard 2016; Ilo et. al. 2021; and Garner et. al. 2021). Thus, the purpose of a public library is expanding, largely to provide services for the growing underserved needs of its community. As the staff members of public libraries learn to navigate the distribution of these new services, they must also ensure protection of their core purpose; to provide “knowledge, information and works of the imagination” (Gill 2013, 1). Not all libraries around the world are providing access to these new services but depending on the positionality of board members of this growing role, it may change their views on the importance or need of social justice literature and how their provision of these services is related to literature access.

The process public libraries go through to provide these resources, especially books, can look different from location to location, but it is often encouraged that the process be protected by creating a collection development policy that is available to the public. The IFLA’s Section on Acquisition and Collection Development provides the following definition of a collection development policy,

A [collection development] policy statement is a kind of framework and set of parameters within which staff and users work. It serves many functions beyond being merely a tool for selection of materials. In addition to describing current collections, it forces the staff involved to (re)consider the aims and objectives of the organization, both long and short

term, and the priorities to be attached to different activities. It assists with budgeting, serves as communication channel within a library and between the library and outside constituents, supports cooperative collection development, prevents censorship, and assists in overall collection management activities, including the handling of gifts, deselection of materials and serial cancellations” (Biblarz et. a. 2001, 1).

Though many major urban public libraries have collection development policies, there is no current requirement for them anywhere. Alternatively, some libraries may produce a collection development policy, but it might not be publicly available, or at least easily accessible. This creates concern that collection policies are less common among smaller libraries with less resources. Many rural Nevada libraries have a main branch which has a collection development policy, and thus their smaller branches often adopt the same one. However, many of these policies are not easily accessible online. Not having a collection development policy prevents libraries from remaining accountable to procedures that protect the collection process. This may mean that books and materials are removed or censored from library shelves or the library completely without being approved by a deselection and/or collection maintenance criteria. This is especially relevant during times of bans and censorship as a collection development policy will explicitly outline the procedures involved in removing a book, and often keep it from happening at all.

Beyond collection development policies, there are several ways in which libraries across the country create consistency in their missions and maintain accountability between each other. One such way is through the adoption of the nationally recognized American Library Association (ALA) Code of Ethics (American Library Association Council 2017), or creation of their own code perhaps inspired by the ALA’s. Several codes from the ALA connect back to the original

purpose of a public library of providing resources regardless of community members' identity. ALA proposes several codes to help foster ethical decision making such as upholding intellectual freedom, not allowing personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation, and even confronting inequity and oppression, that which is also a mission of social justice and social justice education. Not all libraries adopt the ALA's code of ethics, and as my will data show later, there are only a few rural Nevada public libraries that have easily accessible publicly available statements that touch on these same values. Several of the ethical codes from the ALA directly challenge the current bans and censorship happening around the country, which is supported by the fact that the ALA openly supports and sponsors Banned Books Week (ALA 2012b). Without a code of ethics, a public library may struggle to justify their stance on bans and censorship should their library be under the threat of one.

An additional way that libraries create consistency in their missions and maintain accountability with one another is that it is often required in most public, academic, and special libraries that the librarians have master's degrees in library science, preferably from an American Library Association (ALA) accredited program (American Library Association HRDR 2016). Additionally, there are even rural library management graduate certificates from universities like the University of North Texas.¹ These graduate programs and certificates also create consistency across libraries as they educate prospective librarians on established policies and procedures of a public library, such as those mentioned so far. However, many rural libraries are managed by individuals without a degree, or with a degree in a field other than library or information science (UNT 2023), which is likely due to lack of availability of librarians with these types of degrees in rural communities. Though a degree alone is not the mark of a good librarian, there is a threat

¹ See <https://informationscience.unt.edu/rural-library-management> for more information on Graduate Academic Certificate in Rural Library Management.

to consistent library management throughout rural communities if they neglect to have this type of resource. This means that rural communities may differ from urban communities in how they run their libraries and implement policies and procedures, which is not inherently bad, but can create problems should issues of book bans and censorship come up.

For public libraries to provide, “access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services,” that, “is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status, and educational attainment” (Gill 2013, 1) they must be thoughtful of their cataloging system. The most popular cataloging systems are the Dewey Decimal System and the Library of Congress Classification System. The Dewey Decimal System is still used mostly in public and K-12 libraries, despite its richly controversial history, based off racist and sexist approaches to categorizing (Furner 2007). For example, Black American history is often not placed in the American history category, and there are often separate categories for women and people of color in umbrella categories, situating white heterosexual cis-gender men as the norm (Joseph 2023). Though advocates are increasingly bringing awareness to this issue and encouraging libraries to switch over to different cataloging systems, such as the Library of Congress, this entails an immense amount of labor and resources that smaller rural libraries might not be able to afford and prioritize. Social justice education provides a possible solution to the continued learning of social justice practices and beliefs on behalf of library staff and community, and the unlearning of prejudice and bias.

Though all these policies and procedures are put in place to create consistency and accountability across public libraries, like any institution, public libraries are run by people who bring in their own experiences, beliefs and biases that shape how these procedures are

implemented. In other words, if the policies and procedures are available to protect libraries from bans and censorship, it must be the actions of librarians, whether because of personal beliefs or community pressure, that are allowing for these restrictions to occur. Additionally, policies and procedures are not entirely concrete, and may change to best reflect the growing needs and beliefs of a community, both on a local, regional, or national level. Thus, though there are many procedures put in place to protect libraries from bans and censorship, they are not enough to keep them from happening. How librarians perceive the needs of their community will be exceptionally influential in how they carry out their duties and procedures, how they maintain the purpose and policies of their libraries, and how this impacts the ways in which their community can use and access their library.

Perception and Bias in Decision Making

The following section explores how perceptions and bias may infringe on staff members' ability to maintain and properly implement the overall purpose of the library, and policies and procedures used to protect that purpose. This is explored in three parts. First, I examine how perceived demands may conflict with the actual needs of a community, and then I examine how explicit and implicit biases may influence the current bans and censorship happening throughout the country. Finally, I narrow the focus by explaining how political affiliation may influence explicit and implicit biases.

The role of bias in perception-based decision making

It is first important to establish how perceptions are different than reality, and the consequences of decision making based on perceived demand as opposed to actual demand. Perceptions are how we process our sensory experiences of the natural world. However, perceptions can also involve personal and social perceptions, which shape our understanding of

people, relationships, and societal norms (Cherry 2023). Regarding top-down processing, perceptions are shaped by knowledge, experiences, and thoughts instead of sensory input alone, as is the case with bottom-up processing (OpenStax College 2023). This basic understanding of perception is important to help establish how lived experiences directly shape and impact the formation of our understanding of the natural and social world. Most research on the consequences of perception-based decision making instead of reality-based decision making has been conducted outside of sociology such as psychology (Hasanali 2014). However, these scholars bring important attention to several factors that may influence the creation of perception-based outcomes. Public librarians, like healthcare workers in Hasanali's study (2014), may find that not all communities may properly convey their needs, especially people with different migrant statuses who may have limited knowledge of community resources, and thus do not have all the information available to properly evaluate their community needs. This concept is likely not immune to institutions outside of healthcare, as many stakeholders make decisions without truly knowing the full breadth of needs of those who will be impacted by those decisions. For example, if this were to occur within a library setting, the needs of the community may not be met if decisions of the library are made based on perceptions alone.

Though librarians may strive to curate collections based on the needs and demands of their communities, perceived demands and their own personal beliefs of their community may influence the collection process, even if unconsciously (Quinn 2012). This could result in two outcomes. On the one hand, librarians may avoid adding controversial items to their collection. On the other hand, they may prioritize the collection of potentially controversial items to maintain intellectual freedom. However, both decisions may be largely based on the pressures librarians perceive to be under on behalf of their community and administrators (Oltmann 2016).

Though librarians may feel that library funding bodies should not have a say in the public library acquisitions, they do feel that local community values should be considered in material acquisition (Oltmann 2016). However, unless librarians are specifically acquiring representative data on community values and needs directly from community members, they are likely using perceptions of their community to shape their collection process. This was the case with several of my interviewees who indicated they often choose books to add to collection based off outside perceptions of demand rather than directly from library patrons.

Beyond perceptions, implicit and explicit bias can directly impact diversity and equity within libraries in both who they staff, how they interact with patrons, and the materials and texts they acquire for their libraries (LaBossiere et. al., 2019). Even if librarians believe themselves to be relatively free of prejudice or bias, they, “are susceptible to stereotypes in the same ways as people who hold a personal animosity toward a specific group” (Bielby 2000, 122). Librarians may have an opinion on what social justice education is based on biases and stereotypes and use that information to decide if it is important to have certain books within their collection. Or they may have a bias against a certain group within their community, and explicitly or implicitly choose not to have books and materials about that group’s identity. These examples may seem hypothetical, but when the most common books being banned around the country have to do with gender, sexuality, and race, and they are being banned in areas that are politically and socially conservative, there appears to be a correlation between social beliefs and bans and censorship (Pendharkar 2023, Alfonseca 2023). Either way, it is these beliefs that create inconsistency in achieving the original purpose of a public library, which aims to provide to its community equally regardless of their identities (Gill 2013). Additionally, these threats demonstrate how social justice education and literature are pivotal tools in the debate of bans and

censorship. While social justice tools are being threatened, they are also exactly what is most important to combating such threats.

Political bias

As mentioned, current bans and censorship are coming from both sides of the political spectrum. In PEN America's Banned in the US online report (Meehan et. al. 2023) they explain that in,

Examining states with book bans against recent voting patterns, 19 of these 33 states (58 percent) voted Republican during the 2020 presidential election, while 14 states (42 percent) voted Democratic. However, Republican-leaning states had more districts banning books than Democratic-leaning states; 50 districts out of 153 (33 percent) are in states that voted Democratic in the 2020 presidential election, while 103 districts are in states that voted Republican. These 103 districts account for 88 percent of all book ban cases in the 2022–23 school year.

Thus, though states on both sides of the political spectrum are both receiving and imposing bans and censorship, most success is occurring in Republican-leaning states. What often differentiates these bans are the types of books being challenged. Liberal bans often involve removing materials with what is now considered inappropriate language or insensitive imagery of racial stereotypes. Several liberal challenges in schools and libraries included books such as *Of Mice and Men*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and several Dr. Seuss books due to racist language or imagery (Alfonseca 2023). Conversely, books being removed from a conservative position involve topics on race, sexuality, and gender (Alfonseca 2023). It is these themes that connect back to social justice and social justice education. I suspect that the largest threat to books about and on social justice would be the opinions of Nevada conservatives, as conservatives across the

country are the ones who are leading book ban efforts on topics surrounding social justice (Kingkade 2022). This is relevant in the case of rural Nevada because, as I discuss later, rural Nevada has historically been and continues to be politically conservative and/or vote Republican. Additionally, proponents of bans and censorship in recent Nevada news have been conservative groups.

There are several theories that may explain why conservatives are leading most of the contemporary bans and censorship on books, especially those dealing with topics of race or racism or featuring characters of color, and LGBTQ+ characters. Though this will not be explained in depth in this paper, one explanation is the connection between conservatism and Christianity. In a study exploring the link between Christianity and public book banning, Tamney and Johnson (1997) found that fundamentalism may help explain the association between conservative Protestantism and intolerance. They found that among their mainline Protestants sample, moral traditionalism was related to intolerance. They understood this as the biggest threat to the books that are being banned most often, which include nontraditional themes.

Arguably, social justice is important to conservatives and Republicans, but in a different capacity than which it is spoken about in more liberal or Democratic circles. Defined differently than mainstream social justice studies, “a republican principle of social justice specifies how republican freedom should be distributed among the members of the political community” (Peterson 2020, 68). In *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (1999), author Philip Pettit argues that an equal distribution of republican freedom is achieved when we maximize expected freedom as non-domination, meaning other agents can not interfere in one’s life. These agents can be governmental or interpersonal.

Conservative author, scholar, and former president of the American Enterprise Institute, Arthur Brooks, has led several talks speaking about the social justice agenda for conservatives. He claims it is a “hope agenda” rooted in, “work, entrepreneurship, and education,” to help those being left behind, the poor community (American Enterprise Institute 2014). He argues that we must progress the sanctification of work, entrepreneurship by means of building your life not just a business and restructuring our educational institutions to serve children instead of adults (American Enterprise Institute 2014). Brooks argument centers economic inequality as the root problem needed to be addressed by social justice, and that conservatives need to be agents of change in this mission.

Though there are several differences between this vision of republican freedom as a means of social justice, and that defined so far by social justice scholarship, there is one major difference that seems to be most pertinent to the challenges of bans and censorship, this being that republican social justice has little explicit discussion of the role power and intersectional identities play in inequality. In fact, conservatives often do not talk about race as a systemic problem (Coletti 2020). Though conservatives and Republicans may also seek for social justice, those visions look different than that which is explored in major social justice texts, which explore race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other identities at converging places of oppression. Thus, essential components to social justice education such as teaching those with privilege the nature and existence of their privilege and how to mobilize such people who are more likely to be in positions of power to become allies may not be happening in the same way. Therein lies the potential that conservatives are opposed to the availability of certain progressive social justice education texts, as they inform readers in a way that contradicts the socialization of republican freedom. This then brings the discussion to what sort of social justice and social justice education

is available in public libraries, and how the history of public libraries informs what is happening today.

Social Justice and Social Justice Education in Public Libraries

The exploration of direct social justice work is more prominent in scholarship than the exploration of social justice education in public libraries. Nevertheless, scholars are expanding our understanding of how social justice education and literature can be used in library settings (Moronta & Brissett 2022; Vincent 2012, Betts-Green 2020, etc.). For example, many scholars begin by bringing attention to how public libraries have neglected to be agents of social justice in the past.

