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## **Arguing Book Bans: A Critical Analysis of Public Forums at School Board Meetings**

**Kim Reichenbach Krutka**  
*University of North Texas*

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[Parents] can no longer tolerate the extracurricular indoctrination of their children. They don't like the public schools focus on SEL in the school room, CRT, DEI, LGBTQ, low educational standards, and yes, pornography in the libraries.

—Supporter of book banning efforts

Instead of banning books that shock and concern you, please consider that other children need to know that their experiences are real.

—Supporter of book choice

The library profession is dominated by white, female librarians and has a history of prejudice and oppression that forms its systems, policies, and programs today (“Library Professionals: Facts & Figures”). Current efforts to ban or restrict access to books in school libraries continue to reflect this foundation of oppression. I seek to confront these inequities and oppression within the current context of library book banning efforts. I explore how these issues contribute to a library ideology and how they demonstrate whiteness as property and a rejection of counter-storytelling. I will further illuminate these concepts and offer guidance for librarians pursuing anti-oppression work through an analysis of one school district. This article is guided by these overarching questions for libraries and librarians:

- What is the historical and current context of libraries, book banning, and issues of power and oppression?
- In what ways do whiteness as property and counter-storytelling help to analyze and define the issues surrounding book banning?
- To what extent can this theoretical examination guide future efforts to disrupt oppressive systems and inform librarians doing anti-oppression work?

I write this article as a white, cisgender, heterosexual, non-disabled woman who relies on the expertise, knowledge, and perspectives of critical scholars who have examined issues of power and oppression. I particularly rely on scholars of color. See the works cited list for many of these scholars and their work, including Rudine Sims Bishop, Nicole Cooke, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Cheryl Harris, Sofia Leung, Jorge López-McKnight, Sujei Lugo Vázquez, and Daniel Solórzano. I have participated in systems that perpetuate white supremacy and oppress groups that have been traditionally marginalized, but seek to learn, grow, and further anti-oppression work in school libraries.

I draw on Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical lens to analyze library book banning and the extent to which these efforts further oppressive library systems. Literature about the history of libraries and the importance of book collections that reflect diverse communities, along with current events related to library book banning, provide context for this discussion. Those with influence over a library's systems decide what the library can and should be. I use the term ideology to describe what a person believes a library should be and how it is reflected in words, actions, programming, collections, and policies of the library. While the myth of library neutrality continues to plague the profession (Gibson et al., "Libraries on the Frontlines" 752-755; Mehra 461; Scott and Saunders 152, 155, 160, 162), it would be impossible for a library to be neutral. A library, and those involved with it, make choices about how the library operates and who it operates for. I will use CRT, specifically the two tenets of counter-storytelling and whiteness as property, to analyze the public dialogues around book banning, the library ideologies they represent, and provide guidance for disrupting oppressive efforts.

I use *multicultural literature* to refer to groups or collections of books that contain windows and mirrors (Bishop ix) for the many identities and experiences that exist in our

communities and enter our libraries. I do not use the term as a way to describe any single book. For instance, a single book featuring an identity that has been historically marginalized, such as a disabled character in a wheelchair or a group of Black students, is not *multicultural literature*. I avoid normalizing stories centering dominant groups, and othering stories centering marginalized groups by labeling them individually multicultural.

### **Theoretical Framework**

CRT originated as a means to challenge white supremacy and the oppression of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the legal world, and as a tool to change these systems of oppression (Crenshaw et al. xiii). While CRT is neither rigid nor standardized, researchers and scholars have developed tenets of CRT, including race as a social construct, racism is normal, experiences and knowledge of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, intersectionality, interdisciplinary, whiteness as property, critique of dominant ideologies, focus on historical contexts, counter-storytelling, and interest convergence (Leung and López-McKnight 13-15). CRT has been applied to many other areas since its inception, including education and libraries. In Leung and López-McKnight's book dedicated to applying CRT to library and information studies, they stated that while the tenets and applications of CRT can be wide-ranging, they are all tied together by "a commitment to social justice and to the elimination of racial oppression and all forms of oppression" (13).

