Identifying Inclusion: Publishing Industry Trends and the Lack of #OwnVoices Australian Young Adult Fiction

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Introduction

Worldwide, young adult (YA) fiction has risen to the forefront as a form of entertainment and an avenue to advocate for social equality in media. Organizations such as *We Need Diverse Books* (WNDB) in the United States have raised awareness about the lack of diverse representation in YA fiction and provided a platform to connect industry professionals with authors who write inclusively. The Australian publishing industry has a long history of being influenced by overseas markets (Wilding 152), and particularly the United States market. As a result, there is an assumption that such high-profile international advocacy is prompting Australian publishers also to include a wider representation of marginalized communities. This article questions this assumption through an exploration of the Australian YA fiction publishing industry, based on a comprehensive audit of all Australian YA novels published from 2016 to 2018.

There is a "generally held belief that Australian writers are publishing young adult writing in increasing numbers" (Mills 3), and certainly the spike from 98 YA novels published in 2012 to 144 YA novels published in 2013 supports this observation (ibid. 5).[1] However, "[t]he image of Australian culture" presented in our most critically acclaimed, award-winning local YA fiction (Voskuyl 100) has been identified as "predominantly Anglo-Australian" (ibid. 282) even as far back as the late 1990s, and even today marginalized communities are notably under-represented in the character casts of books.

Following the initial trending of the #weneeddiversebooks hashtag, coined by author Aisha Saeed in a post on Twitter April 24, 2014, Australian literary commentators drew attention to the underrepresentation of queer authors and characters in contemporary Australian YA fiction (Binks, "We Read To Know") and disabled authors and characters

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[1] The reason for this surge can likely be attributed to John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), which had great commercial success in the Australian market.

(Binks, "Beyond Ableism"). Subsequent scholarly research revealed the underrepresentation of Indigenous Australian people and people of color among authors and characters in Australian YA fiction (Kwaymullina, "We Need Diverse Books Because"; Mills 13). In 2015, a report by the *Australian Library and Information Association* (ALIA) revealed that only two YA novels by Australian authors made it into the top-ten most borrowed list from Australian public libraries in 2014. This revelation brought together authors, librarians, and readers to support Australian young adult fiction under the hashtag "#loveozya" and created a surge of audience attention towards this area of Australian publishing. However, the subsequent increase in social media promotion of Australian YA fiction novels in the #loveozya hashtag revealed that these books shared the same issues as Australian young adult fiction in the 1990s, as they presented "predominantly an image of Anglo-Australian culture" (Voskuyl 100).

Literature Review

Indigenous Australian YA fiction author and academic Dr. Ambelin Kwaymullina, who is from the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia, states that rather than having a "diversity problem," the local publishing industry has a "privilege problem," which she defines as "a set of structures and attitudes that consistently privilege one set of voices over another" (*Privilege and Literature*). This problem limits the accessibility of the industry by authors from communities that fall under the commonly-used umbrella term of "diverse" (or sometimes "marginalized"). WNDB defines this use of "diverse" as, "including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities*, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities," with the social model of disability adopted to understand "disability as created by barriers in the social environment, due to lack of equal access, stereotyping, and other forms of marginalization" (WNDB, "About WNDB"). The privilege problem places further restrictions on authors from traditionally marginalized

communities who seek to write stories that are reflective of their own experiences or identities, as both they and their characters are marginalized and under-represented, and their books may face opposition from publishers for *both* reasons.

Art that draws heavily from an author's or illustrator's identity and experiential knowledge of belonging to a marginalized group can be referred to as an "#OwnVoices" creation, a term coined as a hashtag by Dutch YA author Corinne Duyvis. "#OwnVoices" is a label designed to identify books that fit this criterion, with the underlying assumption that such books will represent marginalized experiences more authentically than books written by outsiders (Whaley). Simultaneously, it draws audience attention to books by authors and illustrators from marginalized communities in a market that too often prioritizes "mainstream dominant-majority writers [who] can still legitimately be accused of appropriating other cultures and silencing or erasing them by speaking in their place" (Pearce 239, "Messages from the Inside").

While Duyvis' #OwnVoices label is new, attributing the perceived authenticity of a book to an author's real-life experiences is a far more established practice. Even the Australian publishing industry promotes this link at times as a marketing tactic, with one current example being the author bio for young adult fiction crime writer Fleur Ferris. The bio emphasizes Ferris' professional experience of "working for a number of years as a police officer and a paramedic" and "[seeing] the darker side to life" during this time, presenting it as a factor that contributes to her "unique insight into today's society and an endless pool of experiences to draw from" for her writing in the crime genre (Penguin Books Australia). While this example does not relate to marginalized identity, it illustrates how such links are made between personal experience and the author's capacity to render it authentically on the page.

Such apparent authenticity is often promoted as a desirable characteristic for a book, even from a publisher's perspective. This is true even if it is rarely identifiable in concrete details, but rather an intangible quality that readers can "feel […] is true" and appreciate in different ways depending on their identities (Howard 92). This link between authenticity and personal experience is just as relevant to authorial practice generally as it is to depicting marginalized identities, yet it is only in the case of the latter that the validity of this connection has been challenged.

American academic and education researcher Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop noted in 1982 that the "image-makers" who created outstanding representations of African American life in children's and YA fiction between 1965-1979 could be distinguished by "[t]heir perspective [which] makes it necessary for them as writers and artists to be witnesses to Afro-American experience" (99). This same understanding is also applicable to other marginalized experiences and identities. Short and Fox extend this focus on author perspective to highlight the impact of the "differing intentions" of insider and outsider authors in determining whether an authentic narrative is produced, arguing that insider authors write to benefit readers from their own community, while outsider authors aim to educate outsider readers about marginalized identities (17).

