Behind Closed Gates:
The Barriers to Self-Expression and Publication for Australian Young Adult Authors of
OwnVoices Fiction

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Abstract: This paper based on an empirical study of Australian authors argues that, despite the OwnVoices movement gathering momentum in Australia, there are still barriers and limitations for authors from marginalised communities within the Australian publishing industry, This is due to power imbalances in publishing spaces which silence marginalised writers, limiting the availability of their books to teenage readers.

Key words: Diversity, OwnVoices, Young Adult Fiction, Australian Fiction, Publishing

Introduction

Bringing together the increased global diversity advocacy in youth literature spaces, and the publishing experiences of Australian authors, the research discussed in this paper provides insight into the Australian publishing industry from the perspective of its marginalised authors. Unlike in the US, prominent Australian authors of OwnVoices YA Fiction rarely discuss their publishing journey in relation to their marginalised identity, even when participating in public discussions about diversifying literature. These discussions therefore rarely mention barriers they may have faced due to their novel's OwnVoices status. In developing our research, we questioned if their public identification with a marginalised community impacted their publishing journeys. Through insights from our interviewed authors, methods for better supporting future authors of OwnVoices Fiction can be discovered, and a greater understanding of how to address inequities in local and global publishing industries can be achieved.

For this study, conducted in 2016, we interviewed seven Australian authors of OwnVoices YA Fiction who self-identified as belonging to traditionally marginalised communities, including multiple cultural, LGBT+, and disabled communities. Interview data

was analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis to understand how publicly identifying as a member of a marginalised community impacted on the authors' publishing experiences and audience reception. Findings show that barriers to publishing still remain for authors from marginalised communities, despite and increasing audience and need for them, for the publishing industry still has a long-ingrained systemic prejudice against their marketability, despite several successful YA books by diverse authors.

Representation of marginalised communities in fiction is important in Australia for two reasons. First, as a colonised country, primacy should always be given to the voices, perspectives and narratives of Indigenous Australian authors. Second, Australia has an increasingly diverse population as indicated by the 2016 Census. Migrants from Asian countries now outnumber migrants from Europe, and more than one-fifth of Australians speak a language other than English at home (*Snapshot of Australia, 2016*). Australian Census data is less reliable in the areas of sexuality, gender identity and disability; as some teenagers may not disclose their sexuality or gender identities, and the Census uses a narrow definition of disability (*Snapshot of Australia, 2016*). Nonetheless, these teenagers exist, and it is important that books published in Australia reflect the diversity of our population to benefit all teenagers.

Diversity and Australian Publishing

The foundations for the modern diversity advocacy movements in Children's and Young Adult (henceforth YA) Fiction were laid in 1965, with the publication of Larrick's landmark article, 'The All-White World of Children's Books'. Just under 50 years later, 2014 saw this advocacy reach the mainstream with the creation of the grassroots organisation *We Need Diverse Books* (henceforth WNDB). WNDB (2018) defines diversity as 'including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities*, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities', and adopt the social model of disability, which

understands 'disability as created by barriers in the social environment, due to lack of equal access, stereotyping, and other forms of marginalisation'. This article uses this definition of diversity.

Enabled and mobilised on social media, WNDB have nurtured public interest in supporting inclusive fiction for young people among readers, booksellers, librarians, and book reviewers. Specialist diversity publisher Lee & Low Books in America directly attributed the 4% increase of Children's and YA books with 'multicultural content' in 2015, as indicated by data from the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), to WNDB's influence (*The Diversity Gap*). Support for inclusive fiction and marginalised authors increased further when YA author Corinne Duyvis coined the label 'OwnVoices' on 6 September 2015, to refer to literature written by *and* about people from the same marginalised community (Duyvis). This is the definition of OwnVoices that we use in this study.