Some scholars position public libraries, as an institution, as a symbol of equality and justice (Jaeger et. al. 2015). Others recognize how public libraries have also contributed to immense injustice throughout their history, for example, by pushing white normativity and perpetuating racist social structures (Honma 2005). These polarities position a large argument of whether public libraries ought to exist as apolitical, benevolent, and neutral in social matters despite this not being reflected throughout history (Matthews 2021). This is echoed by scholar Jesse Hauk Shera who argues that public libraries were, “judged by every standard and measured by every criterion, the public library is revealed as a social agency dependent upon the objectives of society. It followed – it did not create – social change” (1975, 248). This means that even if public libraries have reflected times of support for social change, it was only because it was the social norm, and arguably a social pressure. At the same time, libraries might ascribe to a notion institutional heroism (Hudson 2017), meaning that during times of social change and unrest, libraries have positioned themselves as centers of knowledge and safety from misinformation and subjectivity. According to this argument, many have created a façade, that may have some

truth to it, of being a hub of truth and strength to stand against the turmoil that may exist beyond its walls. This institutional heroism is insufficient if words are used instead of actions to say that libraries are positively contributing to social change when they are not doing so in active and meaningful ways.

Historically, conforming to social norms also meant that during times of immense and explicit social injustice, public libraries were often actors in the carrying out of unjust actions. A poignant example of this is in the segregation of public libraries throughout the Jim Crow era in the United States. The first public library in the United States was the Library Company of Philadelphia, which was established by Benjamin Franklin in 1731 (American Library Association 2024). It was not until 1905 that the Louisville Western Branch Library, the first library to provide services specifically for a Black community, opened (Wheeler et. al., 2004). Yet, even when public libraries that were open to Black communities became more common, numerous additional barriers infringed on access to the institution such as African Americans being beaten, arrested, and often losing their jobs for attempting to register for library cards (Wheeler et. al, 2004) The segregation of public libraries continued until the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964; however, the lingering effects of this time can still be seen, as public libraries often exist as what sociologist Elijah Anderson (2015) refers to as a white space. Libraries as white space means that they create, “a normative sensibility in settings in which black people are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present. In turn, blacks often refer to such settings colloquially as “the white space”—a perceptual category—and they typically approach that space with care” (Anderson 2015, 10). This issue is not one of public libraries alone but instead a problem insidious to numerous institutions within American society. Public libraries thus exist as white spaces, including in Nevada, not only because they are largely staffed with

white librarians, but also because their shelves are disproportionately filled with white authors. Bishop, DuVernay, and Hankins (2022) explain why Black librarianship is so important to amplifying this issue, challenging it by bringing awareness to insidious forms of racism in the institution, and countering it by encouraging changes through a social justice lens. The main message is that even if public libraries have been institutional heroes, it has likely only been for a white demographic. This is reflected now more than ever as many libraries across the country are taking social justice education books off their shelves in response to immense public pressure, disproportionately marginalizing non-white authors (Harris and Alter 2023).

Beyond their complicated history and contemporary issues, scholars are now exploring how social justice efforts are showing up in public libraries. Current discussions involve the growing number of resources available in public libraries, how public libraries help empower and support youth, and how public libraries cater to underserved communities. Numerous scholars have explored the impact of growing public library resources and onsite social workers or social work informed trainings for library staff members (Garner et. al. 2021; Ogden & Williams 2022; Jamal et. al. 2023; Gorham & Bertot 2018; etc.). This literature brings attention to the growing diversity of needs of library patrons, and how social workers have been brought in when library staff may feel unequipped with the skills to address the needs of their community members. Some of the ways onsite social workers are helping community members is through psychosocial crisis intervention (Ogden & Williams 2022), in creating a safe space for people to gain access to social worker services in a more discreet location (Garner et. al. 2021), and overall fostering collaboration and communication between social workers and library professionals (Jamal et. al. 2023).

The existing scholarship has brought light to how in spite of the resources they provide, public libraries have often neglected to be inclusive and agents of change, which is what is supposed to be outlined in their institutional purpose as a public library. Regardless, it is evident that literary freedom is at risk throughout the country as book bans, censorship, opposition to inclusive programming, and pushback on public comments of social issues is becoming more and more rampant. Nevada serves as an essential player in this discussion as it was the only state that did not have any book bans in 2022, a year in which backlash to DEI efforts instituted after the murder of George Floyd, resulted in book challenges and/or bans in every other state in the contiguous United States. However, Nevada's outlier status changed in 2023 (American Library Association 2023). This research begins to address the factors that made Nevada different. Answering my research questions will help to better understand Nevada's public librarians' opinions about the types of books that are being banned most right now, and what sort of work is being done to protect them. The work of previous scholars has queued me into what sort of social inequalities exist within public libraries, and how these factors might be influencing how book ban activists are making progress in their agenda. Whether these issues are prevailing in Nevada is a gap in the literature that this research fills. Overall, the state of our country regarding the growing book ban movement shows that the original purpose of the public library is at risk. This research explores how rural Nevada public libraries may help explain when and why these bans and censorships occur and argues that social justice education is a mechanism to combat them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The following section contextualizes social justice specifically in rural Nevada libraries. It begins by defining rural and frontier Nevada and then explores the social demographics of this region. This section will also introduce the numerous rural libraries throughout the state and their relevant relationship to social justice, book bans, and censorship histories over the past ten years.

Rural and Frontier Nevada

Nevada has a population just over 3.1 million people, with around 280,000 people living in the state's rural and frontier counties (Griswold et. al. 2021). This includes the three rural counties of Douglas, Lyon, and Storey, and the eleven frontier counties of Churchill, Elko, Esmeralda, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander, Lincoln, Mineral, Nye, Pershing, and White Pine. This research will explore all these rural and frontier designated counties, but will largely refer to both as rural, and draw from sources that may define rural and frontier slightly differently.

There are numerous definitions of rural used in the U.S. Census, among different government agencies, and beyond. While there is a consensus that rural means anything that is not urban, definitions used by different groups are varied (Cromartie & Bucholtz 2008; Cromartie 2019). Therefore, some organizations have begun referring to Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes instead. RUCA codes classify rural/urban statuses based on population density, levels of urbanization and journey-to-work commuting. The National Center for Frontier Communities is much more specific about how they define frontier lands stating on their website that, "American frontier lands are remote, and often historically indigenous. They are rural and agricultural. They are towns built around mining and other natural resources" (2023). Additionally, they use a three variable matrix to designate frontier counties based on population density, travel time, and distance to market/service centers. Specifically, frontier

counties have a density of between 12 and 20 persons per square mile, a distance to services and markets of between 30 and 90 miles, and a travel time to services and markets of between 30 and 90 minutes (The National Center for Frontier Communities 2023).

Within Nevada rural and frontier counties in 2021, 75.5% of the population was white, 1.1% was Black, 4% was Native American, 2.1% was Asian Pacific Islander, and 17.3% was of Hispanic Origin (Griswold et. al. 2021, table 1.10). These numbers are likely similar today; however, over the past ten years, Nevada's population has grown more diverse overall (Girnus 2021) and rural communities are projected to diversify over the next ten years (Griswold et. al. 2021, table 1.11). In the 2020 presidential election, all rural and frontier counties voted for the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, and this trend of voting red holds true across time (See Griswold et. al. 2021; Nevada Secretary of State 2023). Nevada's rural and frontier communities are largely supported through agriculture and mining, though there are also opportunities for jobs in education, hospitals, Wild West tourist attractions, and more (Work in Rural Nevada 2019). Though statistically rural Nevada seems homogenous, there are numerous identities that will have different needs and interests when it comes to the use of public libraries. It is this sentiment that is echoed by interview participants later in the Results and Discussion section.

Marginalized populations within rural Nevada

Rural America deals with several unique issues due to their geographic location and restricted access to certain resources. The Rural Health Information Hub (2023) brings attention to the following issues on their website that may be different than those experienced in urban areas:

A disproportionate burden of chronic disease relative to the general public, restricted access to quality health care, insufficient or lack of health insurance coverage, geographic

isolation, lack of public transportation, poor infrastructure, low educational attainment, low health literacy, poverty and unemployment, a smaller health care workforce and a lack of specialty care, limited availability of bilingual providers and interpreter services, and cultural or social differences, stigma, and norms.

These issues heavily weigh on the health and wellness of rural communities and make community members especially susceptible to inequities regarding economic stability, education, social and community contexts, health and health care, and access to healthy and quality neighborhood and urban environments (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2018). Thus, it is the intersection of these issues that situate rural communities as a marginalized group. Additionally, inequities based off geographical location can be intensified when overlapped by those that exist due to racial and ethnic inequality (Meit 2018), an experience that might be experienced by some of Nevada's rural population.

Rural Nevada libraries predominately serve white middle-class readers due to the demographic makeup of these rural communities being predominately white and middle class (Griswold et. al. 2021); however, there are marginalized populations within these rural communities that may face additional barriers to access of different community resources. Marginalization often happens at intersections of converging identities of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, and religion. As mentioned previously, 75.5% of Nevada's rural population is white, 17.3% is of Hispanic origin, 4% is Native American, 2.1% is Asian Pacific Islander, and 1.1% is Black, (Griswold et. al. 2021, table 1.10). Additionally, in 2019, county-level per capita personal income in rural and frontier Nevada ranged from \$32,859 in Pershing County to \$75,635 in Douglas County (Griswold et. al. 2021, table 2.1).

Unfortunately, there is not ample census data on trans identities and sexualities; however, it is likely that members of the LGBTQ+ community are a bit more hidden as they face increased rates of stigma and discrimination in rural communities (Whitehead et. al. 2016).

Rural Nevada is not completely homogenous due to the diversity amongst different gender, sexuality, and racial and ethnic identities. This research explores the different needs and perceived demands of rural Nevadans considering this diversity, ensuring that these communities are not painted over with a single brush. One thing that does unite many rural communities in Nevada is the presence of a public library when other public infrastructure is minimal.

Nevada Rural and Urban Public Libraries

Within the state of Nevada there are 92 public libraries, and about 55 of them are in rural communities (See Table 1). Though some towns may have access to some of the larger urban public libraries in Reno, Las Vegas, and Henderson, most rely on their closest rural public library. The Clark County Library System has a floating book inventory meaning that you can return a book at any library site, even if it is not where you originally checked it out. These books may be redistributed by administrators to disperse surplus books, but overall, one library site is not the sole holder of any one book. This also means that you can request a book from the library system, and even if it is not at your nearest library site, it can be sent there quickly. Rural towns surrounding Las Vegas are also a part of the greater Las Vegas-Clark County Library System. This means that they have access to any books and materials available at urban library branches. However, they must put in requests to receive these materials, and it may take longer for them to receive it. Unlike the urban branches, their book inventory is not a floating inventory, meaning they are the sole holders of their books until they relinquish them back to the greater library

system. This means that rural libraries can specially curate their collections to best reflect the interests of their own community.

Like the Clark County area, other rural libraries throughout Northern and Central Nevada are all a part of a cooperative, excluding some regions like Douglas County, Washoe, and Carson. They also network and connect with fellow rural libraries and reach out to their nearest urban partners. Even so, due to the sheer distance between most branches, receiving books and other resources often takes much longer than it would at an urban library. It is these sites that are most like other rural public libraries beyond Nevada that often face challenges regarding revenue, proximity to other services, access to electronic resources, and staffing (Swan et. al. 2013). These challenges impact the access and availability of certain texts and materials, including social justice education texts. However, there are other challenges that likely have a greater impact on librarians' ability to acquire books on social justice topics. For example, in recent years, there have been increasing calls to ban books and protests of libraries' attempts to engage in social justice practices. In the following section, I review some of these challenges to elucidate how they impede on rural librarians' abilities to engage in social justice work.

Book Bans and Censorship, Drag Queen Story Hours, and Black Lives Matter

Though book ban and censorship commentary has grown in recent years, it is by no means a new phenomenon. The United States has a long history of book bans, burning, and censorship. The first book banned in the United States was Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* in 1637, which was banned by the Puritan government due to its critique of their government and treatment of Indigenous Peoples (Connolly 2023). Censorship has since arisen in the United States numerous times since this first ban, and several examples throughout history showcase how it was often those on the periphery that were most impacted by the destruction

and censorship of knowledges. Most notably is the censorship of abolitionist work such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Mudium 2023), the introduction of the Comstock Laws which burned millions of books (Friedman & Werbel 2023), and the banning of Margaret Sanger's *Family Limitations* which infringed on the access of key contraceptive knowledge (Lakshmeeramya 2017). From these examples, bans were used to limit knowledge that was in opposition to certain powerful ideologies. The history and motivations behind bans and censorship help inform what is happening now.

Today, throughout the United States, book bans, censoring, and pushback on new inclusive initiatives in K-12 and higher education and public libraries have been pervasive. At the time of this research in 2023, Florida has been dominating the news circuit with its mission to ban certain adult and children's books throughout public K-12 schools, and yet it follows Texas in the total number of books banned. As of June 30, 2022, Texas had banned 751-1000 books throughout their school districts and Florida had banned 501-750 books (Friedman and Johnson 2022). As of March 2023, despite Florida governor Ron DeSantis claims of only banning "pornographic and inappropriate" material from public schools, numerous bans have specifically targeted books representing the LGBTQ+ community, BIPOC communities, and topics of race and racism (Pen America 2023). This includes books such as *Forever* by Judy Blume, *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, and the *Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. Much of the media coverage on book bans are largely about those occurring in the public school system as opposed to the public library system, but a record "2,571 unique titles were targeted for censorship, a 38% increase from the 1,858 unique titles targeted for censorship in 2021," in public libraries (Garcia 2023). Additionally, "of those titles, the vast majority were written by or about members of the LGBTQIA+ community and people of color" (Garcia 2023).

Within Nevada's rural libraries there have been no official book bans. However, though there has not yet been any publicly made book bans in Nevada, more states and districts around the country are banning books in public school systems, and thus a potential threat exists for Nevada to follow suit. This idea is supported based off the political makeup of rural Nevada that is similar to the areas that are banning books. Friedman and Johnson (2022) note that these book bans are not the work of individuals alone, but rather the work of advocacy organizations that have continued to demand censorship of certain books and ideas in public schools throughout the country. The ideals of these organizations are overtly reflected in some of the growing conflicts throughout Nevada.

Distinct from overt book bans, censorship of books acts often as a covert form of suppression that may go more unnoticed. The American Library Association (ALA) defined censorship as "the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons—individuals, groups, or government officials—find objectionable or dangerous" (2012b, 1). Censorship includes but is not limited to practices such as subtle pressure, labeling materials, restricting access to materials, and redaction of text both in the publishing process and in the distribution of texts in public libraries (Oltmann 2016). For example, at the time of this research, there is growing commotion from several groups within Nevada, including the Washoe County Library system, to start implementing censorship in public libraries for certain children's books (Lincoln 2024a). This was followed with an outpour of community opposition with over 1,500 people signing a petition to protect against book censorship, as well as explicit opposition from librarians (Lincoln 2024b). Several other instances of right-wing groups bringing opposition to county level discussions have occurred over the past several years.