Today the books by Bishop's "image-makers" could be described as #OwnVoices novels. The #OwnVoices label, in its concise and easily shareable form, enabled this concept to spread through social media to reach new audiences of readers and publishing professionals in a way that was not possible in the past. While there has been some mainstream discussion about how public misuse of the #OwnVoices label can place additional pressures on authors to disclose affiliation with a marginalized community, with particular concern for queer authors (Ellis), the #OwnVoices concept has been advocated for by many scholars who focus on diversity in children's and young adult fiction books in their

own national context. Reese has highlighted that prioritizing #OwnVoices books allows Native American writers to retain control of important cultural knowledge (391), Ramdarshan Bold has emphasized that authors of #OwnVoices books can challenge the "misrepresentation, cultural appropriation, and stereotyping" of marginalized characters that has historically occurred (386-387), and Kwaymullina has shared both of these views, while contributing to adapting the label for an Australian context, especially with Indigenous Australian stories ("We Need Diverse Books Because"). Notably, #OwnVoices has been embraced by WNDB to further highlight their attention to publishing industry access for authors and illustrators from marginalized communities.

WNDB's advocacy has been enabled through data collected by the librarians at the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison (CCBC), who have tracked the publication of books by and about people from marginalized communities since 1985 (CCBC; Tyner). Quantitative data such as this evidences publishing industry priorities in the United States regarding which voices are considered worthy of a place on the market by publishers, as they clearly indicate which authors, illustrators, and characters the publishing industry staff have chosen to invest their time and other resources in. This data also provides a resource for diversity advocates to use to campaign publishers for more inclusive publishing practices. The CCBC reported that the data for 2017 demonstrated that the "number [of books by and about African-American people, First Nations people, Asian/Pacific or Asian/Pacific American people, and Latinx people] is steadily increasing, hitting 31% – now the highest year on record since 1994," although the number of works by "*Black, Latinx, and Native authors <u>combined</u> [...] is only 7%*" (Corrie, emphasis original). Thus, a yearly audit reveals gradual growth in the American publishing industry.

However, Australia has no organizations equivalent to the CCBC to identify and track information about the diversity of authors and illustrators being traditionally published, and although there is some scholarship on representations in fiction, it is not aggregated in a way that provides a long-term view of progress. These individual studies have revealed that representations of marginalized communities in Australian YA fiction have been slow to arrive on the market, and that when they do, they are often by outsider authors. Further, they also demonstrate that representations of marginalized characters written by outsiders often re-tread clichéd narratives of prejudice and identity-based pain rather than exploring other facets of the character's life—an issue found to particularly impact representations of queer characters (Garrison 21). This dominance of narratives written by outsider authors, rather than authors of #OwnVoices, has also likely contributed to the lack of intersectional experiences that has been noted even amongst Australia's most award-winning YA fiction (ibid.).

Australian young adult fiction did not begin featuring *protagonists* from marginalized communities until the 1990s, and this shift from being a supporting character to main character granted "a position of agency in relationship to the dominant culture, and thereby the possibility of resisting incorporation within a mainstream definition" (Stephens and McCallum 129). But this shift did not equate to recognition given to marginalized authors. It took until 1998 for the first young adult fiction book with an Indigenous Australian protagonist by an Indigenous Australian author to be published, which was *Killing Darcy* by Indigenous Australian author Melissa Lucashenko, a Goorie author of Bundjalung and European heritage (Sheahan-Bright 267). Yet it was the book *Deadly, Unna?* by white author Phillip Gwynne, published just one year later in 1999, that was placed on school curriculums, bestowed with the coveted "Book of the Year" award by the Children's Book Council of

Australia, and adapted as a movie in 2002[2], despite significant and ongoing criticism from Indigenous Australian communities (ibid 286).

Larger political events in Australia, such as increased public scrutiny on asylum seekers, have contributed to the growth of specific forms of representation. Between 2004-2006, ten children's and YA fiction books about asylum seekers and detention center detainees were published (Dudek 2) in the midst of increasingly volatile public discussions about national borders, asylum seekers, and the so-called Australian identity. These books often featured split-narratives that involved the "simultaneous positioning of the reader as both an activist and asylum seeker" (ibid. 4), through the depiction of a developing friendship between a (usually) white Australian and an asylum seeker, which framed the marginalized status of the asylum seeker as "incidental to the main plot […] to normalise multiculturalism as a part of everyday life" (ibid.). As a result of their outsider authorship, these books take on an instructional role which models acceptance and empathy to the reader (ibid. 2), while Australian children's and YA fiction notably lacks books on this same topic by asylum seeker authors.

Similar increases in the representation of Muslim identity occurred during the early 2000s, with attempts made to "move away from the sensationalised connotation and reductive stereotyping" of the time (Pearce 58, "Does My Bomb"). However, these same "well-meaning" stories written by outsiders were noted to unwittingly reinforce Orientalist stereotypes about Muslim women of color (ibid.). It was Muslim writers who were able to position their characters as "no longer marginalised or just tolerated in Australia's national space, but stand[ing] squarely in the middle" as equals (ibid. 62). This indicates that #OwnVoices YA fiction can become a transformative area for stories in modern Australia,

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[2] The film's title was *Australian Rules.*

featuring characters with "selfhood and agency" instead of outdated stereotypes (Pearce 58, "Does My Bomb").