The Australian publishing industry is much smaller than in the US, and local releases are often overshadowed by titles from overseas markets. These books have considerable influence on the Australian publishing industry. In 2015, the *Australian Library and Information Association* (ALIA) released a study of the amalgamated records of books borrowed from Australian libraries in 2014. It revealed that only two YA novels by Australian authors made it into the top-ten most-borrowed list (*Australia's Favourite*, 2015), with the remainder written by overseas authors. This discovery provoked frustration from the local YA Fiction author community when it was reported in *The Age* newspaper (2015). As the highest average earnings of the top 25% of YA authors is only $14,000 AUD a year which is approximately $10638 USD (Zwar, Throsby, & Longden 4), libraries are a key source of support, exposure, and income through public lending rights (PLR), paid to authors based on how often their book is borrowed (*Australian Lending Right Schemes*).

Authors and readers rallied to promote Australian YA Fiction using the hashtag #loveozya (Gale; Marney), and in 2016, the inaugural LoveOzYA Committee was established to support what they named 'our national youth literature' (2018). However, in bringing Australian YA Fiction to the foreground, it became apparent that the existing books did not reflect the diversity of Australia's youth, either in their narratives, or its authors. OwnVoices Fiction was represented least of all.

The lower rates of publication of books by and/or about marginalised communities affect representations of Indigenous Australians and People of Colour[1] (henceforth POC) (*We Need Diverse Books Because*; Mills 2015), queer communities (*We Read To Know*), and disabled communities (*Beyond Ableism*), and limits the availability of these stories to teenage readers. As a result, the Australian publishing industry has been characterised as having a 'privilege problem', defined as 'a set of structures and attitudes that consistently privilege one set of voices over another' (*Privilege and Literature*). As indicated by the local YA Fiction market's homogeneity, these voices, uplifted at the expense of all others, are white, heterosexual, non-disabled, and cisgender. Such prejudices can also restrict marginalised authors' freedom when promoting their books, with authors of queer YA Fiction being particularly affected by this (*Don't Talk About The Gay Character*).

OwnVoices YA Fiction therefore faces two barriers to publication. The first is limited access to the industry for authors from marginalised communities, and the second is the perception among some publishers that such stories are less marketable than their non-marginalised counterparts. This bias is a direct result of the industry's 'privilege problem', and the individuals working within Australian publishing houses 'who sustain, reinforce, and benefit from the[ese] structures' (*Privilege and Literature*). In doing so, they allow

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[1] Australia has unique terms and perceptions of cultural identities based on the country's history. The international term "People of Colour" is not directly transferrable to Australia's context; however, it is used here in the context of an international journal for clarity, simplicity, and to aggregate the data for analysis.

contemporary Australian YA Fiction to perpetuate 'socially accepted hegemonic norms' relating to identity (Brule 71), and position marginalised Australian young people as abnormal – and their existence as unnatural (Luke 112).

Methodology

We conducted a series of qualitative interviews in 2016 with Australian authors who publicly identified as members of marginalised communities, and had written at least one OwnVoices novel. To identify eligible participants, we required a consolidated source with all relevant information about these authors and their books. In America, one example is the CCBC, founded by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which has tracked the presence of several marginalised communities in American Children's and YA Fiction since 1963 (CCBC). Their records catalogue the content of books and the demographic of authors with regard to race and ethnicity, and more recently, religion, gender, and sexuality (Schliesman).

As Australia does not have an equivalent to the CCBC, we compiled an annotated list of all Australian YA Fiction authors who had published at least one novel that can be considered an OwnVoices work as of October 2016. This annotated list was compiled through traditional methods, including searching the *AustLit Database* for author details, and less traditional methods involving following the trail of information from publicity activities in print media and large-scale public events and promotional materials made available by publishers. Non-official sites of information, such as social media, were excluded from this data collection process as we were solely interested in authors who publicly identified themselves as marginalised in *professional* contexts. Professional and personal boundaries are frequently blurred on social media, and our university considers all social media research to be a high-risk category. Hence, this list cannot be published due to ethical and privacy considerations.