During a March 2023 Washoe County Commission meeting, nearly two and a half hours were spent on public comment where attenders spoke about their opposition to drag queen story hours in Washoe County public libraries, despite the topic not being on the agenda. This provides a distinct connection to the reoccurring theme of bans and censorship of books containing LGBTQ+ content (Garcia 2023). Many folks who were in opposition believed that their tax dollars should not go to funding these sorts of programs and that children should not be exposed to what they considered to be adult entertainment. Commissioner Alexis Hill mentioned that the program was funded by Friends of the Washoe County Library, which is a volunteer run non-profit that funds different programming, runs events, and fundraises for the Washoe County Library System. Thus, public tax dollars were not funding these social programs, and even if they had been, the County Commission does not have oversight of the programming in Washoe County libraries, thus their opposition at this meeting was to create visibility for their cause (Robinson 2023). Additionally, though typical drag queen performances can explore some explicit content, story hours are catered to children and their parents, and thus involve the reading of a standard children's book but in drag, excluding the typical forms of adult entertainment that many opposers fear are involved in the performance (Robinson 2023).

Opposition to drag queen story hours has been widespread, impacting communities beyond Nevada. In 2020, Minnesota lawmakers introduced a bill to cut 100% of funding for public libraries that host drag queen story hours (Dibble 2020), though as of this writing this bill was never passed.² However, an additional bill, MN HF1903, which is currently in committee, would classify drag performances as adult entertainment and increase location restrictions on

² For more information on this bill see the following:
<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/bill.php?b=house&f=HF4323&ssn=0&y=2020>

adult entertainment.³ Thus, this opposition is a continued battle in Minnesota, and should the newest bill pass, it could prove to other states wanting to pass similar legislation that is it possible. Drag queen story hours are just one activity that some parents participate in to expose their children to a new and engaging form of readings and to build allyship among their children with the LGBTQ+ community. Potential bills like that introduced by Minnesota and other general pushback by the public and by lawmakers not only paint a clear picture of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments, but starkly oppose social justice efforts.

The conservative pushback to efforts to promote diversity and inclusion have not been restricted to anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment. During the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and activist work of 2020, numerous Nevada libraries declared their support of the BLM movement, including the Douglas County Library and the Washoe County Library System. Former Douglas County librarian, Amy Dodson, publicly declared her support of the BLM movement in July of 2020 with a draft statement to the library board denouncing, “all acts of violence, racism and disregard for human rights.” It read in part: “We support #BlackLivesMatter. We resolutely assert and believe that all forms of racism, hatred, inequality and injustice don't belong in our society” (Kane 2021). In response to this draft statement of diversity and inclusion to the library board, Douglas County Sherriff Dan Coverley responded with the following response letter and personal statement on the sheriff's office, “Due to your support of Black Lives Matter and the obvious lack of support or trust with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, please do not feel the need to call 911 for help.” Coverley wrote at the time, “I wish you good luck with disturbances and lewd behavior, since those are just some of the recent calls my office has assisted you with in

³ For more information on this bill see the following:
<https://www.billtrack50.com/billdetail/1575473#:~:text=Bill%20Summary,617.242%2C%20subdivisions%201%2C%204.>

the past” (Kane 2021). Dodson resigned about a year later in July of 2021 and took a job in Chicago, IL. Douglas county is one of several rural Nevada counties that show how even within rural communities there are diverging opinions and responses to social justice efforts. In fact, it is this separation that was also evident in this research, especially in the interviews with rural Nevada librarians.

Social institutions have increasingly been taking public stands for or against different social issues and movements. For public libraries, it puts into question the role of librarians in these movements and how involvement may support or compete with the purpose of a library. Public librarians are increasingly being called to provide and create additional resources to support their communities, changing their original purpose from exclusively librarians to quasi social workers for their community. These initiatives are largely being made based off the perceived demands of their community. Social justice education is an invaluable resource to aid in these efforts as it introduces public libraries to a greater conversation of social justice advocacy and work, and what sort of resources might be most relevant now. Thus, access to social justice education is not only a tool for library patrons, but staff members alike. This argument brings this paper back to central questions of how rural Nevada librarians define social justice, the demands they perceive their community has for social justice texts, and thus how accessible these materials are to rural Nevada public libraries and their communities at large.

METHODS

My research explores the definitions, perceived demand, and availability of social justice texts in rural Nevada public libraries through a mixed methods approach of in-depth interviews and surveys responses. These two methods are necessary to explore key ideas addressed the original research questions of: *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* And *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* I conducted in-depth interviews to answer how social justice is defined by rural Nevada librarians and assess how librarians address the demands they perceive for social justice texts in their communities. The survey included several demographic questions that establish who rural Nevada librarians are and how they compare to the communities they serve, as well as asking general questions about importance and demand of a variety of texts in their libraries. This study received exempted approval from the University of Nevada, Reno's Institutional Review Board.

Interviews

The population sampled for this study was public librarians in rural Nevada. Within the state of Nevada there are 92 public libraries, 55 of which are in rural communities (See Table 1). Some of these sites are managed by a team of library staff, whilst some remote locations only have one to three employees. Many of these libraries fall under the oversight of the larger branch manager. Thus, I sent each larger branch, and any smaller libraries that were not part of a larger county library system, all received the same email (see Appendix A) inquiring about participation in a study on rural public libraries and their community resources and catalogs. There may have been some overlap if small branches were misidentified and did fall under the oversight of a larger branch, which only means that may have received the email twice. For the emails that did

not receive a response, I sent an additional email to inquire about the librarians' interest in participation. If I did not receive a response from the second email, I did not follow up with an additional email.

Once I received a response from the library and identified a participant, I sent a follow up email that was sent directly to individual participants including additional instructions and a consent form (See Appendix B). There was also a separate email for those who only inquired about the survey (See Appendix B). In the initial email received by the libraries, I encouraged recipients to share the study with librarians within their library system, and other rural branches. Thus, interview and survey participation could be a result from snowball sampling, as opposed to direct contact with participants. Snowball sampling may affect the validity of research as it is a convenience sampling technique that can lead to samples that are not representative; likely because people will only refer others to the study that they believe should participate (Robert 2015). However, when working with such a small population, convenience sampling is a helpful tool to ensure that as much of the available population was made aware of the study as possible.

I formulated the research questions in a way to hear directly from the librarians on several key topics: the purpose of a public library, their perception of what their town's community was like demographically, who uses the library the most, how they define social justice and the types of books and materials they feel are a part of that, whether there is a demand for these types of books in their community, their collection development policy, any pushback they have experienced, and any additional social justice or community services their library provides to their town's community. I worded several of the questions in a specific manner to elicit responses based on the librarian's own interpretation. One example is, "If your library wanted to acquire materials for a social justice education series, what would that look like?" This

question was meant to introduce the idea of social justice as a main topic of the interview, but guided by how they would define it. To keep each interview as similar to the next as possible, if clarification was asked about a certain question, I only gave minimal but thoughtfully vague clarification so as not to provoke certain responses.

The interviews helped directly answer both research questions: *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* And *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* Several of the questions directly answer RQ1 by exploring how librarians define social justice. This included the interview questions of: *If your library wanted to acquire materials for a social justice education series, what would that look like? Follow Up: What are non-traditional library materials that could be included in this? And beyond social justice texts, what other social justice or community services and resources does your library provide to your town's community?* The wording of these two questions encouraged librarians to define social justice in their own words, and what sort of resources they provide in their libraries might fall under its umbrella. *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries* was also explored through several of the questions in direct and indirect ways. The following question directly answered the perceived demand of these texts: *Do you believe there is a demand for these types of books in your community? Can you give me some examples of how you know this?* While the following addressed the impact of the availability aspect: *Does your library actively seek to add social justice texts to the inventory?* Additional interview questions helped create a holistic understanding of who the librarian was, the work they have done, and the nature of their library and community.

I conducted interviews over an eight-month period beginning in June of 2023 and finishing in January of 2024. All interviews were in-depth semi-structured interviews to allow for conversations and ideas to emerge that were not previously considered when creating the interview guide. Each interview lasted between fifty to ninety minutes. Because anonymity cannot be ensured because of the small number of libraries, any identifying information has been minimized throughout the Discussions section by attaching pseudonyms and removing all identifying information. This confidentiality was outlined for participants both in the signed consent form for interview participants and in the consent agreement at the beginning of the online survey. Additional security was created throughout data collection by securing identifying information in a Nevada Box folder that was only accessible to the research team.

All interviews were conducted over Zoom due to costs of travel for in-person interviews. Though in-person interviews have the highest standard of interviewer-participant encounter (Krouwel, Jolly, and Greenfield 2019), Zoom interviews have grown in popularity to streamline accessibility both for researchers and participants. Interviews were audio and video recorded using the built in Zoom software. The video recordings were automatically recorded but I then deleted them after the Zoom finished processing the recording as they will not be used in analysis. In total, six interviews were conducted. Nearly fifteen total participants were identified, but two ended up revoking their interest after reviewing the interview question guide, two people never showed up to the Zoom interview, and five people did not respond to emails after trying to schedule a date for the interview. This non-response pattern mimicked a trend in the survey responses that will be discussed further in the Limitations and Discussion sections.

Survey participants ranged in demographics and experience. Though there were only six interviews, they were geographically and demographically representative of rural Nevada librarians and their responses led to data saturation, as their responses were all extremely similar.

Survey and Census Data

To provide an opportunity to engage with librarians that did not have the ability to meet through interviews, I created an alternative survey. This survey included myriad questions geared to document demographic information and probe perceptions of social texts without explicitly referring to them. All rural Nevada libraries that responded to the initial email were sent a demographics survey for their staff to complete (see Appendix 3). The survey was open to any library staff member that are directly involved in day-to-day library services that concern books, collections, and other community resources.

The survey consists of questions about race and ethnicity, gender, educational attainment, political affiliation, and socioeconomic factors. There is also an additional optional section of the survey that inquiries about the importance of books based on topic and authorship, ways the librarians perceive their community, and several other questions. All survey responses were completely anonymous. I asked that the library staff not share the link to the survey with anyone outside of the Nevada library community, but it was encouraged to share with other rural public libraries throughout Nevada. This, like the interviews, means that some responses may be due to snow-ball sampling, which has the same benefits and limitations addressed in the interviews section. In total, thirty-nine responses were collected, but only twenty-nine of those participants completed most of the survey. In fact, the additional ten only exist to address a non-response trend, but their responses to the preliminary qualifying questions for participation were not included in the analysis of survey results. Though it cannot be certain that these responses came

from a representative sample of the state, interest in the link to participate was asked for by a widespread and representative sample of rural libraries. I compare the demographics results against the county level data from Griswold et. al. (2021) to establish the demographics of the librarians against their communities at large.

The survey questions help address the primary research questions in a few ways. Several of the questions measure *the importance of social justice texts in public libraries* by evaluating the importance of social justice topics and different demographics of authors. Again, several of the questions measure *the demand of social justice texts in public libraries* by evaluating the perceived demand of social justice topics and different demographics of authors. Other questions such as *the typical visitor of the library I work at is like me* or *the typical visitor of the library I work at has similar interests as me* were originally included to draw conclusions about the importance librarians give to particular books and how they then perceive demand for them based off how similar they believe themselves to be to the community they serve.

Both the interviews and surveys come together to help answer the two research questions and frame rural Nevada in the discussion of book bans and censorship, and social justice education throughout the country.

Data Analysis

Data analysis happened in several steps. First, I transcribed interviews with the aid of the transcription software Otter.ai. This type of software is helpful but not always accurate, so each transcription was reviewed for accuracy, and proper corrections were made to fix punctuation and speaker assignment. Following transcription, I uploaded the interviews into Dedoose and began reviewing each preliminary interview, making notes of reoccurring words and concepts to create a rudimentary coding scheme. Overall, my aim was to employ a thematic content analysis

(Anderson 2007) of the data to find general themes in the narratives of research participants. Each theme I tried to connect back to my two research questions and the greater literature review. I also highlighted any cases of certain participants having experiences that greatly stood out from to fellow participants, but this was quite rare. Thus, I reviewed excerpts from each major code and organized them into main themes discussed more in depth in the Results section. The themes that emerged helped me to interweave the contributions of this research with the literature and research on the topic discussed previously. It is these findings and results that I bring into the Discussion which will be accompanied by the survey results.

For the surveys, I exported results from Qualtrics into Excel for analysis. I cleaned up the data by removing questions that would not be used for analysis, such as preliminary qualifications for participation questions. Additionally, because most questions were nominal in nature, I recoded each response and assigned a numerical value to create ease in analysis. Questions regarding importance were coded on a scale of 1 meaning “not at all important” to 5 being “extremely important”. Similarly, questions of demand were coded on a scale of 1 meaning “no demand” and 5 meaning “very high demand”. I then ran several statistical evaluations on several questions including the general descriptive statistics, t-tests, correlations, and regressions. For major questions, I evaluated differences in political affiliations and compared them to each other.

In the discussions section I review a small content analysis of the availability of the top 13 challenged books in 2022 throughout Rural Nevada (Table 11). I created this table by searching for each book title on the catalogues for the Nevada Library Cooperative (Northern and Central Nevada), Washoe County Library District, and The Library District (Southern Nevada). This table is used to showcase the availability of these texts throughout rural Nevada.

Lastly, I used demographic information from the Nevada Rural and Frontier Health Data Book – 10th Edition from the University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine (Griswold et. al. 2021). No additional analysis was done with this data besides general comparisons to demographic results of this research and survey.

Limitations

Several limitations exist in this research study, including the sample size, non-response bias, and social desirability bias that could be addressed in future research. Primarily it is composed of a small sample size both for the interviews and the surveys. In total, there were six interviews that each ran about an hour long. There are technically 39 survey responses, though the number of surveys is truly closer to 29 responses as 10 respondents stopped completing the survey after the first demographics question asking about gender identity. Due to the limited survey responses, the amount of plausible statistical testing was limited and thus the results section is predominately composed of simple t-tests as opposed to more aggressive regressions. Despite this smaller sample size for the mixed methods approach, I believe the sample created data saturation with a particular opinion, especially for the interviews, as responses were extremely similar from each participant to the next, and I suspect would have continued to be should other participants been identified.