Therefore, #OwnVoices books have significant potential to make representations of contemporary teenage experiences in Australian YA fiction more inclusive and reflective of Australia's population. The 2016 Australian Census showcased the country's increasingly diverse population, with the Indigenous population having increased by 18% since the 2011 Census (now a total of 2.8% of Australia's population) and more than one-fifth of Australians speaking a language other than English at home, with Mandarin (2.5%), Arabic (1.4%), Cantonese (1.2%) and Vietnamese (1.2%) all seeing significant growth (Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Snapshot"). The 2016 Census was also the first Census that documented sex and gender as separate categories, demonstrating growing public recognition of Australia's queer (and specifically, gender-diverse) population (ibid.).

Despite Australia's rapidly diversifying population, studies show that authors from marginalized communities still face several challenges, many of which are related to the lack of support or additional identity-based expectations from publishers and other professionals who work closely with the industry (Booth and Narayan, "Don't Talk"; Booth and Narayan, "The Expectations"). Broader issues relating to the overall under-representation of diversity among authors and character casts also contribute to these challenges (Booth and Narayan, "Towards Diversity"). This is compounded by the prominence in Australia of imported "bestselling YA (often written by white American authors) [which] implicitly perpetuates cultural hegemony," as it has been observed doing in the UK (Ramdarshan Bold and Phillips 5), by occupying space on Australian publishers' budgets and bookstore shelves that could otherwise be dedicated to local authors from marginalized communities. "[T]he marginalization of identities and selves not aligning with the 'norm'" (ibid.) that such books perpetuate in their own market is therefore doubly problematic within the Australian market,

as no international representation is interchangeable with depictions of Australian identities and experiences (and visa versa) – marginalized or not.

Research into the experiences of traditionally-published (as opposed to self-published) authors of Australian #OwnVoices YA fiction has revealed that many authors write to challenge the under-representation of their marginalized communities within Australian publishing (Booth and Narayan, "Towards Diversity" 21); that those who wrote queer protagonists face specific challenges of censorship by their publishers and encounter systemic prejudice in the Australian school education system (Booth and Narayan, "Don't Talk" 44); and many also feel a responsibility to be "educators" for outsiders through their books instead of just entertainers (Booth and Narayan, "The Expectation" 16). While these studies provide some insight into #OwnVoices authors' individual experiences, they do not provide the overall numbers needed to understand the context of the challenges they face.

No data or list exists to document the Australian publishing industry's inclusion/exclusion of authors from marginalized communities, although efforts have been made to establish this benchmark. Attempts to survey authors of adult fiction about identity, such as for the 2016 Stella Diversity Survey, produced results described as "disappointing" by the project coordinator, Kon-yu, with what she described as "a response rate of just under 16%," strongly suggesting that this approach is currently not reliable or appropriate for use in the Australian context (Kon-yu 5). Multiple publications have detailed the survey's purpose and methods (Kon-yu; The Stella Prize, "The New Iteration"; The Stella Prize, "The Stella Count Survey"), and Kon-yu's publication already details her reflections and personal thoughts about being involved in the survey, so we provide only a brief overview here.

The Diversity Survey was an initiative of the annual Stella Prize, a financial award founded in 2012 for a novel or non-fiction book by an Australian female author. As part of the process, they track the number of books by female authors that are reviewed in

professional publications each year, known as The Stella Count. However, the singular focus on gender led to much criticism from marginalized female authors, so the 2016 Stella Diversity Survey was created to "take into consideration the additional hurdles faced by women writers who are non-white, queer, gender diverse and differently abled" (Kon-yu 2).

Survey design involved community consultation and an exploration of similar surveys in the United States such as VIDA: Women In Literary Arts (The Stella Prize, "The New Iteration"), as well as extensive consideration of the "language around gender, sexuality and race/ethnicity" (Kon-yu 5); the final questions are available online (The Stella Prize, "2015 Stella Count Survey"). The survey was circulated to "female authors who had work reviewed in 2015" (Kon-yu 5) and were presumably identified as part of the broader Stella Count, although contact details could not be located for all authors (The Stella Prize, "The Stella Count Survey"). In total, there were 59 responses to the 370 surveys circulated (Kon-yu 5), with no feedback provided on the survey, except from one white author who didn't see how identity "had much to do with any writer's ability to write a book" (ibid 6).

Due to the low response rate demonstrated by the 2016 Stella Diversity Survey, we could not be confident that a similar survey conducted with young adult fiction authors would yield results, particularly as it would require authors to participate every year to show progress within our available time frame. Therefore, we sought an alternative method to gather demographic data. An approach inspired by overseas activity had already been adapted for the Australian context within the advocacy space with the creation of *Voices from the Intersection* (VFTI). VFTI is a non-profit volunteer organization founded by YA authors Dr. Ambelin Kwaymullina and Rebecca Lim in 2016 "to support the creation of Aussie Own Voices" books in children's and YA fiction categories (Lim), drawing on the language of international advocacy and the attention on #OwnVoices books. Having observed the success produced by a combination of advocacy and quantitative data (Corrie), as demonstrated by

WNDB's use of CCBC data (WNDB, "Frequently Asked Questions"), and noting the international influence on local advocate group *VFTI*, we drew similar inspiration from international research and advocacy activities in designing our project.

We collected data from existing records about Australian young adult fiction books and authors and aggregated this information based on demographics. Specifically, we aimed to investigate the current status of #OwnVoices YA publishing in Australia. To do so, we compiled an annotated list of all #OwnVoices YA fiction published in Australia between 2016 and 2018, in the immediate aftermath of #OwnVoices being coined. The contents of this list, and the changes that occurred in the two years since, provide significant insight into how the Australian publishing industry has responded to the concept of #OwnVoices and diversity advocacy more broadly.