At its initial completion, the annotated list contained 36 authors, of whom around 20 are still currently writing. Following university ethics approval, seven authors were invited to participate in the research – approximately one third of eligible authors. All marginalised communities of Indigenous Australians, POC, queer people and disabled people were represented in this sample, with some authors belonging to multiple communities.

The primary method of data collection was 45-minute interviews with these authors, and the guiding interview questions have been published (*Towards Diversity*). Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the written consent of the participants, with permission to publish from the research. Findings were analysed with the 'socially committed [form of] research' (Lin 214) of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which emphasised the parts of authors' experiences where power was contested as discussed below, as well as instances of 'power abuse and the injustice and inequality that result[s] from it' (van Dijik 252). CDA was well-suited to this research, due to its use in examining teenage reader responses to constructions of identity in Australian YA Fiction (Bean and Moni), and our interviewees' status as publicly self-identified members of societally marginalised communities.

Of the seven authors, two submitted written responses, while five were spoken interviews conducted either face-to-face or via telephone depending on geographical location. Authors were based in multiple states around Australia, which offered diverse experiences resulting from their exposure to different writing communities and audiences. Authors who participated via written responses voluntarily provided us with supplementary materials, which provided further insights. This included excerpts from letters they had received from readers, and other writing they had published about their journey that they felt was relevant to our research interests. From this, we gathered rich qualitative data that provided significant insight into how Australian authors of OwnVoices YA Fiction 'represent the same area of the world from different perspectives or positions' (Fairclough 26).

The participants in this study are Australian authors of OwnVoices YA Fiction with varying levels of prominence in the literary landscape. For ethical reasons, including protecting the privacy of the interviewed authors and ensuring that they do not suffer direct or indirect consequences as a result of participating in this research, all findings have been anonymised, de-identified, and assigned a pseudonym unique to this paper. One of the seven authors requested to not be quoted directly, and their perspectives are discussed in the aggregate with the other six authors. We refer to participant authors' identities throughout this article using broad labels: Indigenous Australians, POC, queer people and disabled people. While we recognise that the diversity of identities within these communities should ordinarily be recognised, these labels are warranted for the purpose of maintaining author confidentiality and safety.

Barriers to Self-Expression and Access to Publication

Participant authors revealed experiences of wide-spread prejudice, which they attributed to their personal identities and the inclusion of these identities in their books. This prejudice impacted their creative self-expression, access to publication, and recognition from related stakeholders. The point at which resistance was faced varied among authors; from during the publishing process to during their promotional activities with Australian arts organisations. In each case, these barriers manifested as a result of how the publishing industry, or these wider audiences, perceived the authors and their identities.

Only one of the seven authors interviewed felt they had not experienced prejudice from within the Australian publishing industry or literary adjacent spaces. Overall, these author accounts are symptomatic of a deep-seated prejudice within the Australian publishing industry and related areas against marginalised communities, resulting in exclusion, censorship, and silencing of authors, and these stories subsequently being underprovided to teenage readers.

Publishing Industry Barriers

Author 1 strongly believed that 'gatekeepers' were the source of the majority of barriers for marginalised authors, stating that the current low representation of marginalised creators on Australia's publishing landscape 'means [gatekeepers are] not looking for diverse voices, [because] obviously diverse voices are out there'. Despite having published an adult book with a major Australian publisher, and having a first-look deal for their next book, the publisher declined the author's first YA book set in the country of Author 1's birth. Their response, 'oh we really like the book, it's really well written, we enjoyed reading it, but there's no market for um genre fiction *from that part of the world*' (Emphasis original), was repeated by all other publishers they approached.

Author 1 said:

Everyone wants […] writers [from my birthplace] to be the next [famous Adult Literary Fiction writer], but no-one wants the next Neil Gaiman or, you know the next, um, George R. R. Martin to come from that part of the world.

Author 1 said that the profiles of publishers 'all say "looking for diverse voices" and then you look at everything that they've published – all white guys'. After a series of rejections, their YA novel was eventually released through a small publisher to positive audience responses.