However, due to the non-response bias, I believe there is a large demographic missing from the study. In total, there were 15 survey participants that were identified; however, two ended up revoking their interest after reviewing the interview question guide, two people never showed up to the Zoom interview, and five people did not respond to emails after trying to schedule a date for the interview, despite several attempts to connect. All these potential interviewees had received a copy of the interview guide. This non-response pattern mimicked a

trend in the survey responses as ten people stopped responding after the gender demographics questions. Two of the participants who stopped answering did seemingly review the entirety of the survey, whilst the other eight are unclear. I can only speculate why those who did not continue their participation in the research did so. When I initially reached out to libraries, the wording of the email did not specify social justice. Thus, considering they were interested up until the point that they received the interview guide or viewed the survey that included more specifics about the content of the research, specifically wording including social justice, I suspect they did not want to discuss their opinion on the topic. If this is truly the case, there is a missing sample of people who may have a differing opinion on social justice that do not have their opinions properly represented in this research.

This non-response bias also ties into the often-present social desirability bias found in much social research. “Social desirability bias refers to the tendency to present oneself and one’s social context in a way that is perceived to be socially acceptable, but not wholly reflective of one’s reality” (Bergen & Labonté 2020, 783). Due to the nature of the research questions and the topic at hand, there is a possibility that librarians did not answer in a fully authentic manner. This may be due to the questions regarding ideas about social justice, since it has been socially polarizing amid book bans and censorship. I attempted to mitigate this bias through a few tactics. First, in interviews, in addition to letting participants know that their answers were confidential, I told interviewees that I wanted them to feel comfortable speaking freely about the topics at hand, and that they were welcome to skip any they wanted. Additionally, when it came to the first question about social justice, I ensured that they were the ones to define it. If it ever came up again during the interview, I made certain to refer to their own definition. In the survey I never mention social justice, but instead ask about a “variety of books.” I included books that could be

identified under the more “controversial themes” that have been banned in recent years such as LGBTQ+ and race/ethnicity, but also included topics such as Nevada History and Romance, intermixed between social justice topics.

In sum, there are numerous limitations that may sway results into being more representative of a positive, and often liberal, viewpoint. As I will recommend again later, I would suggest that future research specifically seek out more conservative viewpoints by mitigating political language in their outreach tactics, and/or purposefully using language that appeals to conservative demographics if actively seeking that specific demographic. Though this research may not appropriately represent this demographic, there is still a lot to learn from the sample that was involved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results and Discussion chapter will be broken into three sections. First, I will discuss the results of the interview and the results of the survey separately, then I will bring the results together in the concluding Discussion section to connect them back to the two main research questions and the discussion of bans and censorship at large. Once again, the primary research questions of this study are: *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* And *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?*

Interview Results

In total, six interviews were conducted. Each interview was around an hour long and was semi-structured in nature. All interview questions can be found in Appendix C: Interview Guide. Interviews sought to address both research questions. This section will be a thematic analysis of interview responses, connecting back to the research questions as well as integral discourse subjects introduced in the literature review including the purpose of a public library, perception and bias, definitions of social justice and social justice education, and the roles of social justice and social justice education in a public library space. All librarians have been given aliases.

Throughout all interviews, three key themes emerged including *unique rural qualities*, *addressing the needs of a community*, and *social justice*. These three themes include several sub-themes that will be discussed as each theme is presented. I will begin with the theme of *unique rural qualities* to acquaint the discussion with the nature and characteristics that make up rural Nevada, which will be further broken into the subthemes of *rural cultures are unique*, and *everyone knows each other*.

Unique rural communities

Rural Nevadans librarians believe that their own communities differ in several ways from both the state's urban communities and other rural communities. Most rural towns are either active or former agriculture and/or mining communities. Despite this commonality, many participants mentioned how each of their communities is still unique and has their own culture, *"Like, you can't compare them [a rural branch] to an urban branch, even though people try to all the time. And you can't compare them to each other [rural branches] because they're all different. I think that's one of the more interesting things about being in a rural library. Is that - you know - you really have to adapt towards your community and their needs"* (Bonnie). These cultural differences depended on the type of community that each rural library was in such as agriculture, mining, or bedroom communities. As Diane mentions, this means that depending on the type of community, *"each branch, while we have access to the same resources, and we have the same overall mission statement, each branch does have to function independently and take the needs of their community into consideration."* Bonnie confirms this sentiment, stating, *"that's one of the interesting things about the rural branches is that they all serve a different function, depending on what community they're in"*. Nevada has quite a small population of only 280,000 people living in the rural and frontier counties (Griswold et. al. 2021). This means that at most a county may have around 55,000 people, as is the case with Elko and Lyon County, and have as little as 1,000 people, as is the case with Esmeralda County (Griswold et. al. 2021, table 1.2). Because of these smaller populations, though librarians believed their communities were unique, every interviewee made some comment about how they know all their library patrons because of how small their town is. Diane even felt pressure to conform to this rural norm when starting their new job, *"I knew ahead of time that there was going to be an expectation when I got here*

that they were going to expect me to know them, and know who's related to who, and who's not talking to who and all of that good stuff...And now I know this whole entire town...Everybody knows everybody's names. We don't even use library cards here". Other librarians feel they know their community so well that they are able to anticipate the types of books they want. For example, Amy said, *"But usually, that's because we know who the people are, you know, if they're gonna check out a book, this specifically for one reason or another - it's a small enough town that we're going to call him up and know him by name".* Evan confirms this as he says he believes, *"There's something unique about knowing most of the people who walk through your door and being able to look at their account just by name, you know, their likes and dislikes, you know what to offer them".* These sentiments connect to the larger discussion on how perceptions and bias influence the types of books and materials that librarians will provide to their community which introduces the next main theme which is *addressing the needs of a community.*

Addressing the needs of a community

Addressing the needs of a community goes hand in hand with what librarians believed the purpose of a library to be, and nearly everyone gave the same answer: a community center. Several librarians mentioned the fundamental purpose of a library was simply to be a place where people can find information, such as Frank who mentions, *"the purpose of public libraries is to help people get the information that they need and want,"* which Diane confirms with, *"The direct purpose of the library is to help people find the answers they're looking for."* However, everyone mentioned to some degree how their libraries serve a greater purpose, and how, *"We're now more of a community center where we fill those gaps where we don't have community centers anymore"* (Amy). There are myriad ways in which the librarians believed they are able to achieve this mission. For example, Frank noted, *"Our library system has always promoted*

engagement with the local community, as much as possible. Yeah, basically, we're a place for people to come, get information, and interact with other people. And in a non-threatening, and in an open-ended environment, you know, we don't really care what you call it, what your politics are, we're here for you. And we'll do the best we can to help you find what you need". In fact, this idea of an inclusive and open environment available to all, often involved seeking out people in the community to help. Amy clarifies by saying, *"but we try to find those people in our community who aren't using the library, and we try to find ways to bring them in. So that we can serve everyone".* This often involved spreading word about public programs and community resources provided by the library, and even several communities having bookmobiles that could service the most remote rural residents. In fact, every single rural library provides much more than the books on their shelves. Additional resources included access to computer and tablets, free WIFI within and outside of the building, portable hotspots, access to testing information such as AP classes and citizenship tests, health kits, and numerous others. Librarians really did a lot with a little, and the sentiments of Evan seemed to be shared across rural Nevada, *"And so I think that's what my role is, just to be a beacon for the community, 'Come on in- and if I can help, I will do whatever I can to support you'".*

There are four subthemes that address how librarians are able to gauge the demands and needs of their patrons and curate their libraries accordingly: patron directed demand (patrons specifically requesting certain books or access to resources); librarian directed demand (librarians asking patrons for their demands, often based off past expressed needs); external directed demand (looking at trending book lists and community resources of other libraries); and internal directed demand (personal beliefs of what should be available to their community).

As mentioned, nearly every rural Nevada library belongs to a larger cooperative, either the Nevada Library Cooperative for Northern and Central Nevada or The Greater Library District Las Vegas – Clark County System for Southern Nevada. This means that all patrons have access to more books than that what is physically on the shelves of their local library. Additionally, if a patron were to request a book that is not within the cooperative, librarians can submit a request to receive the book through Interlibrary loans or they can often purchase it so long as it follows their collection development policy, which all participating librarians had at their library, though one was not always easily visible on their site. All this being said, in theory, if a library patron were to request a certain book, the librarians throughout rural Nevada would be able to acquire it. It may take some time for them to receive it, but they would nonetheless be able to. Thus, patron directed demand, librarian directed demand, external directed demand, and internal directed demand largely come together for the continued curation of the library at large and when acquiring materials for specific patrons. According to Frank this is, *“both a science and an art.”* Patron directed demand occur when library patrons specifically ask for a book, *“so a lot of our collection is patron led requests. If they have a request, especially if it's like fiction, or a popular title or part of a series like that, we know right away like that those will fit into our collection development policy”* (Amy).

Librarian directed demand often involved librarians going out of their way to ask patrons what books they wanted based on that patron’s history, *“I have some people requested very specific books. But since I've been out here, I have discovered that the town really thirsts for suggestions, which is cool because I love reference work”* (Diane). External directed demand usually involves acquiring books from a catalogue or from a list of top sellers, *“I don't have a great answer for it. Since its collection and developments, like in Vegas, this job, they're the ones*

who, while I have, I can have a say in my paperback books, they give us an A catalogue for me to order from that. The new books that come in are usually bestsellers, great authors that they're just ordering for every library, and I get like one or two copies" (Evan). Some even used Book of the Month organizations or Tik Tok to get suggestions on books to acquire.

Lastly, and not as popular, were internal directed demands where librarians acquired books that they personally believed should be available to patrons, regardless of if their patrons wanted them or not. Only two librarians mentioned doing this to some regard, otherwise most followed strategy exemplified by Frank who remarked that, *"I'm not going to go out and try to find materials that fit into that niche, just because it's there. It really has to speak to our patron base... I guess that's maybe a cop out but it's basically about what our patrons want"*. It is this statement that directly addresses *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* as librarians will make available what they believe is most in demand by their community.

Social Justice

Regarding the relationship of the librarians to *social justice* work and texts, three main subthemes emerged which is *negativity, indifference, and unfamiliarity*. The definitions of social justice librarians gave, and their perceptions of their community was mixed. This, in turn, made the importance of social justice education varied. First it was important for social justice to be defined by each librarian both directly and indirectly, as opposed to me giving them a definition, to inform what types of material fit within their own definition. Some of the key terms that came up as rural Nevada librarians defined social justice are equality, equity, racism, sexual orientation, access, education, income and class, immigration, and civil rights. Thought all librarians were able to provide some details about social justice, or the topics that would fit into a

social justice series at their libraries, no one provided a concrete definition. Thus, some of the definitions came from the additional resources their libraries provided, that they felt fell within their understanding of social justice. Examples include citizenship tests, access to technology, community support for youth, food assistance, and more. It is this variability that connects to the research question of *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* and will be elaborated on in the Discussions section.

Returning to the three subthemes which emerged when librarians discussed how their communities felt about social justice, *negativity*, *indifference*, and *unfamiliarity*, negative reception occurred most frequently. Evan's comment provides an apt example of a perceived negative reception. *"Social justice is just something they're not going to care about. They'll brush it off. And they're like, that's millennial stuff, like trying to change our ways. We don't care. So, we can have the books here, but they won't move, we'd have the programs, and maybe some of the teens will come if we're lucky. But kids won't care. And that's kind of the problem with that, like, anything involving social justice, almost all people here are friendly, they're open to each other. When you throw those terms around, it becomes political almost, and they just don't want to deal with that"* (Evan). In fact, several librarians commented on when or if they try to introduce materials or programs that may involve social justice themes, they must approach the topic with care. For example, Corrine pointed out that she, *"have to be careful with how we advertised it and the wording that we used, because some people can get very upset about certain words"*. Diane also shared this sentiment stating, *"But people have chosen to live here because they do like the lifestyle out here. They do like it being family oriented. But that means also, how I present new material can't be as flashy because they purposely don't want it that way."*

That's not how they want new information presented out here.” Although the themes of indifference and unfamiliarity appeared less frequently, some librarians did mentioned themes of indifference where patrons generally minded their own business and did not comment on any books with social justice themes. Finally, some librarians mentioned a theme of unfamiliarity, as it was common for people simply to not know what social justice was, *“because I think people are just going to, like, if you say it out here, if you say social justice, they're just going to be like, what's that?”* (Bonnie).

There was some mention of censorship, but not on behalf of librarians, but of the patrons themselves. Often this was either that books would mysteriously go missing from the shelf, they would be checked out and never returned, or that the book would be turned around so that the spine faced inward and could not be visible, meaning the title was hidden. Bonnie spoke directly about specific book challenges at her library, mentioning, *“You'd have to ask some of the collection. Development people if they get, I'm sure they do get challenged books. Everyone does. But not so much here. You know, and we think that we really like to take, because we're so much more connected with the actual individual people that come in and out. We do like to take the stance, and it's like, if you don't want your kid to read it, don't let them read it”*. Most notably, the only comment from a librarian on a challenge was Frank who said, *“In my 10 years at the library, there's only been one challenged book. And that book was the Bible.”* Several librarians made comments acknowledging the bans and censorship occurring throughout the country but said that that was not something occurring at their branch.

Indeed, several librarians mentioned how there was promise that people were open to content about social justice topics, so long as it was presented appropriately, *“But that doesn't mean they're not open to it. You just have to make it available and allow acceptance, tolerance,*

and then eventually love of whatever it is that you're presenting to them. And embracing it and going oh, no, that's normal. We see that all the time. But you have to take it in the appropriate steps for your community” (Diane). Bonnie made a similar comment about the nature of change in rural communities, “It's just being exposed to it and having the opportunity to see it and then go oh, wait, I think I might want to try that.... it's a slow process, change doesn't come very quickly to rural locations.” Diane was the only librarians who felt that this path could be taken more directly, stating, “And some people were like, well, this whole section made me uncomfortable. Well, guess what? In order to grow, you have to be uncomfortable. Otherwise, you stay this size. In order to get out of this size, you got to be a little uncomfortable and move just a little bit, you know?” All the librarians that discussed challenges, bans, and censorship believed that they were not something that would happen in their community. So, considering their more conservative communities, “they think libraries are conservative, but we are probably the least conservative place on the planet. Not just because we don't believe in censorship, but because everybody has a right to everything” (Diane).