Methodology

The first iteration of the annotated list discussed in this article was produced in 2016 with the purpose of identifying Australian authors of YA fiction who had published at least one novel that could be classified as #OwnVoices. Since then, it has been regularly maintained to reflect the changing Australian YA fiction landscape. The findings discussed in this article reflect the contents of the list as of December 2018. There were several ethical considerations regarding author privacy and author preferences, which were complicated by the small size of the Australian publishing industry. Hence, only de-identified and anonymized data from the annotated list is discussed in this article. We discuss our ethical considerations here first, before detailing how we built the list.

The Ethics of #OwnVoices-driven Research

The collection of our data involved several ethical considerations. For an author of #OwnVoices fiction to be included on our list, they must have publicly and freely identified as a member of a marginalized community within their *professional* context. As the study

was developed with a view to support the continued publishing of #OwnVoices Australian young adult fiction, it was crucial that the research method itself did not pose any risk or discomfort to the authors who would be included on the list. In this way, the study was designed to reflect the ethics of the advocacy efforts that inspired it, for as stated by Duyvis in regard to the #OwnVoices label: "Nobody is under any obligation to disclose any part of their identity. Safety and privacy are essential. We're just working with the information we have; it's all we can do."

Our method was designed around Duyvis' statement, which we considered a crucial ethical guide for the project. As we had excluded surveys of authors as a data collection method for the reasons detailed above, we required an alternative. Similarly, surveying publishers and agents about their authors may have led to authors feeling an "obligation to disclose" their identity, or worse, not being consulted at all before this was done. This would be a significant privacy violation that would disproportionately impact marginalized authors, thus undermining the project's intent to contribute data that would ultimately benefit these communities. The concept of "working with the information we have" was raised early in our discussions, and from this, we considered the question: what information do we have already? As explored below, the existing database of AustLit has limitations as it only records cultural identity (and as we later learned and discuss in the following section, does so imperfectly at times), yet we wanted to include queer identity and disability status to create a fuller picture of the Australian #OwnVoices literary landscape. We knew that we would need to consider other sources, which created the challenge of deciding which sources to recognize.

To be certain our demographic information was accurate, we would need sources that had a tangible record. This was to ensure confidence in our data, as well as to ensure that we were respectful of those who were included and how they self-identified. We primarily chose

to use sources that are freely accessible and professional in nature (such as publisher or publicity materials, and author websites), as they are developed with the expectation of a public readership and with the intention of promoting book sales. (A more detailed discussion of these sources is included in the next section.) We also included authors' professional websites, and after some consideration, author blogs that were directly linked to the professional websites.

However, there were sites of information that were ethical grey areas, and as a result, we also excluded numerous potential sources for list information. The largest consideration was social media, regardless of the platform or form of information. We made this exclusion due to the frequent blurring of personal and professional boundaries by authors on their social media profiles: disclosures about their personal life including information about children were followed by promotional activities, such as engaging with fans, announcing public appearances, and sharing links to purchase their books.

We concluded that the hybrid nature of these spaces and the ephemeral nature of much of the content may have motivated some authors to disclose membership to a marginalized community in an informal manner—such as a hashtag, an emoji, an in-joke in their profile, or re-sharing of an identity-related post—despite preferring to not foreground this information in their professional context. This is consistent with our university's stance on research ethics, as it typically considers the use of social media data as belonging to the high-risk research category. Therefore, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and other social media platforms were entirely excluded as sources of author self-identifying information for this project.

We also excluded information that was included as part of personal anecdotes shared at small-scale events and information that was known through personal communications with authors, as it was not intended for a public audience. While the former were public events,

they typically did not have formal records capturing the events, and due to their design as intimate gatherings, these stories were also understood as not intended for a broader public audience. This is in line with the distinction between public information and publicizing privately-disclosed information (Petronio 12; Islam 5). Further, such personal information is protected under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Koch) wherein:

> "'Personal data' means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person."

However, large-scale events such as writers' festivals where authors were aware that the event was being recorded by the hosts for distribution at a later date (through livestreams or podcasts) were included, as authors were understood to have shared this information with the knowledge that it would be disseminated to audiences not physically present at the time.

Our approach was also consistent with considerations made for another recent diversity survey of Australian media, which was *Screen Australia*'s 2016 surveys of diversity in Australian TV dramas. This mixed-methods study involved surveys and face-to-face interviews with industry professionals to gather demographic information, and it shared our areas of interest, which were cultural background, queer identity, and disability status. Due to feasibility reasons, we had already excluded direct contact with individuals. However, we note that when it was not possible for Screen Australia to consult with industry professionals about this information (interviews, surveys, or employers and agents), "public sources were used including official biographies and media quotes" (Screen Australia 8). Similarly, we

used only entirely professional spaces as sources for demographic information on authors, and this method of data collection was granted ethics approval by our organization.

We recognize that our broad range of exclusions of information sources could be interpreted as suppressing or ignoring freely-shared self-identification by authors who belonged to marginalized communities. However, we concluded that the potential personal and professional risks authors may have faced if their personal information were shared with new, unintended audiences—with queer identity being a particularly significant consideration—greatly outweighed the former concern. Additionally, despite the public nature of the sources used to compile the annotated list, we recognize that not all authors would want their personal identities to be foregrounded to the same extent, and that doing so may simply be a breach of their privacy. Therefore, only the de-identified and anonymized information from the annotated list is discussed in this article.