Author 1's experiences convinced them that 'People of Colour are being marginalised … in the literary world, as authors,' which they considered 'a shame because there are gatekeepers and I think the gatekeepers are largely keeping the gates closed'. Their experiences demonstrate how an industry like Australia's that is 'used to reading only certain types of books' by marginalised authors will make choices that maintain the literary status

quo and resist potential change. These views were strongly supported by Author 2, who requested not to be quoted.

Author 3 experienced prejudice prior to the publication of their OwnVoices novel from a fellow author. After describing the premise of their novel, which drew upon their experiences of being a POC, an unnamed white author responded by 'making a face' that Author 3 interpreted as unkind and dismissive: 'like [they were thinking], "another ethnic storybook."' This incident occurred years before their interview for this study, but was hurtful enough to be remembered in detail. Such attitudes create a hostile environment for Authors of Colour, particularly when coming from a more established peer in their field. In addition to impacting an author's mental health, the permeation of these attitudes throughout author communities can potentially create barriers to future authors and deny writers a supportive and safe writing community.

Author 4 believed the lack of 'opportunity' for authors from their cultural community to be published via traditional means impacted their representation on the Australian literary landscape. Their second novel, an OwnVoices novel, was turned down by five major Australian publishers, and ultimately published through a smaller publisher. However, they noted that smaller publishers such as this one 'didn't have a lot of resources' compared to major publishers, to promote their books and gain an audience. Further, Author 4 felt their publication through a publishing house that specialised in supporting their community could influence potential readers to think their books '[were] only relevant for [similarly marginalised] readers,' even though they saw their work as having a 'broader relevance' for all teenagers.

Author 4 credited much of the presence of authors from their community on the Australian literary landscape to writing competitions that operated in partnership with publishers, which were specifically open to marginalised writers and provided opportunities

for publication. Additionally, Author 4 felt they were 'seeing a bit of a shift' within the industry, due to recently being approached for a writing project by one of the five major publishers who originally turned down their OwnVoices novel. While they had encountered barriers to getting their YA Fiction published, they hoped this meant the industry was beginning to change.

Author 5 described experiencing 'layers of […] censorship' applied to a queer character in their OwnVoices YA novel during the editing process. Significant changes were made to the character's narrative arc, which imposed heteronormative ideals onto the character's plotline and minimised details that Author 5 felt were true to the specific experience of being a queer teenager they had sought to represent, out of the myriad of queer teenage experiences that exist. As a result, Author 5 thought the book 'would never be as good as it could have been'. Although describing it as a process of 'negotiation', Author 5 believed these 'compromises' they had to make were motivated by their publisher's desire to get the book 'into Catholic schools'. Additionally, Author 5 believed the publisher's concerns about the particular realistic queer experience they sought to depict being 'too adult' for a teenage character arose *because* of the queer identity, as the same narrative elements are frequently published in Australian YA novels with heterosexual protagonists.

Such an assertion automatically implies that the author, too, is somehow 'too adult', or 'inappropriate" to be around young people; potentially compounding the psychological burden of asking them to deliberately erase aspects of their identity from their book. Author 5 described the presence of the queer character within the novel as something 'we [the author and publishers] had to, really keep it hidden' during the promotional stages for the novel, to go undetected by gatekeepers who might otherwise have restricted access to the book.

For a later novel, Author 5 consciously wrote a queer character 'front and centre', and promised themselves that 'if they have any problems with any of the [queer] stuff then I'm

going to fight tooth and nail to keep it exactly as I want it'. Unlike their previous novel, they 'didn't hide [the queer character] at all' during the writing process. Despite being prepared to 'fight' to protect their novel, the publishers didn't challenge the queer character's narrative. Author 5 said the publishers 'did not censor a single thing', and hoped this indicated some progress in attitudes towards queer people in the Australian publishing industry. Yet for all of Author 5's determination, their past experiences reveal how little power authors have when faced with publisher demands. It must be recognised that Author 5 may not have achieved their goal if they had encountered this censorship again.