#### *Whiteness as Property*

Harris describes whiteness as property by explaining that being "white increased the possibility of controlling critical aspects of one's life rather than being the object of others' domination" (1713). This tenet helps to explain the "expectations of power and control that

enshrine the status quo as a natural baseline” (1715), and it can be used to examine the “right to use and enjoyment, and the right to exclude others” (1731). Whiteness as property has been utilized in library scholarship. Kumasi et al. (114) and Snow and Dunbar (657) use this CRT tenet to examine the power of whiteness to determine what information is, how it is organized, and how it can or cannot be accessed within cataloging and classification schemes. Snow and Dunbar were able to see that “dominant groups, typically white, heterosexual males, have centered their perspective and made it seem ‘natural’ to the detriment of non-dominant groups” (658). Within the context of book banning, this tenet guides my discussion of the power for whiteness, and other dominant identities, to become an “object of law and a resource deployable at the social, political, and institutional level to maintain control” (Harris 1734). For example, do certain people have the power to discard books about minoritized groups on a library’s bookshelf? Do certain groups expect to be able to determine who should or should not be represented in a library? Do these expectations and demands say something about who the library space is intended for?

### *Counter-storytelling*

Delgado describes stories as a way to illustrate what is and what could be as told by both the “ingroup” and the “outgroup” (2412). The ingroup’s stories “provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (2412). The counter-stories of the outgroup provide “new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live” (2414) and can “show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion” (2415). Solórzano and Yosso examine the counter-stories of People of Color as sources of strength and necessary knowledge, through methods such as “storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives” (26). In the

context of cataloging, Snow and Dunbar examine the power of counter-storytelling to “de-center whiteness, masculinity, and heteronormativity of cataloging work” (662). This CRT tenet can guide librarians in eliminating problematic subject headings and becoming more representative of groups that have traditionally been excluded by institutions.

The counter-story lens also plays a role in analyzing how the information field continues to “not reflect, and perhaps not fully understand, the communities it serves” (Cooke 336). Cooke examines Library and Information Science (LIS) courses that focus on diversity and social justice as counter-stories by “creating learning environments that accommodate and encourage discussions of race, privilege, social justice, and other necessary and difficult issues” (340). Particularly relevant to this article’s discussion, Hughes-Hassell focuses on literature as counter-stories because it “gives voice to teens whose voices have gone unheard... challenges the single story... (and) challenges readers whose lives have been shaped by race and privilege” (“Multicultural Young Adult Literature” 215). For instance, is there an acceptance or rejection of books that provide counter-stories in a school library’s collection?

## **Literature Review**

### *The Importance of Book Collections*

Understanding library collections is central to understanding efforts to ban books. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop offers a powerful way of framing the use of multicultural literature by describing the need for mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for all readers. Windows provide “views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange,” sliding glass doors “walk through in imagination,” and mirrors offer a reflection of the reader’s identity and experiences (ix). Bishop’s discussion has inspired further evaluation of this topic, including

guides for selecting literature (Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd 810-817), research demonstrating the need for diverse representation of people, stories, and experiences in literature (Burns 11; Hughes-Hassell et al., “Through Their Eyes” 36-38), and how it is a benefit to student learning (Adam 14; Colby and Lyon; Kim et al.).

Multicultural literature can help center experiences and stories that are often marginalized, affirm identity, further an appreciation of differences (Adam; Bishop; Kim et al.; Stewart) and disrupt the perpetuation of master narratives (Colby and Lyon). For instance, Stewart explores the intersections of one student’s identity as a refugee, immigrant, and adolescent girl, and seeks to understand how the student related to books partly by making “sense of her own experiences by reading about others that were similar” (248). Educators had viewed this student through a deficit lens that labeled her as unwilling or unable to read. Yet when presented with books that reflected her own experiences, and a culturally competent educator, her “reading practices were transformed” (251). This demonstrates the ability of literature to create “learning communities that acknowledge and celebrate diversity” (Colby and Lyon 27).