Though not a thematic result, it is important to mention that there were nearly fifteen participants identified to participate in the interview and many ended up not participating for one reason or another. Two people specifically declined to participate further after reviewing the interview guide which was provided to them in the second email. Then a few participants, who had also been provided the guide, never showed up to the Zoom interview and never responded after being contacted for a follow up. The others, who had also received the guide, just stopped communicating after the first email. Though there is no way to know for certain why these librarians no longer wanted to participate, it does lead to a potential finding that the topics and ideas spoken about in the interview were topics they were not comfortable discussing.

In total, of the six interviews I conducted, there was little variability in responses, leading to data saturation. As I will address further in the Discussions section, the interviews help address both research questions. It is, in part, due to the main three key themes of *unique rural qualities, addressing the needs of a community, and social justice* that we now understand how librarians go about acquiring books and how demands and the purpose of a library influence these decisions. Additionally, though librarians have general ideas and loose definitions of social justice, they also believe it is something that their community is either against, indifferent to, or unfamiliar with. Thus, because librarians largely curate their collections based off their unique communities, how they perceive the desire to have social justice books impacts the importance and availability of them throughout rural Nevada. I will further explore the importance and demand of social justice texts in the survey results section, and the mixed method results will come together in the Discussion section to build meaning and connect to the existing literature.

Survey Results

The survey results show several key findings. These findings include a trend of nonresponse, the importance and perceived demand of social justice over non-social justice texts and authors, and how political affiliation influences the importance and demand of social justice texts and authors by librarians and their guests. These findings largely aid in answering the second research question: *How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* All survey questions can be found in Appendix D: Online Demographics Survey. I will introduce the data by beginning with a brief comparison of the demographics of rural Nevada against that of survey participants.

In general, survey participants, all of whom are librarians within rural Nevada, vary from rural Nevada in most demographics (Table 2). Rural Nevada's population is composed of 20.2%

aged seventeen and under, 57.7% between eighteen and sixty-four, and 22.1% 65 and older (Griswold et. al. 2021, table 1.4). Those younger than eighteen were exempt from participation, and because sixty-five is generally the age of retirement, it is not surprising that 96.55% of the survey participants are between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five.

Griswold et. al. (2021) had not surveyed gender demographics, but the gender results from this research's survey trend accordingly with nationwide reporting of librarians in public, academic and school libraries (ALA 2012a., table A-1). Importantly, the gender demographic question is the question in which ten survey participants, from the initial thirty-nine, stopped answering the survey. There are numerous reasons why participants may have stopped participating at this point, though it could be due to the wording of the gender categories, which in an attempt to be inclusive of gender diversities, may have ended up being off putting to respondents. At least two of these ten people did continue to view the rest of the survey, though they did not respond to any additional questions, and it is unclear whether the other eight viewed the entirety of the survey as well.

Table 2. Demographics

	Percentage	Count
Age		
18-64 Years Old	96.55%	28
65 Years or Older	2.45%	1
Gender		
Cis-Gender Female	78.57%	22
Cis-Gender Male	10.71%	3
Non-binary / Third Gender	7.14%	2
Another	3.57%	1
Race and Ethnicity		
Another	17.24%	5
White	82.76%	24
Sexuality		
Another	13.79%	4
Straight/ Heterosexual	86.21%	25
Socio-Economic Class		
Poor	6.90%	2
Working Class	37.93%	11
Middle Class	48.28%	14
Upper Middle Class	6.90%	2
Political Party		
Democrat	37.93%	11
Independent	17.24%	5
Republican	31.03%	9
Something Else	13.79%	4
Political Leaning		
Conservative/ Right	13.79%	4
Liberal/ Left	51.72%	15
Moderate	31.03%	9
Something Else	3.45%	1

Within Nevada rural and frontier counties in 2021, 75.5% of the population was white, 1.1% was Black, 4% was Native American, 2.1% was Asian Pacific Islander, and 17.3% was of Hispanic Origin (Griswold et. al. 2021, table 1.10). Survey participants were predominately

white, which again trends with nationwide averages of librarianship (American Library Association 2012a., table A-1).

Lastly, there was a mix of political affiliations despite rural Nevada counties voting for the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, in the 2020 presidential election (Griswold et. al. 2021, table 2.15). However, this does follow a trend of librarians being more Democratically leaning, as shown through the American Library Association, who exclusively donated to Democratic candidates in 2020 (Cunningham 2023). Griswold et. al. (2021) did use a different measurement for socio-economic status, stating the average household income as 57,598 dollars (table 2.5). Instead, I opted for a self-assigned socio-economic status instead of household income since household income does not always properly measure all aspects of someone's socio-economic status (Cowan et. al. 2012). Lastly, several participants did identify as LGBTQ+, though further analysis on this demographic will not be conducted. Though all these demographics may be spoken about in the Discussion section, only political affiliation is used to make comparisons in the data analysis.

The remainder of this results section will explore the importance and perceived demand of social justice over non-social justice texts and authors and how political affiliation influences the importance and demand of social justice texts and authors by librarians and their guests. The independent variables are the types of book topics and types of authors, and the dependent variables are the levels of importance or levels of demand assigned to them. The controls are non-social justice texts and authors. The survey section does not have unique hypotheses but as mentioned previously, they will work to address the second research question of *how does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public*

libraries by establishing the perceived demand librarians believe there is for social justice texts in their library.

In comparisons, social justice texts include the topics of Race/Ethnicity, Politics, LGBTQ+, Workers' Rights, Health, and Civil Rights. I ran several tests excluding politics and health because they potentially do not have a strong enough case to be considered social justice topics. However, the results were extremely similar to the results with those two included, thus all analyses include them as social justice texts. These topics were chosen as several of the topics are those that are being challenged throughout the country, specifically race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+, and civil rights. The other topics are often written about in social justice education but are potentially not as explicitly coded as social justice. Non-social justice texts include Nevada History, Mining, Romance, and Rural Communities. Again, the non-social justice texts were included to act as a control and are based off assumptions of topics that are important to rural Nevada. For questions regarding the importance or demand of authors, the justification of why each type of authors might fall under social justice or non-social justice is not as strong, especially since social justice education can be written by authors of any identity. However, I have divided them by authors that are often of a privileged identity, and those that are typically of a marginalized identity. Thus, the privileged authors for analysis are Men and White. The marginalized authors are Women, Non-Binary, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Immigrants, Low Income, and Prisoners. Evidently, the smaller number of categories for privileged authors did make the creation of a standardized scale less robust. These scales of social justice texts, non-social justice texts, privileged authors, and marginalized authors, were created by averaging each survey participant's score of each type of book topic of author into their respective category. For example, if survey participant 5 gave the following scores for the importance of the following

topics: Race/Ethnicity (3), Politics (4), LGBTQ+ (3), Workers' Rights (2), Health (4), and Civil Rights (4); then their social justice texts score would be 3.34.

A paired two sample for means t-test was conducted to determine the difference between the importance of social justice books ($m=2.51$) and the non-social justice books ($m=2.58$) for rural Nevada librarians, the results were not significant: $t(28) = -.411, p>.05$. This means that there was not a statistically significant difference between the importance librarians gave to social justice texts and non-social justice texts, as non-social justice texts scored just slightly higher than social justice texts (Table 3).

Table 3. How important do you think it is to have books involving the following topics in your library?

	Highest	Lowest	Average	St. Dev	Median
Nevada History	3	1	1.59	0.17	1.00
Race/ Ethnicity	4	1	2.43	0.27	2.00
Mining	4	1	2.83	0.22	3.00
Politics	5	1	3.14	0.34	3.00
LGBTQ+	5	1	2.75	0.35	2.00
Agriculture	4	1	2.72	1.28	3.00
Workers' Rights	4	1	2.48	1.45	2.00
Romance	5	1	2.97	1.76	2.00
Health	3	1	2.00	0.18	2.00
Civil Rights	3	1	2.17	0.97	3.00
Rural Communities	4	1	2.83	1.23	3.00
<i>Social Justice Books</i>	4	1	2.51	1.09	2.50
<i>Non-Social Justice Books</i>	4	1	2.58	0.86	2.80

From 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely Important)

Social Justice Books: Race/Ethnicity, Politics, LGBTQ+, Workers' Rights, Health, Civil Rights

Non-Social Justice Books: Nevada History, Mining, Romance, Rural Communities

Next, a paired two sample for means t-test was conducted to determine the difference between the importance of marginalized authors ($m= 2.39$) and privileged authors ($m=2.16$) for

rural Nevada librarians. The results were significant: $t(20) = 2.50, p < .05$. This means that rural Nevada authors believed it was more important to have books written by marginalized authors over privilege authors in their library (Table 4). Regarding social justice education in rural Nevada public libraries, librarians believed that the importance of books with social justice topics were equally as important as topics not involving social justice themes; however, they did believe that authors of marginalized identities were more important to have the privileged authors. The importance librarians personally believe books and authors might have does not necessarily determine how they choose to curate their collection; thus, demand was also explored.

Table 4. How important do you think it is to have books written by the following types of authors in your library?

	Highest	Lowest	Average	St. Dev	Median
Men	3	1	2.04	0.88	2.00
Women	3	1	2.14	0.93	2.50
Non-Binary	4	1	2.30	1.41	2.00
White	3	1	2.00	0.86	2.00
BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)	3	1	2.07	0.98	2.50
LGBTQ+	4	1	2.30	1.44	1.00
Immigrants	3	1	2.04	0.96	2.00
Low Income	3	1	2.04	0.96	2.00
Prisoners	4	1	2.50	1.40	2.00
<i>Marginalized Authors</i>	3.43	1	2.39	0.99	2.00
<i>Privileged Authors</i>	3	1	2.16	0.99	2.57

From 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely Important)

Marginalized Authors: Women, Non-Binary, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Immigrants, Low Income, Prisoners

Privileged Authors: White, Men

Regarding demand, a paired two sample for means t-test was conducted to determine the difference between the social justice books ($m = 1.62$) and non-social justice books ($m = 2.35$) and

the results were significant: $t(22) = -4.6, p < .05$, meaning that librarians perceive there to be a higher demand for non-social justice texts over social justice texts (Table 5).

Table 5. What sort of demand is there for books involving the following topics at your library?

	Highest	Lowest	Average	St. Dev	Median
Nevada History	4	1	1.61	0.78	1.00
Race/ Ethnicity	3	1	1.95	0.95	2.00
Mining	4	1	3.27	0.98	4.00
Politics	4	1	1.95	1.05	2.00
LGBTQ+	3	1	2.00	0.87	2.00
Agriculture	4	1	2.23	0.92	2.00
Workers' Rights	3	1	2.18	0.85	2.00
Romance	4	1	2.04	1.22	2.00
Health	4	1	1.86	1.04	2.00
Civil Rights	3	1	1.91	0.97	1.50
Rural Communities	4	1	2.82	1.14	3.00
<i>Social Justice Books</i>	2.29	0	1.62	0.54	1.86
<i>Non-Social Justice Books</i>	3.4	1	2.35	0.60	2.40

Original Question Scoring from 1 (No Demand) to 5 (Very High Demand)

Social Justice Books: Race/Ethnicity, Politics, LGBTQ+, Workers' Rights, Health, Civil Rights

Non-Social Justice Books: Nevada History, Mining, Romance, Rural Communities

Additionally, a paired two sample for means t-test was conducted to determine the difference between the importance of social justice texts ($m = 2.71$) and the perceived demand of social justice books ($m = 1.62$) and the results were significant: $t(22) = 4.34, p < .001$. This suggests that how important librarians believe social justice books to be in their libraries is statistically higher than the demand they perceive there to be for them. The mean for social justice texts was different here as a few less people answered the perceived demand question, and thus their importance score was excluded. Similarly, a paired two sample for means t-test

was conducted to determine the difference between the demand for marginalized authors ($m=2.27$) and privileged authors ($m=2.95$) and the results were significant: $t(20) = -2.21, p < .05$, meaning that librarians perceive there to be a higher demand for privileged authors over marginalized authors (Table 6).

Table 6. What sort of demand is there for books involving the following topics at your library?

	Highest	Lowest	Average	St. Dev	Median
Men	5	1	2.73	1.75	2.00
Women	5	1	2.77	1.72	2.00
Non-Binary	3	1	2.41	0.73	3.00
White	5	1	3.36	1.59	4.00
BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)	4	1	2.73	1.01	2.00
LGBTQ+	3	1	2.05	0.95	2.00
Immigrants	3	1	1.72	0.88	1.00
Low Income	3	1	2.05	0.90	2.00
Prisoners	3	1	2.18	0.73	2.00
<i>Marginalized Authors</i>	3.14	1.28	2.27	0.56	2.00
<i>Privileged Authors</i>	5	1	2.95	1.50	3.00

Original Question Scoring from 1 (No Demand) to 5 (Very High Demand)

Marginalized Authors: Women, Non-Binary, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Immigrants, Low Income, Prisoners

Privileged Authors: Men, White

Unlike social justice topics, a paired two sample for means t-test was conducted to determine the difference between the importance of marginalized authors ($m=2.39$) and the demand for marginalized authors ($m=2.27$) and the results were not significant: $t(20) = .48, p > .05$. This means that how important librarians believe marginalized authors to be in their libraries is not significantly different than the perceived demand they believed there to be for these types of authors in their libraries.

Finally, the findings of the survey results are the comparisons of political affiliations and the four questions just explored which are the importance of social justice texts and marginalized authors, and the demand for social justice texts and marginalized authors (Tables 7,8,9, and 10). These results are inconsistent with the scholarship previously discussed. Current challenges, bans and censorship are happening across the political spectrum, but are largely successful in Republican voting districts. Thus, a clear hypothesis would be that Republicans and Conservatives would score social justice topics and marginalized authors as less important or in smaller demand than Democrats or Liberals. But, for each of the four questions, Democrats and Liberals always scored the lowest. In fact, Moderates and Independents often scored the highest, Republicans and Conservatives in the middle, and Democrats and Liberals the lowest (Tables 7,8,9, and 10). Only in a few instances was the difference significant, but nonetheless, the trend was consistent.

