

RISS Review: Feminist Search Tool*

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Why are the authors of the books I read so white, so
male, so eurocentric?

- [Feminist Search Tool](#) - a conversation piece

[Search](#) *

Feminist Search Tool* was designed by Read-In, Hackers & Designers, and the Utrecht University Library. It is a free resource that seeks to uncover those biases that users bring to searches but also

interprets established MARC fields in new ways, which uncover the biases that exist within systems of organization. They seek to answer the question, “Why are the authors of the books I read so white, so male, so eurocentric?” The audience for this tool is librarians, or at the very least, researchers who have a fairly robust understanding of library organizational systems.

To use the tool, users create a query for either keyword, author, or book title and hits search. A keyword search of “art and politics” yields 1,939,775 records. The interface is streamlined and simple. There is no advanced search because discovery is not really the point of this tool. Design-wise, the site is sparing, modern, and bold, using simple black text on a white background in a large, easy to read font. When there are explanations about the site, such as what is described in the next paragraph, the pop-up is a bright color with black text overlaid.

The search results look quite different than users will be used to, which is the point of the project. For instance, the first result is “Search question related to Predominant Language.” At this point in the search process, the user may become confused. The number of records in various languages resulting from that keyword search appear--908 items in GER for example. Once the user clicks on “Predominant Language,” an explanation is provided on the left side of the screen. The explanation notes that “Predominant Language” plays off of the MARC 21 tag 008, referring to the language of the cataloged material. The number of search results for “Predominant Language” is intended to guide the user to consider the overwhelming number of English results, which illustrates a “linguistic monoculture.” The creators interpret a number of other MARC fields, offering users the chance to see how many results come up according to “Multiple languages,” “Translated Work,” and “Place of Publication,” among many others.

art and politics

Search *

Results: **1939775** records found for: art and politics

Search question related to Predominant language

170294 in ENG

2741 in UND

908 in GER

435 in FRE

...

Search question related to Predominant language ×

Language of publication refers to the predominant language of a publication*. It is an interesting filter to consider in the light of our question: *Why are the authors of the books I read so white, so male, so Eurocentric?*, because it shows how difficult it is to make conclusions about race and nationality of the author on the basis of the language of an item. Despite those shortcomings, this filter clearly reflects that English remains the dominant language of global scholarly publishing, with 81.52% of the items of this data set being published in English. This highlights a linguistic monoculture, that scholars such as Gloria E. Anzaldúa have long tried to criticize and attempted to intervene in. Additionally, the fact that English, Dutch, French, Italian and German are the five most frequent languages of publication is - despite of the occurrence of some of these languages in different geographical contexts - still very telling for how our Western knowledge economy functions.

art and politics

Search *

5 records found for: art and politics

Search question related to Predominant language

170294 in ENG

2741 in UND

908 in GER

435 in FRE

Search question related to Multiple languages

Though the efforts and concepts for this search tool are fantastic and rooted in feminist and anti-racist philosophies, the end result is pretty confusing and cumbersome. It seems that a primary function of this site would be the “conversation piece,” where users could discuss their findings in the context of the question the site posits, “Why are the authors of the books I read so white, so male, so eurocentric?” but unfortunately, at least in the few days this reviewer revisited the tool to write this review, the link to the conversation area was not functioning.

The tool itself is easy to navigate, but the results would benefit from more explanation. There is a useful description of the tool on the homepage if one chooses to click on “Feminist Search

Tool” or the “Menu” at the top, but it is not obvious that you should click on it. The creators make plain on the homepage of the resource that users should not use this as a replacement for any catalog but rather a supplement to the one at the Utrecht University Library, however, they don’t really explain what the results users can expect from the search tool. Rather, users will eventually come to understand that they are looking at something analytical and re-interpretative rather useful for a specific query. For this reason, this resource is certainly meant for a librarian and faculty audience rather than the academic community at large.