In addition to including multicultural literature, there is a need for educators to understand how to incorporate it and create beneficial experiences with the text. Adam (10-13) recognizes that even when multicultural books are present, there is an ineffective and sometimes harmful approach, such as the “othering” of minoritized groups. Colby and Lyon examine the importance of multicultural literature being authentic and representing many types of experiences, including books with “African Americans or any other minority depicted as *normal people*” (25; emphasis added). In addition, white educators’ lack of awareness concerning

“whiteness and the privileges their skin color has granted them” (25) could hinder their ability to effectively select and use multicultural literature.

Without counter-stories, educators can promote the idea that the dominant culture, present in master narratives, is the preferred culture (Adam; Bishop; Colby and Lyon; Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd; Solórzano and Yosso; Stewart). These master narratives can be described as books about groups who have been traditionally privileged, such as those with white, male, cisgender, Christian, able-bodied, straight, English-speaking identities. These master narratives privilege identities and experiences by “naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (Solórzano and Yosso 28). In a Korean kindergarten class, Kim et al. found that students’ lack of interactions with African or African American children created a context where “children revealed biased attitudes towards Africans/African Americans, particularly Africans” (408). As researchers studied the use of multicultural literature, specifically focused on African and African American representation, parents recognized student growth in cultural and literacy skills and researchers observed children addressing misconceptions and altering biased attitudes.

This call for multicultural book collections has been an influential concept for librarians. There is an abundance of literature examining the extent to which book collections reflect a diversity of identities and experiences, and how libraries and librarians can better meet this expectation (Cahill et al.; Salem; Suzuki et al.; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor; Zilonis & Swerling). For instance, Cahill et al. suggest that librarians “actively promote diverse materials in the programs they offer, the lists of books they recommend, and the promotional displays they create” (280). Hughes-Hassell et al. emphasize the need for library book collections to reflect diversity because the “message of white superiority must be challenged” (“Through Their Eyes”



37). There are also many organizations and programs to enhance school librarians' ability to know about, use, and recommend multicultural literature, such as the National Education Association, Social Justice Books: A Teaching for Change Project, and We Need Diverse Books.

*Library Origins and Resistance to Change*

While current efforts to ban books are significant, these issues are part of a problematic history of libraries. There is a plethora of literature that examines the prejudiced and inequitable origins of libraries (Gibson et al., "Libraries on the Frontlines" 755; Jennings and Kinzer; Mehra and Gray 196; Prescott et al. 295). Children's librarianship originated with goals to assist children with reading, but to also guide them in "their assimilation to white supremacist 'norms'" (Lugo Vázquez 177). This oppressive foundation is reflected in current library collections, programming, systems, staff and physical spaces (Solórzano and Yosso 26; Kumasi et al. 114). This includes being a place of "racialized knowledge production" (Hudson 23), shelving books with master or dominant narratives that portray historically marginalized individuals and groups in negative, inauthentic, and stereotypical ways (Hughes-Hassell, "Multicultural Young Adult Literature" 216), and using exclusionary and derogatory subject headings such as "illegal alien" (Morales & Williams 77).

Scholars have examined library neutrality and diversity initiatives as factors that can ensure the maintenance of the status quo in library systems (Gibson et al., "Libraries on the Frontlines" 754; Hudson 19; Scott and Saunders 155). Library neutrality is the idea that librarians should avoid taking sides and that as an institution, librarians have an obligation to resist doing so. Neutrality is an effective tool for preventing needed change in the way library systems, programs, staffing, administration, community engagement, and more, have operated. This persistence of library neutrality has impacted the education of librarians (Mehra 461) and

resulted in inaction (Gibson et al., “Struggling to Breathe” 76; Solórzano & Yosso 26-27). While multicultural library collections are a component of more liberatory libraries, diverse books are not the only factor in equitable libraries. Scholars have advocated moving beyond a narrow focus on diverse books by also working toward rectifying inequitable library systems through deliberate action (Gibson et al., “Libraries on the Frontlines” 753; Hudson 3).