Our particular attention to the risk of producing discomfort or other unforeseen consequences for the authors is a direct result of witnessing and learning about the negative experiences that authors from marginalized communities in Australia have faced because of people's perceptions of their identity. These instances are known to occur within and outside of the publishing industry; however, events within the industry are rarely written down or recorded in any capacity, due to the potential risk this poses to the author's career. Similarly, animosity from non-marginalized (and especially white) members of the reading public, such as harassment at local writers' festivals during or after an event, are a known occurrence that other attendees witness and discuss in their social networks, but which are not commonly recorded in professional or official sources. The small size of the Australian publishing industry and the limited opportunities available to authors means that unlike in the United States, the organized community of diversity advocates and literary critics on social media

such as Twitter (Templeton) does not exist. As a result, the sparse documentation of these events does not reflect their frequency.

Dr. Randa Abdel-Fattah, an Australian, Muslim and Arab young adult fiction author and scholar, is one of the few who has published accounts of these experiences with the *intention* of highlighting and interrogating the prejudiced behavior of non-marginalized literary professionals and audiences in Australia. She details one incident that occurred in the early 2000s while seeking an agent for what would become her debut novel. After pitching the story, about a Muslim Australian teenage girl, she recalls the agent "had the audacity to joke: 'Is there an honor killing in it?'" (Abdel-Fattah 101). That this was shared in 2017 as an exemplar of the challenges she faced in the publishing industry is a testament to the impact of the "joke." In the same article, Abdel-Fattah shares an incident that occurred after she had spoken at a writers' festival:

> Following a talk at a writer's festival, a white male journalist who has written a children's book approached me and complained that "people like me" have an "asset" because they "get more publicity" for being "different." He resented that I could "play the exotic card" and in doing so implied that this *censored, marginalized,* white, middle class, heterosexual male journalists. (102-103)

These examples of microaggressions and harassment from within and outside the publishing industry illustrate just two of the forms of prejudice that marginalized young adult fiction authors encounter when their identity is foregrounded. Events like this formed the basis of our decision not to publish the list we created for our data collection, for as Duyvis stated, "Safety and privacy are essential." Promoting the identifying information gathered for this study to audiences would disempower the authors featured by removing their agency, and potentially frame their artistic accomplishments as defined by their identity rather than their skill.

This is also similar to the approach undertaken by Screen Australia for their diversity surveys, as the full survey responses were not published, and the data collected is predominantly discussed in the aggregate in their final report. However, as they conducted five surveys circulated to over 5000 industry professionals, they were able to invite select responders to contribute further to the study through interviews (40). As we did not have access to such resources, and as the pool of authors eligible for this study is drastically smaller, we were unable to supplement our study in this way. Additionally, as the purpose of this list and study is to enable the growth of #OwnVoices YA fiction within the Australian publishing industry by examining recent progress in the publication rates of specific marginalized communities, the individual identification of the authors featured is not essential to the argument of our study.

Building the list

Data collection began with the investigation of information resources and publicity materials released by publishers, before progressing to other published resources such as newspaper articles and community-generated and maintained resources. This method of "berrypicking" to "gather information in bits and pieces instead of in one grand best retrieved set" (Bates 419) enabled the snowballing of references and information about authors to construct an accurate picture of the Australian YA fiction author community.

We began with the AustLit Database, a non-profit collaboration between Australian researchers and the National Library of Australia (AustLit, "About AustLit"), which has been led by the University of Queensland (Australia) since 2002 (ibid.). Mills describes this database as: "[drawing] its content from a range of sources, including the deposit collections of the National Library of Australia[3] (whose new acquisitions are added to the AustLit

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[3] All books published in Australia are required to be deposited at the National Library of Australia to comply with the Copyright Act of 1968: https://www.nla.gov.au/legal-deposit/what-is-legal-deposit

database on a monthly basis), pre-existing bibliographies […] and original research by

AustLit researchers" (3).

Due to its vast collection of works and authors "date[ing] largely from the arrival of

European print culture in Australia (c.1788) to the present" (AustLit, "About AustLit"), the

AustLit Database was anticipated to be the biggest source of information for our list. The

database has the unique feature of allowing users to filter search results by the "cultural

heritage" of the authors, which was particularly useful for identifying Indigenous Australian

authors and authors of color. In the Australian context, people of color refers to migrants of

non-white cultural heritage, including but not limited to those from Arabic countries such as

Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, and Asian countries such as China and India (Australian Bureau

of Statistics, "Cultural Diversity"), and also Mediterranean countries such as Greece and Italy

(Kapetopoulos)[4]. Using the advanced search function, searching for a "novel" in the "genre"

of "young adult," and excluding "international works"— described by the database as "works

that are referenced by, or an influence on Australian Literature" (AustLit, "Advanced

Search")—revealed 6,137 works and 2,231 creators of these books as of April 8, 2019.

Results can be filtered to display only the desired entries by "cultural heritage," which

includes (but is not limited to): Aboriginal, Chinese, Greek, Indian, Italian, and Jewish. By

exploring these categories individually, we identified authors of #OwnVoices YA fiction by

examining the publications listed for each author. From this process, and 2,231 potential list

candidates, a total of 13 authors of #OwnVoices Australian YA fiction were identified in

2016.