Table 7. Political Affiliation T-Test (equal variances) Comparisons to *How important do you think it is to have books involving the following topics in your library? For Social Justice Texts*

	Mean Group 1	Mean Group 2	T-Stat	P Value
Political Party				
Democrat vs. Republican	2.02	2.79	-1.53	0.14
Democrat vs. Independent	2.02	2.93	-1.55	0.14
Republican vs. Independent	2.79	2.93	-0.29	0.78
Political Leaning				
Liberal vs. Conservative	2.12	2.83	1.16	0.26
Liberal vs. Moderate	2.12	3.18	-2.50	0.02*
Conservative vs. Moderate	2.83	3.18	-0.73	0.48

Original Question Scoring from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely Important)

Topics: Race/Ethnicity, Politics, LGBTQ+, Workers' Rights, Health, Civil Rights

* *p-value <.05*

The only significant difference with the importance of social justice texts was between liberal and moderates. Still, Moderates and Independents scored highest, Republicans and Conservatives scoring in the middle, and Democrats and Liberals scored lowest, as was the case with other questions (Table 7).

Table 8. Political Affiliation T-Test (equal variances) Comparisons to *What sort of demand is there for books involving the following topics at your library? For Social Justice Texts*

	Mean Group 1	Mean Group 2	T-Stat	P Value
Political Party				
Democrat vs. Republican	1.32	1.88	-2.24	0.04*
Democrat vs. Independent	1.32	2	-1.77	0.11
Republican vs. Independent	1.88	2	-0.86	0.42
Political Leaning				
Liberal vs. Conservative	1.44	1.79	-0.75	0.46
Liberal vs. Moderate	1.44	1.88	-1.83	0.08
Conservative vs. Moderate	1.79	1.99	-0.38	0.72

Original Question Scoring from 1 (No Demand) to 5 (Very High Demand)

Topics: Race/Ethnicity, Politics, LGBTQ+, Workers' Rights, Health, Civil Rights

* *p-value* < .05

The demand of social justice texts was the only instance in which there was a significant difference between Democrats and Republicans, but again, Republicans scored social justice texts higher than Democrats, which contradicts existing scholarship (Table 8). In the instance of political affiliation and the importance of marginalized authors, there was no significant relationships. Again, the trend of Moderates and Independents scoring highest, Republicans and Conservatives scoring in the middle, and Democrats and Liberals scoring lowest held true (Table 9).

Table 9. Political Affiliation T-Test (equal variances) Comparisons to *How important do you think it is to have books written by the following types of authors in your library? For Marginalized Authors*

	Mean Group 1	Mean Group 2	T-Stat	P Value
Political Party				
Democrat vs. Republican	2.27	2.38	-0.20	0.84
Democrat vs. Independent	2.27	3.05	-1.13	0.29
Republican vs. Independent	2.38	3.05	-1.12	0.30
Political Leaning				
Liberal vs. Conservative	2.34	2.62	-0.43	0.68
Liberal vs. Moderate	2.34	2.56	-0.41	0.69
Conservative vs. Moderate	2.62	2.56	0.46	0.93

Original Question Scoring from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Extremely Important)

Authors: Women, Non-Binary, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Immigrants, Low Income, Prisoners

** p-value <.05*

Table 10. Political Affiliation T-Test (equal variances) Comparisons to *What sort of demand is there for books written by the following types of authors at your library? For Marginalized Authors*

	Mean Group 1	Mean Group 2	T-Stat	P Value
Political Party				
Democrat vs. Republican	2.03	2.20	-0.66	0.52
Democrat vs. Independent	2.03	3.05	-2.98	0.01*
Republican vs. Independent	2.20	3.05	-3.06	0.02*
Political Leaning				
Liberal vs. Conservative	2.09	2.57	-1.31	0.22
Liberal vs. Moderate	2.09	2.49	-1.52	0.15
Conservative vs. Moderate	2.57	2.49	0.23	0.83

Original Question Scoring from 1 (No Demand) to 5 (Very High Demand)

Authors: Women, Non-Binary, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Immigrants, Low Income, Prisoners

** p-value <.05*

Lastly, Independents scored statistically higher for the demand of marginalized authors than both Democrats and Republicans (Table 10).

These finding of Moderates and Independents scoring highest, Republicans and Conservatives scoring in the middle, and Democrats and Liberals scoring lowest was the most consistent finding throughout the evaluation of survey results. These results may have been in due part to the low sample size, that would make any outliers stronger, and thus I would recommend that future research explore this further with a larger sample size. Despite this limitation, these findings will still prove useful in the discussion when exploring how the survey results help to understand how the perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries.

Discussion

Nevada serves as an essential player in the discussion of bans and censorship as it was the only state in 2022 that did not have any attempted book bans. But, since the start of this research project, the updated report from the American Library Association shows that in 2023 there were thirteen attempts to restrict access to books and twenty-two titles that were challenged in those attempts (American Library Association 2023b). Unfortunately, at this time, it is not clear where those attempts occurred or what books were specifically targeted. Regardless, this changing dynamic can be better understood by looking at rural Nevada, the state's majority-Republican voting counties, and their perceptions around social justice and social justice education, the types of the books being banned most. Through interviewing and surveying rural Nevada Librarians, both research questions of this project are answered.

Regarding how differing definitions of social justice and the demand for these texts influenced the importance and availability of social justice texts in public libraries I found that

librarians perceived definitions to be different than their own, and thus the importance was low. Additionally, and arguably more influential, the demand librarians perceived there to be for these social justice texts, was very low, and thus the availability of these texts was low as well. Thus, if social justice education is the way to for us to build a society that is more equal and fairer, it is not only important for us to think about fighting for justice in places where book bans occur, but places where book bans are not occurring as well. As they may not be occurring in these places because the books that are regularly challenged do not exist there in the first place.

I will begin by addressing *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* To understand the answer to this question is to understand how importance of texts is measured by librarians, which is largely based on the purpose of a public library. Public libraries throughout rural Nevada are unique to urban libraries in several ways; however, it is the way in which they can specially curate their collection and facility to the demands of their communities that makes them especially accountable to access or inaccess of different resources. Revisiting UNESCO's definition of a public library, they emphasize that a public library, "provides access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status, and educational attainment" (Gill 2013, 1). Rural librarians not only strive to fulfill this definition through their work but extend additional services that help address community needs. Librarians throughout rural Nevada are able to do this effectively because they know their community intimately. Nearly everyone mentioned that they do not need library cards because they know everyone who uses their library by name. They strive to make their libraries accessible, several branches even having bookmobiles to travel out

to homes beyond the periphery of their communities to make sure everyone has the option to read books from their library. For those that do not come to the library, they seek them out to ensure there are no barriers to their entry. Additionally, they provide educational opportunities, resources in different languages, technology support and so much more, to ensure equal access of their full range of resources and services to their entire community. The barriers to this often come in the form of the physical location being too far from other community centers or the size of their facility being too small, disallowing them from being able to provide certain resources or carry too many books. But every librarian emphasized how their libraries have evolved to be not just a place to borrow books, but a true community center that provides access to an immense number of supplies that would not be easily available to their community otherwise. This evolution is exactly in line with the changing nature of libraries at large, as other scholars have documented. Libraries are not just for books anymore; they are a community hub that helps fill in the gaps of unaddressed community needs.

So, when dealing with the barriers to providing support to a community, such as physical size of their space and budget, librarians must gauge what is most important to their communities. Thus, when asking how the different definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries, it is truly asking how important social justice is to library patrons. Though patrons of rural Nevada libraries are using library resources that help bridge access to resources not available elsewhere in the community, which I argue are tools of social justice, rural librarians do not perceive social justice education to be important to their patrons. In fact, there is an opposition to specific phrasing around social justice themes that librarians have to be considerate of when advertising and providing particular resources, programming, and books. Despite there not being a statistically significant difference between

the importance of non-social justice texts and social justice texts by librarians, interviews helped clarify that it is not the opinions of the librarians that matter when acquiring books.

Though this study does not include responses directly from patrons about their opinions on social justice. However, how librarians understand the needs and preferences of their patrons is plays a large role in decision making and library curation. Perceptions and bias are formulated by librarians because they have such a close relationship with their library patrons and have been able to build that rapport to acquire texts based of direct requests and assumed needs and likes of their patrons. So, librarians have to perceive how important social justice is to patrons based on their interactions with patrons and the patrons' interest in social justice. It is likely that the importance of social justice texts to patrons or their familiarity with them that is guiding their communication, or lack thereof, with their librarians. For rural librarians to all agree that social justice education is important but not to their patrons suggests that social justice is something that does not feel inclusive of their patrons and their values. Considering that a vast majority of rural Nevada residents have historically voted for Republican candidates, perhaps patron definitions of social justice are more aligned with Philip Pettit's (1999) definition of republican freedom. This definition centers justice as a maximized expected freedom from non-domination, meaning other agents, specifically the government, can not interfere in one's life. Thus, when social justice in a liberal framework is introduced in their libraries, it feels misaligned with their values and interests. Additionally, when a rural Nevada community is predominately white, perhaps social justice education on race and ethnicity would not be a priority to their lives as much as social justice education on class and economic disparities. Thus, because main topics of social justice education are not at the center of their lives, they are not inquiring about these types of books in their libraries. Alternatively, as proposed by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed (2017), sometimes those who are oppressed may not be entirely aware of their oppression. Thus, people who are economically disadvantaged, or marginalized by some other mean, might not seek out a social justice text about their disadvantaged condition as a form of oppression because they are not entirely aware of the social influences.

What would conflate this argument is that there was no significant relationship between political affiliations and importance assigned to social justice texts and non-social justice texts by librarians. In fact, Republicans and Independents often scored higher than Democrats, and Conservatives and Moderates scored higher than Liberals. This would directly conflate with the current trend in conservative opposition to book bans. The survey question asked, “How important do you think it is to have books involving the following topics in your library?” The list of topics then included six options later coded as social justice texts, and five options coded as non-social justice texts. The social justice topics were race/ethnicity, politics, LGBTQ+, workers’ rights, health, and civil rights. The non-social justice topics included Nevada history, mining, romance, and rural communities. Thus, though an original assumption was that there would be a political bias against social justice texts from conservatives, it was the opposite. I offer a few potential explanations as to why this finding may have occurred. The most likely reason is that there was too small of a sample size of conservatives, and thus each conservative participant had a greater influence on the sample averages. An alternative explanation could be that Democrats and Liberals have been discouraged by the effectiveness of social justice texts to create an impact in their rural communities, as they also scored lower on perceived demand for these texts in their libraries as well, though it was not statically significant from the other political affiliations. Perhaps instead, librarians, even if they are conservative or Republicans, still believe in access to myriad of texts. What this study was not able to do, once again, was

survey the patrons specifically. Therefore, there is no way to determine the difference in measured importance specifically of the patrons and their political affiliations. Regardless, if the definitions of patrons, whatever they may be, keeps them from asking for these types of books, their librarians will not acquire them. Thus, regarding *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries*, when patron's definitions of social justice, based off the librarians interactions with patrons and the patrons' interest in social justice, create opposition to it, or at least a perceived opposition to it from their librarians, it becomes less important for social justice education to be in their public library.

This then addresses *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* When there is little perceived demand for patrons for social justice texts, librarians do not acquire them, making them less available. To see this availability from a theoretical idea to an actualized consequence, I conducted a small content analysis of the availability of the top 13 challenged books in 2022 throughout Rural Nevada (Table 11).

Table 11. ALA's Top 13 Challenged Books in 2022⁴ Availability Throughout Rural Nevada

	Nevada Library Cooperative	The Library District	<i>Washoe County</i>
<i>Gender Queer: A Memoir</i> by Maia Kobabe	7* (E, K)	2 (E)	6 (E, K)
<i>All Boys Aren't Blue</i> by George M. Johnson	3* (E, K, A)	6* (E, A, P)	3 (E, K, A)
<i>The Bluest Eye</i> by Toni Morrison	9* (E, K, A)	11* (E, A, P)	6 (E, K, A, P)
<i>Flamer</i> by Mike Curato	1	2* (E)	4 (E, K)

⁴ Link to ALA's Top 13 Challenged Books of 2022, which lists why they were challenged: "Top 13 Most Challenged Books of 2022", American Library Association, April 21, 2023. http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10?gad_source=1 (Accessed January 17, 2024) Document ID: 5e20bb19-8c8a-4866-a89c-a7feefbe4ff1

	Nevada Library Cooperative	The Library District	Washoe County
<i>Looking for Alaska</i> by John Green	6* (A, P)	8* (E, A)	14 (E, K, A, P)
<i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i> by Stephen Chbosky	6* (A, P)	9* (E, A, P)	6 (E, K, A)
<i>Lawn Boy</i> by Jonathan Evison	5* (E, K, A)	9* (E, A)	4 (E, K, A)
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie	12* (E, K, A)	7* (E, A)	8 (E, K, A, P)
<i>Out of Darkness</i> by Ashley Hope Pérez	1 (E, K, A)	3* (E, A)	7 (E, K, A)
<i>A Court of Mist and Fury</i> by Sarah J. Maas	15* (E, K, A, P)	15* (E, A, P)	9 (E, K, A)
<i>Crank</i> by Ellen Hopkins	6* (A, B)	4* (E, A, P)	10 (E, L, A, P)
<i>Me and Earl and the Dying Girl</i> by Jesse Andrews	4* (E, K, A)	2* (E, A, P)	6 (E, K, A)
<i>This Book is Gay</i> by Juno Dawson	2* (E, A)	6* (E, A)	3 (E, K, A)

*Currently available at a rural branch (Last updated March 17th, 2024)

Number represents the count of physical books, an E indicates availability of an eBook, a K indicates availability of a Kindle book, an A indicates availability of an audiobook, a P indicates a Playaway, and a B indicates a Book Bag.