### *Contemporary Book Bans*

National book banning data reveals that the 2021-2022 school year had “[m]ore books banned. More districts. More states. More students losing access to literature” (Friedman and Johnson). The subject matter of banned content has two most prevalent subjects, LGBTQIA+ themes, protagonists, or prominent secondary characters (41% of banned titles) and protagonists or prominent secondary characters of color (40% of banned titles) (Friedman and Johnson). Data shows that the majority of books being targeted “feature LGBTQIA+ characters or characters of color, and/or cover race and racism in American history, LGBTQIA+ identities, or sex education” (Friedman and Johnson). While these trends reflect increases in book banning, a 2022 report by EveryLibrary Institute found that 75% of Americans oppose book banning and only 8% of voters believe “there are many that are inappropriate and should be banned” (*Voter Perceptions*). The work of librarians and researchers continue to shed light on this context where most voters oppose book banning yet there is an increase in challenges and bans. Working with EveryLibrary Institute, Dr. Tasslyn Magnusson has gathered data about book challenges, including the documentation of “Groups Formed to Ban Books” (“Book Censorship Database”). Kelly Jensen evaluates the “book rating systems created by groups like Moms for Liberty, Utah Parents United, and others” (“The Biased Online Book Ratings”) that have become a tool for school districts and the school boards making policy and decisions regarding book challenges

(Jensen, “How Moms for Liberty’s”). In Texas, Patriot Mobile is a group that “poured \$500,000 into a PAC to support candidates in [several] school districts, where the races included debates about critical race theory and what books are on library shelves” (Church). An executive director of this PAC explained the goal is to “install school board members who will oppose teaching ‘LGBTQ ideologies,’ fight to remove ‘pornographic books,’ and stand against anti-racism initiatives” (Hixenbaugh).

In addition to these groups, in districts across Texas, policies, actions, and words illustrate the effort to silence stories and establish who belongs, and does not belong, in school libraries. The state led the nation in book bans from July 2021 to June 2022 with 801 bans (Friedman and Johnson), and there are many stories that bring these numbers to life. This includes content guidelines that banned books with any “discussion or depiction of gender fluidity” (“EFB—Instructional Resources”) and a superintendent telling librarians there are only two genders and the books to eliminate are those about “transgender, LGBTQ and the sex—sexuality” (Schwartz and Hixenbaugh). District board policies have prohibited materials or concepts that portray “slavery and racism [as] anything other than deviations from, betrayals of, or failures to live up to the authentic founding principles of the United States, which include liberty and equality” and disallowed *The 1619 Project* as an instructional material (“EMB—Miscellaneous Instructional Policies”).

## **Discussion**

CRT offers a lens to analyze issues in libraries, including book banning. I will discuss tenets of whiteness as property and counter-storytelling through the analysis of the public forums at one north Texas district’s board meetings from August 2022 to January 2023.

Directed content analysis served as a guide to “validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework” (Hsieh and Shannon 1281). In response to the research questions, I utilized a CRT lens, specifically counter-storytelling and whiteness as property, to discern ways that words, phrases, and arguments promoted an exclusionary library ideology. I opted to follow the directed content analysis strategy that utilizes predetermined sorting categories. Considering the data sources, research questions, and CRT lens, the categories were speakers supportive of book banning ( $n = 36$ ), supportive of book choice ( $n = 25$ ), or irrelevant to the study ( $n = 8$ ).

Each meeting had three public forum opportunities, and I attended and heard these public forums at eight out of nine meetings during this time period. To begin analysis in relation to my research questions, I watched all nine school board meetings through the publicly available video recordings on the district website. I transcribed all 69 public forum speeches and identified emerging themes that represented a speaker’s beliefs in relation to book banning and book choice. This process of watching, re-watching, and transcribing each speech provided a way to holistically identify arguments, patterns, and quotes that represent a more intimate look at the arguments around book banning in this district (see Appendix).

Speakers supportive of book banning emphasized phrases such as “obscene content,” “remove unacceptable books,” and “protect innocent children.” These speakers contributed to a narrative that the district’s library shelves are inundated with pornography. Pornography, pornographic, or porn was said 33 times in these 36 speeches. Penal Code was said 26 times. The language used conveys the idea there are books on the district’s shelves that can physically hurt children, with one speaker asking the board “are you predatory pedophiles? Are you grooming children to be able to take advantage of them?” The narratives constructed by these speakers were consistent, insisting there are pornographic and unsafe books that violate the Penal Code

across the district's libraries. There were also requests for law enforcement on book review committees, fears of students being "indoctrinated slowly and methodically by people who have an agenda," and claims that "I've had my head in the sand and had no idea that this was truly going on." Books were described as "tools in the hands of predators" that "embolden many of them." Emphasizing the impact of books being accessible, a speaker closed his speech referring to board elections and said "there's going to be a reckoning... that's not a threat. That's a promise."