During this process we encountered an issue with AustLit Database, for while it is

possible to exclude these marginalized "cultural heritage" categories from the search results,

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[4] The term "people of color" has only very recently begun to be used in Australia, and therefore, many people may not necessarily identify with this label despite knowing the meaning—Australia has its own unique terms and perceptions of cultural identities. However, it is used here in the context of an American journal for clarity, simplicity, and to aggregate the data for analysis.

there is no means by which to systematically *exclude* Anglo-Australian authors in the same way. This predictably resulted in an inherently "othering" search process and revealed the programmatic "privilege problem" embedded in the database itself: Anglo-Australian authors were programmed as the norm, rather than having their own identifying tag, and Indigenous Australian authors and authors of color were assigned to sub-categories. If an author's specific cultural background was unknown, they were included by default in the Anglo-Australian category.

We understood that such a structure may have been the result of the tags, key words, or search terms that are assigned to books and authors, rather than a conscious bias of the administrators themselves. Yet this cataloging issue meant that authors eligible for inclusion in our annotated list could easily be overlooked, and hence we concluded that the AustLit Database could not be solely depended upon to present an accurate reflection of the current Australian YA fiction landscape in regard to identifying #OwnVoices books.

The second resource we used was the corpus of promotional materials distributed by publishers with the consent of the author. However, wherever it was not feasible to read the promotional materials, we began by examining the books themselves. YA novels featuring a protagonist from a traditionally marginalized community were identified through our own extensive reading of the category, as well as book reviews and *Goodreads* lists of Australian YA fiction that were curated by other readers. When a novel with a marginalized protagonist was identified, we sought information on the author's self-identification with that identity, if any. Publicity materials we examined included press releases and official author bios (including those on official websites and printed in the books), and media activities such as interviews with journalists and book reviewers. If no relevant identifying information was found to categorize the novel as #OwnVoices, the book was not included in our list.

The third and final resource for identifying authors of #OwnVoices YA fiction was

print media with a literary focus. We were aware that in recent years, many Australian publications had featured so-called "diversity articles," which discussed the importance of representing marginalized communities in YA fiction. We investigated the archives of several Australian newspapers, including *The Guardian Australia* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, online arts magazines, and blogs connected to established literary spaces, such as bookstores, writers' centers and festivals, and literary awards. The articles located were often written by commentators who worked in the book industry or by YA fiction authors themselves. In numerous cases, "diversity articles" identified authors of #OwnVoices fiction. Information from these articles was then cross-referenced with either publisher materials or professional author websites to confirm its accuracy, and also to confirm that the authors themselves had identified this way. If not, the books were not included in our list.

Based on the above resources, a total of 23 authors of #OwnVoices YA fiction were identified out of a total of 2,118 YA fiction authors in the AustLit Database as of 2016. This was almost double the number of #OwnVoices authors identified through the AustLit Database itself, presenting a very different view of the Australian YA fiction landscape. These 23 authors included 9 non-Anglo-Australian authors whose "cultural heritage" was not registered in the database. This brought the total number of publicly and freely self-identified Australian authors of #OwnVoices YA fiction for all years on record to 36. This included authors who were deceased and authors who had not published a YA novel in over 10 years.

In summary, the two different methods we used to gather data yielded different results: the first was a search on the AustLit database, and the second was a mix of methods including the careful examination of publishers' materials, author websites, book reviews, and mainstream media. The discrepancies in the findings between the two methods demonstrate how "different practices tend to produce not only different *perspectives*, but also different *realities"* (Law 13, emphasis original), as the reality of the YA fiction landscape

was significantly misrepresented by the cataloguing omissions in the AustLit Database. The same procedures, as documented above, are used to update this annotated list to this day. As of December 2018, the list contains a total of 46 Australian authors who have written at least 1 #OwnVoices YA fiction novel, which is an increase of 10 authors between 2016-2018. In most cases, these were established authors publishing their first #OwnVoices novel, with fewer debut authors being published.

Analyzing the list

The annotated list was analyzed to provide insight into Australian #OwnVoices YA fiction publishing trends. A series of categories were created to organize the information in the list. The first was for the marginalized identities represented, which must be discussed in the aggregate due to the small amount of data and size of the Australian publishing industry, to preserve author privacy. The chosen categories were: Indigenous Australian authors, authors of color, queer authors, and disabled authors. These categories are amalgamations of the many diverse communities that fall under the umbrella terms used, and it is recognized that, while warranted here for the purposes of maintaining confidentiality, generalized labels such as these should not typically be used to group authors when specific recognition is possible.

The second category was for type of publishers – of "big" publishing houses and "small" publishing houses – in order to identify which areas of the publishing industry are releasing #OwnVoices YA fiction. A total of 28 publishers were represented on the annotated list, of which 10 were classified as big publishers and 18 were classified as small publishers. Classification as a big publisher was dependent on regular inclusion on the nominations list for the annual *Inky Awards* (Inside a Dog), which has distinct categories for Australian (Gold) and non-Australian (Silver) books (ibid). Operated since 2007 through the State Library of Victoria, with winners announced at an annual award night, the *Inkys* are highly

regarded within the publishing industry (ibid).

The *Inkys* are the only Australian YA fiction award that is judged entirely by teenagers, with the process involving online voting by teenage members of the public to nominate books for the award and an all-teenage panel of judges that choose the winning books. Therefore, the awards are arguably the highest Australian recognition possible for an author who writes YA fiction, which is intended for teenagers. Receipt of an *Inky* award nomination indicates both the means to sustain a regular output of YA fiction and an engagement with Australian YA fiction spaces more broadly. The use of the categories big and small is used here to de-identify the publishing houses included on the list, and by extension, preserve the privacy of the authors represented. Any publishing houses that had been restructured or have seen other significant changes to their ownership were grouped together under their current incarnation, to reflect the contemporary Australian publishing landscape.