Audience and Publishing Industry-Adjacent Barriers

Author 3 experienced opposition to their creative freedom from adjacent spaces. One recent instance impacted them so profoundly that they 'decided I didn't wanna write YA anymore'. Author 3 recounted that 'someone from a very important arts organisation posed a question', during a public event, asking why Author 3's non-OwnVoices novel had '"no diverse characters"', and paraphrased the question as '"why did you… choose to… ignore," you know…you know, "who you are," or something…'. Author 3 described their reaction as:

> I got really upset and um I did tell my publisher she was gonna get nothing from me when she asked, you know, "what's—what do you—what do you have next?" And um, I'm actually still not over it.

Author 3 highlighted that 'this particular organisation didn't care when [they] wrote about a [character who shared their identity]', yet were comfortable criticising Author 3's novel because it was not one of the 'token stories' they expected. Author 3 emphasised their belief that Authors of Colour are often expected to fulfil specific criteria that white authors are not bound to, which restricts their creative freedom and self-expression. They stated that this double-standard:

compromises voices who might be ethnically diverse but don't wanna write about ethnically diverse things because they have other ideas. That [attitude] just tells them that you're only good to write one thing, and the rest of your stories, *we don't really care about them cause a white person can write them* (Emphasis original).

At time of writing, Author 3 has not published a YA novel since this incident. As they expressed a strong desire to not write novels anymore during their interview, it is possible this prejudice has contributed to silencing Author 3.

Author 6 also recalled instances when their novel had been subject to tokenism, from 'both Anglo and [non-white] readers [from their community]', due to assumptions that their novel was comparable to the tokenistic novels produced by outsider authors. Some readers dismissed Author 6's OwnVoices novel because of this association with outsider narratives: 'as "just another migrant hard-done-by story, I've read those before"', or an 'issue book', as it discusses topics like 'underhanded racism, entitlement, the fact that we never address class in Australia when we talk about race, [and] private school unfairness'. Yet Author 6 stated that readers within and beyond their own community had also expressed that they were able to 'empathise with [the] main character', so booksellers shouldn't 'put it in the ethnic literature section' of bookstores.

Despite this criticism of stereotypical assumptions about their book's audience, Author 6 said they actively warned aspiring authors from their community against 'start[ing] off writing an "Issues" story', even if there are 'large issues' being discussed. Author 6 felt this led to 'clichéd narratives where the protagonist is perfect', because authors were unable to make marginalised characters 'too flawed, [or] people will lose sympathy for them!' revealing the precarious position that marginalised authors occupy in Australia's publishing industry. They believed their initial success in breaking into the publishing industry was because they were 'not writing misery memoirs or "cultural stories"'.

Author 4 identified two societal barriers with lasting impacts on aspiring authors in their community: 'low literacy levels' and a need for 'access' to 'Young Adult Fiction [that reflected their community] in the classroom'. Author 4 attributed the reported lower literacy levels within their community to the Australian school system and curriculum, which largely excludes the perspectives, ways of thinking, and knowledge of those from traditionally marginalised communities. This exclusion results in an educational environment that, for students from non-white communities, involves,

> stepping in[to] a classroom where you're learning someone else's language, someone else's history, predominately being provided books about cultures other than your own [and being taught] by a person that's not from your cultural group.

This observation reveals the systemic nature of the privileging of non-marginalised voices and perspectives, and how the Australian education system hinders the literary development of aspiring Australian writers from marginalised communities when they are young. This system privileges a small demographic of writers who are uplifted by these hegemonic norms, and primes them for artistic development, further education at university, and eventual publication. Yet the lack of access to fiction that reflected their community in school classrooms was believed to limit potential future writers from seeing authorship as an achievable goal.

Author 5 said stories from booksellers about the difficulty of selling queer YA novels were 'really scary'. When considering future writing projects with queer characters, the wondered, 'At what point am I sabotaging my own career?' They felt their identity had become linked to their books, and that they 'think [writing queer characters is] expected of [them]' now, but that even if they wrote heterosexual protagonists, 'there are people who hear' that they are a queer author, 'and will be like, "oh, I don't wanna read that"'.