The 25 speakers in support of book choice were categorized by identifying language like "measured approach to book challenges," "I continue to support all of our librarians and what they do," and "censorship of books... should be a tool of very last resort." These speakers described the reading of excerpts of challenged books at board meetings as "cherry picking of lascivious passages... for shock value." Another speaker, reflecting on the statements of those who supported restricting access to books, stated that "no matter how much moral panicking and hiding behind ideas about obscenity that we go through" in the end, book challengers are targeting certain stories to be removed. And another explained that "[Students] need adults with understanding hearts. Please stop throwing verbal grenades. The world is violent enough without your contributions."

### *Whiteness as Property*

CRT can further illuminate these speeches, helping to identify elements of power and oppression. A key aspect of looking at book banning efforts at these board meetings is what Snow and Dunbar describe as "the point where property and privilege intersect with power" (656). The books and content in the library space constitute property. Privilege is represented by speakers' beliefs that they have the right to tell fellow community members what they can

access. Ultimately, what is yet to be seen, is how much power is given to these individuals. They do already exhibit some power in the way they have commandeered board meetings and continue to stoke a moral panic. Seeing books and the library space itself as property, the speakers directly communicated their expectations when they said, “get back to the basics and get rid of all the other nonsense” such as “SEL, CRT, DEI, LGBTQ, low education standards, and yes, pornography in libraries.” There is a need to “clean up the literature” in schools because the “education system has gradually lowered the standards to meet the lowest of the low.” In their worldview, only some people deserve the privilege of determining these standards.

These speakers’ fears and demands to the board are aptly explained through Harris’ description of whiteness as property: “In ways so embedded that it is rarely apparent, the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset that whites sought to protect” (1713). Speakers expressed fear of their power to influence policy being taken away and their expectations for what the district should be doing. This embodies Harris’ assertion that “whiteness [is] an ‘object’ over which continued control was—and is—expected” (1730). There were repeated requests to “expedite” the process, as the presence of these books was likened to a fire in the schools. From their perspective, it was unacceptable that the district would not change policies to handle book challenges or book collections. Whiteness as property can help examine how “the law recognized and protected expectations grounded in white privilege... these expectations became tantamount to property that could not permissibly be intruded upon without consent” (Harris 1731).

When contrasted with speakers who support book choice, it becomes even clearer how to recognize and resist whiteness as property in this context. Speakers expressed “it’s really dangerous to suggest that there are social norms or customs that should be the standard by which

all other students and children are taught or given access to information” and “I don’t want to take that information away from some other child that might benefit from that at the end of the day, you know, like, who am I to choose? So I just, I ask everyone to just be courteous of others’ choices.”

It appears that speakers who support book bans believe that if they do not like a book or think their child should not have a book, they have the right to say that no child should have access to that book. Viewed through the tenet of whiteness as property, whiteness has become “usable property” by “[taking] advantage of the privileges accorded white people simply by virtue of their whiteness” (Harris 1734).

The work of Kumasi et al. (114, 117) and Snow and Dunbar (652) analyze how whiteness as property can operate within libraries to determine what certain people determine is a normal, acceptable way of being and how information sources within the library must reflect that. If the power to determine that norm is threatened, those operating under whiteness as property can exhibit fear in relation to a presumed loss of power to determine how and why libraries operate. In the case of book challenges and book choice, these individuals argue for a need to return to the status quo, which would promote their ability to determine what is appropriate for libraries and what is not.

### *Counter-storytelling*

I know that when I was a kid I only got to see myself in the past. I never got to see myself in the present day. I only got to learn about some history that happened pre-colonization. I didn’t get to see what my family structure looked like. I didn’t get to see what I looked like. And when I finally did get to see that, it really made my life a better place. It made me feel hope that there is a future for me. When we hear all of these people talking about

how, no, it must be up to these criteria. Most of those people have never lived a lifestyle that has not been represented. They've never had multiple parents. They've never had people who don't have the same faith as everyone else.