Findings

There were three significant findings to this research related to the rate at which certain communities were published, as well as the growth that has taken place in recent years. On account of the ethics guidelines we followed and the understanding that the authors are not obliged to disclose personal information such as community identification, it is emphasized that this data is *indicative* of the representation of Australian authors of #OwnVoices YA fiction. Therefore, these findings should be interpreted as an exploration of the choices made by Australian publishers regarding the acquisition of #OwnVoices YA fiction.

Author and Community Representation: Who's being published?

As of December 2018, the annotated list contained a total of 46 Australian authors who had published an #OwnVoices YA novel during their career. This included deceased

authors and authors who had not published a YA novel in over a decade. Findings were amalgamated into the following categories to be discussed in the aggregate: Indigenous Australian authors, authors of color, queer authors, and disabled authors.

As detailed in Table 1, of the 46 authors counted, 11 (24% of the annotated list) were Indigenous Australian authors, 24 (53.3% of the annotated list) were authors of color, who were the most strongly represented, while 7 (15.5% of the annotated list) were queer authors. The lowest represented community was disabled authors, of which there were only 4 making up a total of 8.8% of the list. The latter category included physical disability, chronic illness, mental illness, and other neurological conditions, as per WNDB's definition of disability. One author, who identifies with more than one community and has published multiple #OwnVoices books exploring these different identifications, is counted in multiple categories, leading to a slight discrepancy in numbers and percentages, which are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 1

Categories	Number of authors of #OwnVoices young adult fiction in the final list	Percentage of authors of #OwnVoices young adult fiction in the final list
Indigenous Australian	11	24.4%
Authors of color	24	53.3%
Queer	7	15.5%
Disabled	4	8.8%
TOTAL	46	102%

Publisher Representation: Who's Publishing #OwnVoices Fiction?

The annotated list provides a clear indication of which publishing houses are proactively supporting Australian #OwnVoices YA fiction. To meaningfully organize the data, the 28 publishers on the list were divided into the categories of big and small. There were 10 big publishers and 18 small publishers. The distribution of Indigenous Australian authors, authors of color, queer authors, and disabled authors across these two categories is explored below.

Of the 11 Indigenous Australian authors of #OwnVoices YA fiction, 3 were published by big publishers, while the remaining 8 were published by small publishers. 15 of 24 authors of color were published by big publishers, compared to 8 by small publishers, and 3 of 7 queer authors were published by small publishers. The other 4 queer authors were published by big publishers, along with 3 of 4 disabled authors, with only 1 disabled author being published by a small Australian publisher (Table 2).

Table 2

Categories	Total books published	Published by big publishers	Published by small publishers
Indigenous Australian	11	3	8
Authors of color	24	15	8
Queer	7	3	4
Disabled	4	3	1

Industry Growth between October 2016-December 2018

As of October 2016, there were 36 publicly identifying Australian authors of #OwnVoices YA fiction documented. 2 years and 2 months later, only 10 new authors who fit this criterion had published a novel. In some cases, this was the author's debut novel; in

others, it was an established author's first #OwnVoices YA novel. Progress occurred relatively evenly in each author category and was predominantly driven by big publishers, with one exception.

Only 1 new Indigenous Australian author of #OwnVoices YA fiction was published between 2016 and 2018, by a small publisher. In contrast, big publishers drove the growth among authors of color, who saw an increase of 3 over 2 years, and disabled authors, who jumped from 1 author in 2016 to 4 authors in 2018, with 2 of these authors published by big publishers. The total number of authors of queer #OwnVoices YA fiction also grew by 3 within this timeframe, with releases from big and small publishers. In 2018, the total number of authors of YA fiction in the AustLit Database had grown from 2,118 to 2,233 (an increase of 115), while the number of authors of #OwnVoices YA identified through this study had increased from 36 (1.7% of total) to 46 (2% of total) (Table 3).

Table 3

Categories	Authors of #OwnVoices young adult fiction 2016	Authors of #OwnVoices young adult fiction 2018
Indigenous Australian	10	11
Authors of color	21	24
Queer	4	7
Disabled	1	4
TOTAL	36	46

Discussion

The above findings indicate that while there has been some increase in #OwnVoices YA fiction on the Australian market, the "privilege problem" still remains, demonstrated by the low rates of acquisition and publication of #OwnVoices books. An increase of only 10 eligible new #OwnVoices YA authors published over 26 months out of the 115 new YA authors (8.69% of the total) published in 2017-2018[5] (AustLit, "Advanced Search") is a very small percentage, especially as many of these were established authors writing an #OwnVoices novel, with fewer new authors being published. We acknowledge that the ethical limitations adhered to in this research could have influenced these findings, but they nevertheless demonstrate a need for growth in this area.

We do not suggest that authors from marginalized communities be required to write #OwnVoices fiction, or be excluded for choosing not to do so, as "#OwnVoices is not about policing or pressuring marginalized authors to write about any particular topic" (Duyvis). Rather, we argue that these findings are indicative of the extent to which the Australian publishing industry is still closed to marginalized authors with #OwnVoices stories to share. These indicators are valuable, as they establish a baseline from which future industry trends can be tracked.