Ultimately, Author 5 felt that 'a lot of the things that [they] find [themselves] writing' were queer characters 'who are *acceptable*. To straight people' (emphasis original), which is an approach they hadn't felt pressured to take for any other marginalised characters that they wrote. When it came to writing YA Fiction with queer characters overall, Author 5 felt that 'there are barriers, you know', and that 'a lot of it boils down to fear, their fear and our fear of their fear'.

The Exception

Author 7 was the only author who felt they had not encountered any challenges to publication, opposition or negative expectations due to the content of their OwnVoices YA novel. On the contrary, Author 7 commented that they 'feel like [representation of their specific disabled community] definitely … exists in a lot of works' of Australian YA Fiction. Author 7 described their journey to publication as 'pretty speedy' and had felt 'very supported' throughout the process, and affirmed they 'had a really good experience being published' – twice.

Author 7 recounted numerous positive encounters and relationships with other established YA authors that occurred prior to and after their novel's publication. They did not believe negative reviews of their book were related to their identity or depiction of someone from their marginalised community, and did not disclose any experiences of prejudice from industry-adjacent spaces.

Discussion: Exclusion, Censorship, and Expectations

This study uncovered signs of deeply ingrained prejudice within the Australian publishing industry and adjacent spaces. Six of the OwnVoices YA Fiction authors interviewed confronted barriers to their creative self-expression and access to publication, which they attributed to their public identification as a member of a marginalised community. Five of these authors experienced this prejudice from within the Australian publishing industry,

while three encountered it from adjacent parties with close ties to the industry. Three of the authors interviewed experienced prejudice from both areas. In particular, authors from non-white and non-heterosexual communities who wrote OwnVoices novels faced particularly strong barriers that resulted in restricted access to publication and censorship.

These findings provide significant insights into the sources of this identity-based oppression, and how it manifests in different literary spaces: as exclusion from the space, censorship within the space, or the creation of an unsafe, discriminatory space. The existence of such prejudice is symptomatic of the 'privilege problem' (*Privilege and Literature*) within the Australian publishing industry, and related professional communities, which allows this prejudice to be enacted. Together, these factors result in the silencing of the authentic voices of Authors of OwnVoices Australian YA Fiction.

Author 1, Author 2, Author 3, Author 4, and Author 5 encountered barriers to participation in the Australian publishing industry from within the industry, with literary agents and publishing staff both mentioned as perpetrators of this gatekeeping behaviour. These barriers manifested as exclusion to joining the industry, due to a bias against their marginalised identity, or fiction that contained portrayals of their identity. Author 1's account that many industry professionals publicly claimed to seek 'diverse voices', yet published exclusivity white men, echoes Larrick's finding that while many industry professionals profess an active interest in supporting literature by people from marginalised communities, their actions belie their claims (85).

descriptions of barriers to publishing industry participation highlighted how gatekeepers consistently located these authors and their novels as outside or beyond the industry's construct of normal. For example, Author 1's novel being described by publishers as '*from that part of the world*' (not part of *our* world) and not what the industry believed they 'should' write. Author 2's comments align with those of Author 1. Similarly, the

rejection of Author 1 and Author 4's novels by major Australian publishers and subsequent acceptance by smaller, specialist publishers, meant their books were literally pushed outside of the mainstream.

Gatekeepers also located the identities authors beyond the industry's artificially constructed norm, by issuing challenges to these identities, as if to remind the authors of their non-majority status. Author 3 faced social exclusion and prejudiced expectations from a fellow author, who dismissed their novel by 'making a face' *because* it contained a protagonist from Author 3's own community. This response communicated to Author 3 that their book belonged to a separate category of 'ethnic storybooks', and that they, themselves, cannot be part of the industry norm because they do not share the same cultural identity as their peers. This suggests by extension that the offending author considered Author 3's own presence within the publishing industry to be conciliatory, or perhaps even 'forced' (Larrick 85).