I'm an autistic transwoman, and I just wanted to say that I've noticed in my community, there's a lot of problems with the self-hatred that comes only from growing up in a world that hates you. And these books can show these children that they're loved and that they're valued and that they mean something. And that God loves them. And that they have value and I really think it can build the foundation for a healthy queer adult if they have this understanding that they have value. And to see themselves in the world as something other than a monster is genuinely helpful.

These two statements were voiced during public speeches at board meetings. While these individuals were speaking to the importance of literature as counter-stories for those that are marginalized and underrepresented (Hughes-Hassell, "Multicultural Young Adult Literature" 215), they also represented narratives that countered the dominant themes in the speakers who supported book challenges. Delgado describes those "whose marginality defined the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective—whose consciousness—has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized" (2412), and these voices and perspectives can guide understanding when examining book banning efforts.

Speakers in support of book challenges focused mostly on silencing and devaluing the experiences of trans and gay people. While speakers often asserted they were not targeting anyone's identity, a speaker in support of book choice challenged this refrain by describing a



nearby district where book banners claimed “their obscenity concerns were not a way to target LGBT children but [that district has] now banned all books with transgender characters from all level of their school library.” The following excerpts from speakers supporting book challenges suggest an intentional effort to denigrate and insult queer community members:

- “My preferred pronouns are top and gun. I’m a member of the LGifJ Community. I’m also a member of the African American minority community.” (This person is not Black.);
- Comparison of a trans man to the speaker wanting to be a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle when he was in 5th grade, but he grew out of it “much to my wife’s appreciation.”;
- “The last thing [kids] need to be is confused about who they are.”;
- A mother described a book that included a story of a transgender boy, that it promoted this to her daughter and was offended by the use of words: “transgender men, chest binders, gay, dressed in drag,” among others;
- Common sense isn’t common anymore, people don’t know “which bathroom to use by whom.”

Regardless of the repeated insistence that “this really has nothing to do with the LGBT community,” the examples above illustrate the speakers’ desires to silence the lived experiences of gay and trans individuals and “provide [them] with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado 2412).

It is a compelling element of this discussion that the words of speakers at the start of this section, both of whom are queer individuals, are a counter-story themselves. These individuals are explaining how important and transformative the presence of books that reflect their own identity and experiences are. The power of their words is, as Hughes-Hassell describes, to

“[give] voice to teens whose voices have gone unheard” as well as to “[challenge] readers whose lives have been shaped by race and privilege” (“Multicultural Young Adult Literature” 215).

Yet, as apparent from the book challenge supporters’ speeches, there is a desire to protect the stories and norms of the ingroup (Delgado 2412) and resist attempts to decenter these norms.

## **Implications**

While I have examined individuals speaking at board meetings, the significance of these events extends into school libraries and pose a challenge to the profession. The speakers, both in support of book challenges and support of book choice, referred routinely to the library, librarians, and educators in schools. For example, librarians must not “go against the wishes of parents and against decency for our children. No indoctrination,” “teachers and librarians should not be demonized,” and librarians “use buzzwords like diversity, equity and inclusion to justify the grooming of minors with inappropriate and sexually explicit material.” With the exception of two books that were mistakenly said to be in the district and were not, all other books discussed at the board meetings were in the school district, mostly within school libraries. Speakers referred to the policies and regulations teachers and librarians abide by daily, saying “teachers are blatantly disregarding these policies or they’re unaware of the policy,” “what are the consequences to these teachers who break these rules? What kind of policies can be implemented?”, and “librarians defend the book selection process and I have looked at the [district] book selection policy.” As Snow and Dunbar point out, a CRT lens cannot be used by “focusing solely on the intent and opinions of individuals... instead, outcomes must be the primary focus when interrogating systems, standards, and policies” (648). I believe these individual narratives inform and influence library ideology. All libraries and librarians make

decisions about either exerting the “right to exclude others” (Harris 1731) or disrupting systems that benefit and value the knowledge, experience, and even existence of the privileged. By using whiteness as property and counter-storytelling to analyze public forums, there is a clear ideology of exclusion and oppression by those challenging and banning books. There is an opportunity, and a necessity, to choose otherwise.