Our findings have the potential to enable local advocacy groups such as VFTI, readers, and researchers alike to directly campaign publishers for more #OwnVoices books, and clearly evidence the need for better publication access for them. In the United States, the CCBC's data has revealed a gradual increase in the number of books written by "Black, Latinx, and Native authors" in recent years (Corrie). Independent children's book publisher Lee & Low Books, who specializes in books by and about people of colour, have previously

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[5] These numbers are based on our subsequent search of the AustLit Database on 14 April 2019 using the same search conditions detailed in the methodology section of this article, and excluding any results relating to books published in 2019.

highlighted the role of WNDB in driving this growth by raising interest in these stories in the mainstream (Ehrlich). WNDB uses CCBC data to highlight the need for their work (WNDB, *"Frequently Asked Questions"*), and this progress, however gradual, indicates that such evidence-based advocacy can generate more inclusive publishing practices. Further, these indicative findings provide insight into the priorities of Australian publishers, such as which stories and voices they consider worthy of their time and resources, and what they believe will draw a readership and profit. This contributes to global discussions about diversifying youth fiction and can form the grounds for future research into publishing industry practices and perspectives on diversity and inclusion.

While all publishers have more work to do in order to make their catalogs more inclusive, the fact that eight of eleven Indigenous Australian authors of #OwnVoices YA fiction are published by small publishing houses raises serious questions about how the local publishing industry views Indigenous Australian authors; whether big publishers have not signed more Indigenous Australian authors because they perceive the authors and their stories as "niche" or "not mainstream." Big publishing houses have significantly more resources available to support the creation and promotion of Indigenous Australian literature, so this neglect would significantly impact aspiring and emerging authors from this community. As the original and true custodians of the land, Indigenous Australian voices are inherently deserving of primacy in all contexts, including the publishing industry, and access to the resources of larger publishers would likely support this. Alternatively, this distribution may also be the result of Indigenous Australian authors preferring to publish with smaller publishing houses. Research into why authors choose bigger or smaller publishing houses for their books would need to be conducted in Australia to gain insight into this area.[6]

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[6] The CCBC has noted that in the United States, smaller publishers such as Lee & Low Books have contributed significantly to the growth in children's books by and about People of Color (https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/statsfaqs.asp). Our findings indicate that, in Australia, smaller publishers may do the same for Indigenous Australian authors of #OwnVoices young adult fiction. However, these

Authors of color were the most strongly represented in our data; however, with an increase of only 1 author per year in this category since 2016, this is hardly progress to be celebrated. The low numbers of queer and disabled authors overall suggest two possible contributing factors, both of which may be true: the first is that these identities may be disclosed to the public less frequently, due to social stigmas. This would be particularly relevant for authors of queer YA fiction, who face significant barriers in spaces such as schools and libraries that can potentially impact their livelihood (Booth and Narayan, "Don't Talk"). The second is that these experiences remain excluded from the publishing industry due to a privileging of heterosexual, cisgender, and non-disabled voices and narratives.

Conclusion

The data in this article reveals that Australian #OwnVoices YA fiction authors are still excluded from equal participation in the Australian publishing industry, despite increasing mainstream attention to diversity advocacy in children's and YA fiction in recent years. This suggests that Australian publishing houses have not been significantly impacted by movements such as WNDB or the call for more #OwnVoices fiction. The fact that we could only discern 46 Australian YA authors of #OwnVoices fiction (2% of total) indicates that publishers may be reluctant to embrace audience interest in inclusive fiction or confront their biases for over-publishing non-marginalized authors. This unexpected resistance to global diversity advocacy is revealing of how deeply the "privilege problem" is embedded within the Australian publishing industry, despite Australia's long history of adopting overseas publishing trends.

The under-representation of authors from Indigenous Australian communities, as well as queer and disabled communities, at big publishers was particularly striking. However,

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numbers do not provide insight into the decision making process of any of these authors with regard to publication.

evidence provided by our research can be used to empower Australian advocacy organizations such as *Voices From The Intersection* to lobby the local publishing industry for greater inclusion, in the same way that CCBC data has been effectively used by WNDB in the United States. Australian publishers need to scrutinize their author rosters for homogeneity and actively recruit new authors through established means or the creation of new opportunities. Examples include a public commitment to publish a set minimum number of #OwnVoices novels per year or the creation of writing prizes that specifically cater to emerging YA authors from marginalized communities and guarantee publication. However, Australian publishers must not restrict authors from marginalized communities to writing #OwnVoices stories, for such an expectation would curtail their creative freedoms.

Bookstores and libraries can support #OwnVoices books by ensuring that they are stocked and available for readers and given ample opportunities for promotion that are *not* based solely on their inclusion of marginalized identities, to avoid the higher risk these books have of being viewed as simply educational resources (Booth and Narayan, "The Expectations"). Similarly, school teachers can integrate #OwnVoices books into classroom discussions about literature where relevant and push for curriculum revisions that further diversify the texts available for study (Booth and Narayan, "Don't Talk"). Reviewers, in both professional spaces and online book-blogging communities, can facilitate the success of #OwnVoices books by raising awareness about existing titles through regular coverage of these releases in published reviews or social media posts and indicate to publishers that there is a demand for these stories. Adult readers can support the work of researchers and advocates in this space, based on each group's specific needs, as well as sharing #OwnVoices books with current children and teenagers to ensure these stories are accessible to the people they are written for.

Teenagers in Australia deserve to see themselves represented in the stories of YA fiction *and* the community of authors who create the books. Unless the under-representation of #OwnVoices books is addressed by Australian publishers, opportunities for progress will remain limited, and Australian YA fiction will not truly reflect its audience. Given the historical pattern of importing literary trends from overseas, Australia's publishing industry must decide whether it will meaningfully "continue to accept and embrace diversity" as the United States market has begun to do, or simply "hearken back to the hegemony […] of a bygone era…" (Pearce, "Messages from the Inside?", p.247). By tracking the Australian publishing industry's output of #OwnVoices YA fiction, we have contributed data that paves the way for positive change in the future.

Acknowledgements

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