The Nevada Cooperative is nearly all Northern and Central Nevada public libraries, exempting Washoe and Douglas County. Though Carson City is not a rural community, they did appear to belong to the cooperative. The Library District is The Greater Clark County Library District that includes most Southern Nevada rural communities. Washoe County statistics have been included as a comparison. From the Nevada Library Cooperative's online strategic plan⁵, they service 41 locations. Thus, when looking at the total number of available texts in a cooperative, those are the total amount of texts available for the entire rural community that belongs to that cooperative. For example, *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson was the top challenged book of 2022. Within the Nevada Library Cooperative, which services 41 location,

⁵ Strategic plan available at: https://nvlibrarycoop.libguides.com/ld.php?content_id=68976473

only 2 books are currently available, one of which is currently located in Carson City. Thus, only one book currently sits on the shelf of 1 of 41 libraries in the Nevada Library Cooperative.

Gender Queer: A Memoir by Maia Kobabe has been in the news a lot for its number of challenges as well, and only four rural libraries within the Nevada Library Cooperative currently have at least one of these books on their shelves. When looking at the database for The Library District, which services all of Clark County, it was less clear if the books were on the shelves of rural libraries, so the asterisk exclusively indicates if the book was available in Boulder City, which was the only rural town listed by name. From the interviews, a few librarians mentioned that some of the rural branches, though they have access to the cooperative, do not have an updated catalogue for their own library's collection. Thus, it is possible that there are more of these texts at rural libraries, and they are just not listed on the catalogue. Regardless, it is fairly clear that there is a scarcity of at least these thirteen texts throughout rural Nevada, and the potential for other social justice education to be limited as well.

As mentioned, because every rural Nevada library belongs to a larger cooperative, patrons do have access to more books than that which is on the shelves of their local library. Additionally, if a patron were to request a book that is not within the cooperative, librarians can submit a request to receive the book through Interlibrary loans or they can often purchase it so long as it is in compliance with their collection development policy. Additionally, if the library is neighboring Las Vegas, the text would be sent to them, and then after the patron returns it, it would likely be sent back to the main Las Vegas circulation hub, and not remain on the library shelf. This would differ if the rural branch specifically purchased the book or requested it to stay. Therefore, if a library patron were to request a certain book, the librarians throughout rural Nevada would be able to acquire it. It may take some time for them to receive it, but they would

nonetheless be able to. Because of this procedure, the number of texts available throughout rural cooperatives should be representative of the popularity of the text in their communities.

Returning to Table 11, it is likely that *A Court of Mist and Fury* by Sarah J. Maas is more popular than *Flamer* by Mike Curato, hence why there are so many more texts available. What this means is that if a library has a scarcity of social justice texts, it is likely because library patrons are not requesting them. From the survey results, I determined that there was a significant difference between the perceived demand for social justice books and non-social justice books, favoring non-social justice texts. Thus, if there is no demand for social justice texts, the librarians will not actively seek them out. Only one librarian mentioned that they would actively make social justice texts visible, such as those on display for pride month, despite their patrons not checking them out. Otherwise, most librarians answered the interview question of *If your library wanted to acquire materials for a social justice education series, what would that look like?* by saying something along the lines of, “if my patrons requested these materials, I would *then* do XYZ”.

So, returning to the research questions of *RQ1: How might differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries?* and *RQ2: How does perceived demand of social justice texts impact the availability of these types of texts in public libraries?* There are several key takeaways. First, differing definitions of social justice influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries based largely on the definitions of library patrons. These perceived definitions are based off interactions with patrons and perceptions based on political affiliation. Even if librarians believe social justice education is important, they are much more likely to curate their library collections based off what they perceive the patrons think is important. However, it is arguably how librarians try to appease and keep the community

happy based on perceived demand that is most influential. Perceived demand is more important than librarian definitions of social justice in determining whether social justice books are available, and because the demand from patron's is low, the availability of social justice education is minimal.

This brings the context of rural Nevada to the debate of bans, challenges, and censorship. I argue that it is likely that rural Nevada has neglected to participate in bans, challenges, and censorship as much as other conservative and Republican voting counties of other states, because they are unlikely to ban a book that they do not have in the first place. Thus, not having bans, challenges, and censorships would in theory protect social justice education, but not when the texts are not there to begin with.

The absence of social justice education in public libraries has numerous consequences. First, there is a huge impact on children. Without access to texts that portray a diversity of identities, both similar and different to the child's, they may neglect the proper understanding of society, science, history, and economics, which will inhibit them as they grow into adulthood (Lenihan 2023). However, this understanding is not lost on children alone, as adults may also have improper understandings of social realities of people different from themselves. This is especially true in communities, like rural Nevada, that are predominately white. Returning to the idea of public libraries as a "white space" (Anderson 2015), in which the materials are not only predominately white, but so are the librarians, which was certainly true for those who participated in the survey. Thus, when a rural library believes they are serving all people in their community, striving to fulfill the purpose of a library, they may be unknowingly excluding people who do not feel seen in those spaces. In fact, it was Librarian D, who actively made books available and visible, knowing that their community might not be interested in them that

said, “*And hopefully, just by being me, and accepting their viewpoint is what it is, it sets an example of acceptance for other viewpoints*” (D). Several librarians mentioned that there is potential and hope for interests in these materials so long as it is presented in a certain way. Perhaps, it is also the task of social justice authors and educators to ensure that their material is accessible to all as well. There is a richness to learning about the experiences of others, so even if there is material within social justice education that is not aligned with a rural Nevadan’s identities and values, they may still learn a lot about the world.

The main consequence to bans, challenges, and censorship, especially of social justice education, is that it not only disrupts the purpose of a public library, but also disrupts the rights to living in a free and democratic country. As American librarian, censorship opponent, and former executive director of the Freedom to Read Foundation, Judith Krug said, “The right of any individual to read is an absolute necessity in a democratic society” (Kirtley et. al., 2020). This necessity has been infringed upon numerous times throughout this country’s history. Public libraries have a legacy that is misaligned from their purpose as they have neglected to provide access to knowledge, information and works of the imagination equally to all members of their community. However, it is also important for the purpose of a library to remain neutral too, so as to not unwillingly impose any ideals onto their community, as this infringes on the concept of republican freedom, and would be counterintuitive to facilitating acceptance. Instead, social justice education should simply be protected and made more available and visible when it is absent. Thus, their community would have the opportunity to engage with these materials, even if that engagement comes in the form of opposition. For even in times of opposition fruitful conversation and engagement does occur. Then perhaps, all the differing definitions of social

justice may influence the importance of social justice texts in public libraries and the demand of social justice texts will increase, making them more available in public libraries.

CONCLUSION

As the country faces increasing opposition to literary freedom, it is more important than ever to explore ways to strengthen it. Literary freedom is immensely strengthened by the contributions of social justice education scholars, as they explore topics that include a wide range of experiences and ideas that challenge existing structures of power. These texts seem to be most threatening to conservative opponents as bans and censorship are often most successful in Republican and Conservative led governments. Public libraries can aid in this fight, and rural communities can be epicenters of change if equipped with the right tools, so their partnership is vital.

Scholarship around social justice and social justice education in public libraries has aided in our understanding of its impact on the changing nature and purpose of a public library. Increasingly, public libraries are being called to expand beyond stewards of books and become community centers with access to additional resources and services. It is, then, the growing responsibility for librarians to understand these growing needs and perceive the demands of their patrons. This evolving role introduces intricacies that are guided by perceptions and biases, inherent in our social being, that may lead to misrepresenting or underserving different people within a community. Social justice education thus can equip librarians and their patrons with new information and tools on nuances of society, science, history, and economics from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences. However, immense opposition to social justice education comes in the forms of current day book bans, censorships, and book challenges.

Rural Nevada provides a unique look at why bans, censorships, and book challenges might not be occurring, even in rural conservative counties. This research found that there was in fact little political influence on the importance and perceived demand of social justice texts in

rural Nevada public libraries. However, there was a significantly higher perceived demand for non-social justice texts over social justice texts and privileged authors over marginalized authors. This would suggest, if we go with the perception of the librarians, that social justice education is unimportant in rural Nevada public libraries. Because rural librarians work to address the unique needs of their communities, and there was a general opinion that social justice was not important to their communities, there was a disincentive to acquire materials and texts that fit within the category. Therefore, as was the case with the top challenged books of 2023, there was a lack of social justice books in rural Nevada libraries. Thus, this study suggests that there may have been a lack of bans, censorship, and book challenges in rural Nevada not because their importance and demand for social justice texts was higher, but because it was so low that the books were scarcely available in the first place. This was slightly confirmed by the non-response bias that effected both the survey and interviews responses, as many participants suspended their participation after understanding further what the research was about. Regardless, some rural librarians have hope that this type of material could be more accepted in their communities so long as it is presented in the right way.

This research was inhibited by the small sample size in both the interviews and survey participation. Additionally, this research neglects to measure the importance and demand of social justice education from library patrons themselves, as well as conduct a throughout content analysis of the availability of social justice education in rural Nevada libraries. Exploring further the perceptions and demands of rural America is needed to holistically understand the debate around book bans and censorship.

The greatest limitation to this study was that I did not start with the people that this study aimed to survey. In other words, some of the interview and survey questions were formulated

through a liberal lens, instead of a neutral one, and I did not properly consider the cultural scripts of my participants. Therein lies potential that conversations that explicitly use the phrase “social justice education” may be off-putting to people with conservative ideologies, thus creating a threatening understanding of it. It is arguably this demographic that is not properly represented in this study, and likely makes up the sample of non-response bias from research participants that did not show up to the interview or complete the survey. Therefore, changes that would have bettered the engagement of this research would have included the use of more neutral language, and/or not providing the interview guide to research participants. Additionally, I would have reworded survey questions to allow for participant led responses. In other words, rather than providing concrete options for the gender question, I could have left it open and then grouped them into categories later. Additionally, I might not have used the term social justice at all, but rather an assortment of more neutral terms, ideas, and topics associated with it. Such terms might include equality, representation, and social impact, among others. Indeed, it is building a universally understood definition of social justice that is inclusive of all backgrounds and identities that is a daunting task, but an essential one to depolarize the debate.

Lastly, because I conducted this study exclusively through virtual interviews and surveys, I was unable to make personal connections with rural communities, which would have likely strengthened the trust and participation of existing and potential study participants. Because of this, there are several communities within rural Nevada that have not been represented in this study. These are the communities that slip through the cracks, whether because they do not feel represented and included in their public libraries or because they do not have the means and tools to access them. Seeking out these people and ensuring that their experiences are included and uplifted in this study would have certainly strengthened the feminist and decolonial rigor of the

study. This would have required more time and resources than I had to complete this study as well as a methodological approach that extended beyond librarians and library staff as the study participants. I urge and encourage future scholars on these issues to consider more thoughtfully all of those whom they wish to engage with and formulate the research tools based off their views.

American librarian, censorship opponent, and former executive director of the Freedom to Read Foundation, Judith Krug said, “Libraries serve the information needs of all of the people in the community — not just the loudest, not just the most powerful, not even just the majority. Libraries serve everyone” (Kirtley et. al., 2020). Let us not let the opinions of those who are loudest now infringe upon the access of texts for those who are often not given the space to speak at all. Go to your local public library, check out a book, and help ensure that there is always a demand for books that offend a few and honor the rest.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Email to Libraries for Interviews and Demographics Survey

Dear [Rural Library Name/Library Staff Name on Contact Page]:

My name is Catherine Polley, and I am a Sociology Master's student at the University of Nevada, Reno. I am incredibly passionate about access to education, and I believe public libraries are one of the most valuable tools that fosters that. Thus, I am conducting a research study on rural Nevada libraries, their supply of texts from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, and the demand of these sorts of texts in their community. I am currently seeking participants to be interviewed for my study who have worked in the library system for at least a year and are directly involved in the day-to-day workings of your library. Interview participation will involve being interviewed in person or over Zoom for about 1-2 hours. If you have anyone who is interested or seems to be a good fit to participate, please have them contact me, Catherine Polley, at cpolley@unr.edu. Once they reach out, a separate email will be sent to them with further instructions.

Additionally, I am asking that all staff members at libraries throughout Nevada respond to a brief demographics survey to learn more about the people who serve rural Nevada communities. The survey is less than twenty questions and should take roughly five minutes to complete. *Each survey is completely anonymous.* If your library is interested in participating, please respond to this email and I will send a follow up email with the link to the survey.

In order to participate in this study, participants must be at least 18 years old. There are no known risks involved in this research. Unfortunately, I am not able to offer compensation for participation in this study; however, your contributions are invaluable to this project and learning how to serve rural Nevada communities better.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Catherine Polley
M.A. Sociology Program
cpolley@unr.edu

*Appendix B: Response Emails and Reminders***Response Email to Library Staff Member in Response to Their Interest in Study**

Dear [Rural Library Staff Member's Name]:

Thank you for your interest in my study on rural Nevada public libraries. As stated in my email to your library, I am currently seeking participants to be interviewed for my study who have worked in the library system for at least a year and are directly involved in the day-to-day workings of your library. Additionally, they must be at least 18 years old to participate. If this sounds like you, then I'd love to hear more about your work serving your community. There will be no compensation offered for your participation in the study and there are no known risks involved in this research. Participation will involve being interviewed in person or over Zoom for about 1-2 hours. A document with sample questions for the interview is attached below; however, interviews will be semi-structured so there is no need to prepare any answers in advance.

If you feel that you fit the criteria to participate, please respond to this email with some times in your schedule that you'd be available to meet. Depending on how far you live from Reno, Nevada will decide if we meet in-person or on Zoom. If you don't have access to Zoom, I will either try to schedule an in-person meeting or help equip you with the tools to meet over Zoom. Additionally, please see the attached file for the consent form with additional details, please sign it and email it back at your earliest convenience.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Catherine Polley
M.A. Sociology Program
cpolley@unr.edu

Reminder Message: Response Email to Library Staff Member in Response to Their**Interest in Study**

This is a reminder that you have signed up to participate in a research study about rural Nevada's public libraries. You are scheduled for an interview on [date] at [time]. The study will be conducted at [location of participation (Zoom with link or in-person with in-person location)]. If you have not yet sent a photo or copy of your signed consent form, please do so at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions, please contact Catherine Polley at cpolley@unr.edu.