Author 5 similarly experienced their book and identity being excluded from the industry's norm. The publisher's censorship of their queer character, when heterosexual characters are frequently depicted with similar narratives, suggests publishers considered the representation unacceptable *because it was queer*. In addition to interfering with Author 5's creative self-expression, such publisher interference has the potential to negatively impact on the author's wellbeing, due to the implication that their own identity is 'too adult' or inappropriate for teenagers, and should be 'hidden'. Like Author 3, Author 5's own identity was challenged for being different; and their ability to publish their book was dependant on their willingness to adhere to heteronormative industry standards. While the character was permitted to retain their queer status, and thus was not "closeted", the revised narrative effectively "cloaked" part of the authentic queer experience Author 5 had sought to represent

– the character's identity was visible enough to be perceived, but through a heterosexual veil of acceptability.

By locating the authors' personal identities outside the industry's construct of normal, gatekeepers literally pushed Author 1, Author 2, Author 3, Author 4, and Author 5 to the margins of the publishing industry. Despite achieving publication, these authors remained excluded due to the identity-based prejudice or limitations they encountered. At the same time, Author 3, Author 4, Author 5, and Author 6 experienced barriers and identity-based prejudice from stakeholders connected to the Australian publishing industry. Such experiences forced authors to reflect on their place in the Australian publishing industry: as an exception to the norm.

Author 4 identified these barriers of exclusion and censorship within the Australian education system's Anglo-centric curriculum. Author 4's comments suggested that a cycle of marginalisation affected writers and readers in their community, which began with young readers in schools being denied access to books that reflect their community. The marginalisation of their stories, languages and cultures continued, with Author 4's OwnVoices novel being published by smaller publishers, decreasing opportunities for inclusion on school curriculums due to publisher's limited 'resources' to promote their books.

Therefore, this cycle of marginalisation was facilitated by prejudices shared by the publishing industry and education system, limiting opportunities for current and future authors from Author 4's community. However, Author 4 believed including YA Fiction that represented their community in schools could inspire future writers. While more inclusive publishing practices could support for writers from Author 4's community, they recognised that breaking this cycle of marginalisation also required addressing systemic issues beyond the publishing industry.

Author 5 and Author 3 expressed highly emotive, negative assessments of their future writing careers as a result of anxiety or distress provoked by the responses of industry-adjacent parties to their books. One example as Author 5's fear that they were sabotaging their future and livelihood by writing queer characters, despite this being personally important to them. Income-based concerns are to be expected, given the low earnings of Australian authors (Zwar, Throsby & Longden 4). Ultimately, they characterised their relationship with industry-adjacent parties as one of 'fear' – they were afraid of future prejudice, which increased their uncertainty about artistic choices they would otherwise feel proud of.

Author 3's experiences demonstrate the full consequences that can arise from industry-adjacent prejudice. The public judgement Author 3 experienced for not conforming to industry expectations significantly affected them – even prompting them to revaluate whether they wanted to retain their current place in the industry. With the outcome of this incident being Author 3's decision to not write YA Fiction for the foreseeable future, the creative voice of one of the few published authors from a marginalised community in Australia's YA Fiction market has effectively been silenced.

Author 6 similarly encountered assumptions about their novel from audiences who expected them to write 'migrant hard-done-by stor[ies]' due to their cultural background. Unlike the other authors in this study, Author 6 clearly stated that they had encountered these expectations from their own community, as well as from 'Anglo' readers. Author 6, like Author 5, focused on bookstores as a place where marginalisation could be confirmed or subverted by booksellers: in particular, by not segregating books by Authors of Colour on the shelves.

Despite challenging the marginalisation of books with 'large issues' relating to their community, Author 6 said they advise aspiring authors from their own community to avoid

writing fiction that could be misinterpreted as an 'issue book'. This suggests Author 6's own experiences with industry-adjacent groups affected how they view their place in the industry. Their negative view of 'misery stories or "cultural stories"' may indicate that they have internalised the stigma against these stories to some extent. Overall, it was clear Author 6 experiences affected them.