Librarians, and the institutions within which they operate, must choose an inclusionary and liberatory library ideology. Librarians cannot simply react to these moral panics; they must be grounded in an inclusive and liberatory ideology that does not yield to exclusionary and oppressive worldviews that have a long history in the field. This ideological commitment can be used to evaluate each part of the library system to identify where whiteness as property has dictated whose experiences are normalized. It can inform the cultivation of multicultural book collections that center counter-stories and confronts under-represented or misrepresented stories of historically marginalized groups. It can inform a critical assessment of the library space and question whose languages hang in the aisles. Informed by CRT tenets and the promotion of a liberatory library ideology, librarians could choose to evaluate their book collections, programming, and language in the library (see table 1). For school librarians, CRT can be the lens to identify inequities and a tool for change.

**Table 1**

Opportunities for Implementing a Liberatory Library Ideology

When Evaluating This Part of Your Library, Consider These Questions:		
Books	Programming	Language and Word Choice
<p><b>Identify:</b> Who is the author? What is the topic, identity, and experience?</p>	<p>What purpose can this program have that can be part of a liberatory ideology in the library? Consider: creating community, sharing and celebrating diverse ways of being, recognizing and disrupting problems in our community.</p>	<p>Do the words I am using assume a norm or certain way to be?</p>
<p><b>Analyze:</b> Is this book an authentic, representative account? If the identity, experience, or story is different from my own, who or what can help me understand the authenticity?</p>	<p>Does the program amplify, center, or highlight a culture, event, or topic that is considered the norm or dominant story?</p>	<p>What is the impact of my words?</p>
<p><b>Contextualize:</b> Do my current books about this topic come from a certain perspective? Do I already have the same perspective on my shelf? Do I not have any?</p>	<p>Considering other parts of my library, is this norm shown and discussed in other ways as an assumed common and accepted part of life?</p>	<p>Can I find different words to use?</p>
<p><b>Compare:</b> Is there a different book that can share this experience better? Consider: authenticity, representation, accuracy, quality?</p>	<p>Is there an opportunity to instead provide space for a program that could represent a counter-story?</p>	<p>What experts can help me better understand the meaning and context of these words and what the better or best choice is?</p>

## Appendix

### Board Meeting Speakers

<b>Date</b>	<b>Total Number of Speakers</b>	<b>Speakers Challenging Books</b>	<b>Excerpts from Speakers Challenging Books</b>	<b>Speakers Supporting Book Choice</b>	<b>Excerpts from Speakers Supporting Book Choice</b>
<b>Aug. 9, 2022</b>	15	8	Obscene content which violated the Texas Penal Code; harmful, harmful materials; students at risk; excited to see the 22 books removed	7	Broad selection of what children have available to them; censorship of books... should be a tool of very last resort
<b>Aug. 23, 2022</b>	9	3	Inappropriate material available to minors; Here for our children and their protection, right?	5	Navigating [book] policy in a way that makes members of our community feel welcome, embraced and included, and feel safe
<b>Sept. 13, 2022</b>	8	5	Remove unacceptable books; No indoctrination please	3	It takes all kinds of books to show our kids that they are represented
<b>Sept. 27, 2022</b>	8	6	Forbidden under the Penal Code; Pornography harms children	1	I continue to support all of our librarians and what they do
<b>Oct. 11, 2022</b>	10	5	Any child could go in and have access to this; Please remove the porn	4	Horrified at attempts to ban books

<b>Nov. 1, 2022</b>	7	3	Illegal material available to minors; be sure children are protected	2	Finding comfort in other's experiences valuable
<b>Nov. 15, 2022</b>	5	3	Illegal and inappropriate child pornography removed; School safeguard our children from pornography	2	Measured approach to book challenges
<b>Dec. 13, 2022</b>	5	2	Protect innocent children; Get back to basics	1	Affirm identity as well as encourage an appreciation of differences
<b>Jan. 10, 2023</b>	2	1	Librarians associations have sanctioned for these illegal books to be kept in school library shelves	0	
<b>Totals:</b>	69		36		25

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