Response Email to Recruitment Email to Libraries for Demographics Survey

Dear [Rural Library Name/Library Staff Name on Contact Page]:

Thank you for your interest in participating in my study on rural Nevada public libraries. The following is a link that can be sent and used by all participants: [link]. If you run into any technical difficulties or have any questions, please let me know.

Thank you again for your interest and help!

Catherine Polley
M.A. Sociology Program
cpolley@unr.edu

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Rural Nevada Public Libraries Interview Guide

Catherine (Catie) Polley and Dr. Prisca Gayles
University of Nevada, Reno
Department of Sociology

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. Following is a list of possible questions that might be asked in our in-depth interview. Questions might change slightly to better focus on you and your experiences. If you have any questions prior to our interview, please reach out to Catie Polley at cpolley@unr.edu. Additionally, if you wish not to be asked any of the following questions, please notify Catie Polley prior to the interview through email or at the beginning of your interview session.

Some of the following questions may incite some uncomfortable feelings. I want to ensure that this is a safe space to express all feelings. If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, please indicate so that we can work together to figure out how to move forward.

Interview Guide

What is your name? If comfortable sharing, what are your gender pronouns?

How long have you worked in the library system?

What is your experience working in the library, have you enjoyed it, hope for the future, etc.?
What do you believe is the purpose of a public library?

How well do you think you and your library accomplish this purpose?

What does your town's community look like? Who uses your library the most?

If your library wanted to acquire materials for a social justice education series, what would that look like? *Follow Up: What are non-traditional library materials that could be included in this?*

Do you have any books in your system that fit within this understanding?

Do you believe there is a demand for these types of books in your community? Can you give me some examples of how you know this?

If yes, do you believe the demand is being fulfilled by the library?

If no, why might this be?

Does your library have a collection development policy?

If yes, what does your collection development policy look like?

If no, what does the process for acquiring books and texts in your library/ library network look like?

Does your library actively seek to add social justice texts to the inventory?

Have you experienced any barriers or pushback in acquiring books or texts? Have you had any requests to remove books?

Beyond social justice texts, what other social justice or community services and resources does your library provide to your town's community?

Do you have any other lingering thoughts that we haven't yet addressed?

Appendix D: Online Demographics Survey

Rural Nevada Demographics Survey

My name is Catherine (Catie) Polley, and I am a student in the M.A. Sociology Program at the University of Reno, Nevada working alongside my advisor Dr. Prisca Gayles. I am incredibly passionate about access to education, and I believe public libraries are one of the most valuable tools that foster that. Thus, I am conducting a research study on rural Nevada libraries, their supply of texts from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, and the demand of these sorts of texts in their community. Additionally, I am collecting demographic information from this survey to better understand who Rural Nevada Librarians are, and the communities they serve. If you volunteer to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a brief survey of about 15 questions. It should take five-ten minutes to complete.

This study is considered to pose minimal risk of harm. This means the risks of your participation in the research are similar in type or intensity to what you encounter during your daily activities. I will do everything reasonably possible to make sure you stay safe while participating in this research study. Remember that participation in research is valuable but also voluntary. Benefits of doing research are not definite; but I hope to learn more about your experiences as a librarian or library staff member and your role in supporting your community. The researchers and the University of Nevada, Reno will treat your identity and the information collected about you with professional standards of confidentiality and protect it to the extent allowed by law. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications that may result from this study. The US Department of Health and Human Services, the University of Nevada, Reno Research Integrity Office, and the Institutional Review Board may look at your study records.

You may ask questions of the researcher at any time by calling Catherine Polley at (775) 721-6001 or by sending an email to cpolley@nevada.unr.edu. Dr. Prisca Gayles, Assistant Professor of Gender, Race and Identity and Sociology, and my thesis advisor, can be reached at pgayles@unr.edu.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Additionally, it is completely anonymous, meaning that your answers will not be affiliated with your name or other identifying information. This protection extends to your library as well, meaning your library will not be mentioned as a specific participant. You may stop at any time. Declining to participate or stopping your participation will not have any negative effects on you.

You may ask about your rights as a research participant. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, you may report them (anonymously if you so choose) by calling the University of Nevada, Reno Research Integrity Office at 775.327.2368.

Thank you for your participation in this study!

By saying yes, you agree to the above terms, and wish to continue.

- Yes
- No

IF THEY SAY NO

Thank you for your initial interest in the study. You have indicated no on the previous question and thus wish to discontinue your participation. Again, by stopping your participation, there will not be any negative effects on you. There is nothing further you have to do except to press the last arrow which will submit your survey response. If you have any questions, please email Catherine Polley at cpolley@nevada.unr.edu. Thank you and have an excellent day.

Preliminary Questions

Thank you for your interest in the study. Following are a few preliminary questions to ensure you qualify to participate in the study.

What is your age? (In years)

- 17 years or younger
- 18-64 years old
- 65 years or older

Do you work in one of the following rural counties? Churchill, Douglas, Elko, Esmeralda, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander, Lincoln, Lyon, Mineral, Nye, Pershing, Storey, and/or White Pine
OR

Do you work in an urban county, but rural town?

- Yes
- No

How long have you worked for the public library system? At your current location and/or elsewhere.

- Less than 6 months
- Less than 1 year, but more than 6 months
- 5 years
- 6- 10 years
- 11- 15 years
- 16 years or more
- I don't work in a library

Disqualified for Age of Work Time

Thank you for your initial interest in the study. You have indicated on the previous questions that you are either younger than 18, do not work in a rural community, and/or have worked in the public library system for less than 6 months. Unfortunately, this exempts you from continuing to participate. Again, by stopping your participation, there will not be any negative effects on you. There is nothing further you have to do except to press the last arrow which will submit your survey responses. If you have any questions, please email Catherine Polley at cpolley@nevada.unr.edu. Thank you and have an excellent day.

Qualified to Continue, Personal Demographics (Part 1)

Because of your previous three responses, you are qualified to continue. The rest of the survey should take about five minutes. We encourage you to answer each question to the best of your ability. Answering all questions is not required, but highly encouraged. If you read a question, you are not comfortable answering, either indicate so or leave it blank. Again, if you have any questions or concerns, please email Catherine Polley at cpolley@nevada.unr.edu.

What is your gender identity? Select all that apply.

Cis-Gender: Your gender identity corresponds with the sex you were assigned at birth.

Transgender: Your gender identity does not correspond to the sex assigned to you at birth.

- Cis-Gender Male
- Cis-Gender Female
- Transgender Male
- Transgender Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say
- Another

What is your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply.

- White
- Black or African American
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic Origin
- Other: _____
- Prefer not to say

What is your sexuality?

- Straight/Heterosexual
- Gay/Homosexual
- Another: _____
- Prefer not to say

How do you describe yourself?

- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Something Else: _____
- Prefer not to say

How do you describe yourself?

- Liberal
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Something Else: _____

- Prefer not to say

What would you consider yourself?

- Poor
 Working Class
 Middle Class
 Upper Middle Class
 Wealthy
 Prefer not to say

Earlier you indicated you worked in a rural county. Do you also live in one of the following rural counties? Churchill, Douglas, Elko, Esmeralda, Eureka, Humboldt, Lander, Lincoln, Lyon, Mineral, Nye, Pershing, Storey, and/or White Pine.

- Yes
 No

If you do not live in a rural Nevada county, what best describes where you live?

- In a different state
 In an urban county, rural town
 In an urban county, urban town
 Other: _____

How long have you lived in your community?

- Less than 6 months
 Less than one year, but more than 6 months
 1-5 years
 6-10 years
 10-15 years
 16 years or more

Do you live in the same community you were born in?

- Yes
 No
 Other: _____

Do you work in the same community you were born in?

- Yes
 No
 Other: _____

On an average day, how many people come into the library you work at?

- 0-10 people
 11-20 people
 21-30 people
 31-40 people
 41-50 people

More than 50 people

The following questions are about the supply and demand of texts that include a diverse set of individuals and perspectives throughout rural Nevadan public libraries. There are 3 questions remaining in the survey.

How important do you think it is to have books involving the following topics in your library?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	Extremely Important
Nevada History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race/Ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mining	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LGBTQ+	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workers' Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Romance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civil Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How important do you think it is to have books written by the following types of authors in your library?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	Extremely Important
Men	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-Binary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
White	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

LGBTQ+	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Immigrants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low Income	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prisoners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What three book topics do you think are most in demand at your library?

Do you have any lingering thoughts or concerns about rural Nevada libraries, their supply of texts from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, and the demand of these sorts of texts in their community, or this survey?

Option to Continue to Next Survey

You have now completed the main demographics survey. Following is an optional second section to the survey about your library and its visitors. It is 6 questions long and should take about two minutes to complete. If you would not like to continue there will not be any negative effects on you. If you have any questions, please email Catie Polley at cpolley@nevada.unr.edu.

Would you like to continue on to the optional second set of survey questions?

- Yes
 No

IF THEY SAY NO

You have indicated no on the previous question meaning you do not wish to continue on to the second set of optional survey questions. Again, by stopping your participation, there will not be any negative effects on you. There is nothing further you have to do except to press the last arrow which will submit your survey response. If you have any questions, please email Catherine Polley at cpolley@nevada.unr.edu. Thank you and have an excellent day.

Option Part 2 of Survey

Please indicate how you'd complete the following sentence:

On average, the typical visitor of the library I work at is...

- White
 Black or African American
 Native American or Alaskan Native
 Asian or Pacific Islander
 Hispanic Origin
 There is No Racial/Ethnic Majority
 Other

Please indicate how you'd complete the following sentence:

On average, the typical visitor of the library I work at is...

- 17 years old or younger
- 18-64 years old
- 65 years old or older

Please indicate how you'd complete the following sentence:

On average, I'd assume the typical visitor of the library I work at is...

- Poor
- Working Class
- Middle Class
- Upper Middle Class
- Wealthy
- Prefer not to say

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	Extremely Important
The typical visitor of the library I work at is like me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The typical visitor of the library I work at has similar interests as me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The typical visitor of the library I work at is easy for me to speak with.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoy working at the library I work at.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What sort of demand is there for books involving the following topics at your library?

	No Demand	Slightly Demand	Moderate Demand	High Demand	Very High Demand
Nevada History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Race/ Ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mining	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LGBTQ+	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workers' Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Romance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civil Rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What sort of demand is there for books written by the following types of authors at your library?

	No Demand	Slight Demand	Moderate Demand	High Demand	Very High Demand
Men	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Women	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-Binary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
White	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LGBTQ+	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Immigrants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low Income	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prisoners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Your responses have been recorded.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email Catherine Polley at cpolley@nevada.unr.edu.

Additionally, if you have not yet been interviewed for this research study and are interested, please also reach out to Catherine via email at cpolley@nevada.unr.edu.

End of Survey

TABLES

Table 1: Nevada Public Libraries

*Rural in bold

Alamo	Alamo Branch Library
Amargosa Valley	Amargosa Valley Library District
Austin	Austin Branch Library
Battle Mountain	Battle Mountain Branch Library
Beatty	Beatty Library District
Beowawe	Beowawe Branch Library
Beowawe	Crescent Valley Branch Library
Blue Diamond	Blue Diamond Library
Boulder City	Boulder City Library District
Bunkerville	Bunkerville Library
Caliente	Caliente Branch Library
Carlin	Carlin Branch Library
Carson City	Carson City Library
Dayton	Dayton Valley Branch Library
Denio	Denio Branch Library
Dyer	Fish Lake Valley Library
Elko	Elko-Lander-Eureka Counties Library System
Ely	White Pine County Library
Eureka	Eureka Branch Library
Fallon	Churchill County Library
Fernley	Fernley Branch Library
Gerlach	Gerlach Community Library
Goldfield	Goldfield Public Library
Goodsprings	Goodsprings Library
Hawthorne	Mineral County Library
Henderson	Gibson Library
Henderson	Green Valley Library
Henderson	Henderson District Public Libraries
Henderson	Malcolm Branch Library
Henderson	Paseo Verde Library
Henderson	Pittman Branch Library
Incline Village	Incline Village Library

Indian Springs	Indian Springs Library
Jackpot	Jackpot Branch Library
Las Vegas	Centennial Hills Library
Las Vegas	Clark County Library
Las Vegas	Enterprise Library
Las Vegas	Las Vegas-Clark County Library District
Las Vegas	Meadows Library
Las Vegas	Mount Charleston Library
Las Vegas	Rainbow Library
Las Vegas	Sahara West Library
Las Vegas	Spring Valley Library
Las Vegas	Summerlin Library
Las Vegas	Sunrise Library
Las Vegas	West Charleston Library
Las Vegas	West Las Vegas Library
Las Vegas	Whitney Library
Las Vegas	Windmill Library
Laughlin	Laughlin Library
Lovelock	Pershing County Library
Manhattan	Manhattan Library
Mcdermitt	Mcdermitt Branch Library
Mesquite	Mesquite Library
Mina	Mina-Lunig Community Library
Minden	Douglas County Public Library
Moapa	Moapa Town Library
North Las Vegas	North Las Vegas Library District
North Las Vegas	Northwest Branch
Overton	Moapa Valley Library
Pahrump	Pahrump Community Library
Pioche	Lincoln County Library
Reno	Downtown Library
Reno	Duncan-Traner Library
Reno	North Valleys Library
Reno	Northwest Library

Reno	Reading Information Referral Center
Reno	Senior Center Library
Reno	Sierra View Library
Reno	South Valleys Library
Reno	Washoe County Library System
Round Mountain	Round Mountain Public Library
Round Mountain	Smoky Valley Library District
Sandy Valley	Sandy Valley Library
Searchlight	Searchlight Library
Silver Springs	Silver Stage Branch Library
Silverpeak	Esmeralda County Libraries
Silverpeak	Silverpeak Library
Smith Valley	Smith Valley Library
Sparks	Mendive Community Library
Sparks	Sparks Library
Stateline	Lake Tahoe Branch Library
Tonopah	Central Nevada Museum Branch
Tonopah	Tonopah Library District
Tuscarora	Tuscarora Branch Library
Verdi	Verdi Community Library
Virginia City	Storey County Public Library
Wells	Wells Branch Library
West Wendover	West Wendover Branch Library
Winnemucca	Humboldt County Library
Yerington	Central Library
Yerington	Lyon County Library System
Link: https://publiclibraries.com/state/nevada/	