Author 7 appeared to have escaped much of the exclusion, censorship, and prejudiced expectations that their peers experienced within the publishing industry and adjacent spaces. Whereas all other authors interviewed highlighted the lack of representation of their community, they emphasised the presence of their community within Australian YA novels. While all other authors in this study (except Author 6) identified challenges in accessing publication, Author 7 repeatedly affirmed how positive their publication experience was. This was a stark contrast in tone, and in the characterisation of the publishing industry as a whole.

Author 7's positive experience could be linked to the higher representation of their community on the Australian YA Fiction landscape, albeit not all of it overt. This may indicate that greater representation of marginalised communities create a more welcoming publishing industry, as the authors' identities become accepted into the industry's concept of the norm. As the sole representative of their community in this study due to the limited pool of eligible authors at the time the research was conducted, we acknowledge that this finding may not represent the wider experience of authors from their community.

Conclusion

Based on this study, Australian authors of OwnVoices YA Fiction from marginalised communities face significant barriers in the publishing industry. Six of seven authors interviewed encountered these barriers, which limited their creative self-expression, access publication, and ability to navigate adjacent literary spaces safely. In some cases, these barriers resulted in more than just exclusion, censorship, and biased audience expectations,

and prompted actual hostile encounters. Such findings provide significant evidence of the Australian publishing industry's 'privilege problem' (*Privilege and Literature*), which results in the 'centering [of] a privileged subject and of writing difference to devalued margins'. (Luke 111)

Authors of non-Anglo-Australian backgrounds in particular, experienced exclusion from accessing traditional publication. As Australia is a colonised country, Indigenous Australian narratives and voices should retain primacy across all contexts, at all times. As Australia's population is increasingly culturally diverse, this lack of publishing access to non-white writers is of increasing concern. Barriers such as these are actively depriving young Australian readers of the chance to see themselves and their community reflected in fiction.

Covert forms of prejudice operated within Australian publishing houses. This included the imposition of heterosexual norms onto the narrative arc of Author 5's queer character, which distanced the plot from its original accurate representation of a queer teenager's experience. Such interference denies this authentic representation of queer teenagers' experiences to readers who rely on such fiction to process 'some of the overwhelming burden of emotional issues involved in minority sexual identity' (Misson 29).

Additionally, Author 3's experience of hostility and judgement in adjacent literary spaces, and subsequent decision to no longer write fiction, demonstrates how prejudice from influential spaces connected to the publishing industry can hinder progress. Accounts by Author 3, 5 and 6 about expectations of the narratives they should write from the publishing industry and publishing-industry adjacent spaces affirm other findings from this research, relating to the expectation that authors from marginalised communities also be educators for their readers and audiences. (*The Expectations*)

Before the Australian publishing industry can achieve comparable progress, albeit ongoing, as markets such as the US, Australian publishing professionals must work to

eradicate the prejudice within their industry. This process requires critiquing homogeneity on author rosters, creating more opportunities for marginalised authors to access publication, and challenging the privileging of non-marginalised voices and stories. Spaces adjacent to the publishing industry must also examine their actions and expectations of authors from marginalised communities, and provide support for their creative freedoms rather than restrictions. While efforts to uplift marginalised voices must still be made, it is clear from our study that there can only be true progress by changing industry practices.

Prejudice such as the examples detailed by our participants are merely extensions of the systemic prejudice that exists within broader society. But every individual has the power to break down these barriers and empower the next generation. Part of this involves allowing marginalised authors to freely and authentically express themselves in their art, rather than requiring them to sacrifice their truths to meet the standards of a non-marginalised audience. Larrick declared in 1965 that '[w]hite supremacy in children's literature will be abolished when authors, editors, publishers, and booksellers decide they need not submit to bigots', and as Kwaymullina agreed in 2016, 'by that measure, the vast majority of people who work within literature have the power to transform the world' (*Privilege and Literature*).

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