

Editor's Message: Spring 2011

Posted on [June 14, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



by Sandra Hughes-Hassell

Welcome to the third issue of the *Journal for Research on Libraries and Young Adults (JRLYA)*, the online research journal of the Young Adult Library Services Association. Its purpose is to enhance the development of theory, research, and practices to support young adult library services.

In this issue, we are pleased to publish two papers, both of which focus on the importance of knowing our communities and the interests and needs of the young adults we serve. Arguing that in today's increasingly diverse society it is critical for libraries to collect titles featuring individuals from varied backgrounds, Casey H. Rawson examined the booklists on which many librarians rely for collection development guidance. Looking for a prevalence of diverse protagonists, her goal was to determine which booklists most closely align with actual demographic data for U.S. teens. Her definition of diversity is broad and goes beyond race and ethnicity to include gender, religion, family status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and disability. Her findings are surprising and serve to remind us of the need to engage in purposive collection development. As she points out, whether young adults use libraries may well depend on whether the resources they find there reflect the diversity they see in themselves and in their communities.

Pointing to research suggesting that male adolescent readers are often disengaged readers, Karen Gavigan makes the case that graphic novels can be used in schools and libraries as an effective literary medium for improving the reading motivation of struggling male adolescent readers. She provides an interesting look at the ways in which four struggling eighth-grade male readers responded to graphic novels and discusses implications for the use of graphic novels in schools and libraries.

We conclude this issue with abstracts of eleven posters that will be presented at the YALSA Research Committee Poster Session at this year's annual ALA meeting in New Orleans. The posters cover a variety of topics, represent an array of research methodologies, and feature research that has been completed by faculty members, doctoral students, and librarians. We hope reading the abstracts will pique your curiosity and that you will attend the poster session to talk to these researchers about their work. Perhaps you too will become inspired to engage in a research project to explore a question related to young adults and library services.

JRLYA is currently accepting manuscripts for upcoming issues based on original qualitative or quantitative research, an innovative conceptual framework, or a substantial literature review that opens new areas of inquiry and investigation. Case studies and works of literary analysis are also welcome. The journal recognizes the contributions other disciplines make to expanding and enriching theory, research, and practice in young adult

library services and encourages submissions from researchers, students, and practitioners in all fields. Please direct any manuscripts, questions, or comments to ysalresearch@gmail.com.



About Anna Lam

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2 Responses to *Editor's Message: Spring 2011*



[growing taller for idiots](#) says:

October 15, 2012 at 9:02 am

Hey there! This is my first visit to your blog! We are a collection of volunteers and starting a new initiative in a community in the same niche. Your blog provided us useful information to work on. You have done a wonderful job!

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[Eve Gaus](#) says:

October 15, 2012 at 4:44 pm

Thanks so much, we are glad that you enjoy the journal.

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The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults

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Are All Lists Created Equal? Diversity in Award-Winning and Bestselling Young Adult Fiction

Posted on [June 14, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



by **Casey H. Rawson**

Abstract

With increasingly diverse service populations, especially among younger patrons, libraries are in need of more titles featuring individuals from varied backgrounds. Librarians often rely upon preassembled title lists, such as YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults (BBYA) list or the *Publishers Weekly* bestsellers list, to make collection development decisions. This study examined three such lists for the prevalence of diverse protagonists, with the goal of determining which list most closely aligns with actual demographic data for U.S. teens. Award-winning, Teens' Top Ten, and bestselling titles were included in the study. Overall, the award-winning title list included the highest percentage of protagonists belonging to most marginalized demographic groups, while the bestselling title list included the lowest percentages in these categories. However, all three lists underrepresented protagonists from certain demographic categories. Based on these results, it is recommended that librarians supplement list-based collection development with purposive collection of titles featuring minority protagonists and/or written by minority authors.¹

Librarians who serve young adults are already seeing increasingly diverse service populations, and this diversity extends beyond race and ethnicity to include adolescents representing a wide range of religions, family backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and sexual orientations. Making collection development decisions that will meet the needs of such varied populations is a challenge compounded by the current economic climate, which has seen library budgets and staff positions slashed across the nation.

Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of giving young adults access to titles in which they can see a reflection of themselves—a character or author who shares their race, religion, living conditions, or sexual orientation. Yet in libraries with limited budgets and limited staff, determining which titles will accurately represent the diverse service population of that library might be considered too time-consuming. While popular review sources such as *MultiCultural Review* and *VOYA* provide author and character information for many young adult titles, perusing each issue of these sources is a lengthy process. Thus, many libraries rely heavily on preassembled title lists, such as YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults (BBYA) list or the *Publishers Weekly* Children's Bestsellers list, to determine their acquisitions. In some cases, such lists are actually written into libraries' collection development policies. But does either of these lists accurately reflect the diversity of the nation's young adult population?

Selecting for a Diverse Population: Why Spend the Time?

Several studies report that, despite fears to the contrary, the majority of U.S. adolescents still read outside of school.² However, national reading statistics, especially for minority students, paint a grim picture of literacy: while 41% of white students scored at or above proficiency on eighth-grade reading tests (a low number itself), only 14% of black students and 17% of Hispanic students reached proficiency.³ Similar results are obtained when family income is examined: only 16% of those eligible for the National School Lunch Program scored at or above proficiency, compared to 42% of students who are ineligible for the lunch assistance program.⁴

Given the poor literacy rates and growing numbers of minority students, strategies for improving variables relating to reading and literacy among these groups abound in educational and library science literature. One strategy which has received significant attention involves connecting young adults with literature in which they can find themselves accurately reflected.⁵ And while much has been written about literature for various races and ethnicities, it is important to note that diversity has many dimensions, including gender, nationality, religion, family status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and disability.⁶ As stated in one study examining multiple dimensions of diversity, “Constricting the discussion of multiculturalism to groups identifiable by racial identity alone excludes other marginalized groups from the debate and perpetuates their marginalization.”⁷ A brief summary of the findings of studies that have looked at each of these variables is provided below.

Gender: While a number of studies have examined issues related to gender in children’s literature, less has been done concerning young adult literature. Among children’s literature studies, the focus has been on analyzing not only the numbers of male vs. female characters, but also the portrayals of those characters in comparison to stereotypical gender-specific behaviors or characteristics.⁸ While in general these studies have found that female characters are both underrepresented and stereotyped within the studied samples, at least one study found that portrayals of males and females in nontraditional gender roles are on the rise.⁹

Race and Nationality: According to demographers, 2010 marked a turning point for the United States: last year, for the first time in American history, more minority babies were born in the U.S. than white babies.¹⁰ By the middle of this century, minorities are expected to comprise a majority of the U.S. population; among the under-eighteen population, that landmark is expected to be reached in the next decade. Many studies have looked at the role of race in children’s and young adult literature and/or the prevalence of minority characters in titles for this age group. The seminal study was conducted by Nancy Larrick in 1965; this study looked at 5,000 children’s books published in the early 1960s and found that only 6.7% included at least one African American character.¹¹ Since Larrick’s work, additional research has been done into children’s and young adult literature for or about African Americans,¹² Hispanics,¹³ Asians,¹⁴ and Native Americans,¹⁵ among other minority groups. These and other studies have consistently found that minority-race characters are underrepresented in fiction for children and young adults, and that existing portrayals of minority characters are often riddled with stereotypes or otherwise negative images. Studies addressing nationality of authors or characters are less common. One study that dealt with the issue of nationality in fiction novels found that titles by American authors included a higher number of minority-race characters than titles by foreign authors; however, minority characters in books by U.S. authors were more likely to be one-dimensional and stereotypical in their portrayal than minority characters in books by foreign authors.¹⁶

Religion: “Sex, politics, and religion are the three traditionally taboo subjects in polite American society,” □ wrote Patty Campbell, “and in young-adult literature the greatest of these taboos is religion.” □¹⁷ While little if any quantitative research has been done in this area, several researchers have completed limited content analysis studies on young adult titles which do have religious themes and characters.¹⁸ These authors conclude that given the prevalence of religion among adolescents and the U.S. population as a whole, there is a significant scarcity of titles dealing with religious themes being written for this age group.

Family Status: Despite the fact that adolescence is marked by increasing independence and separation from one’s parents or guardians, family structure is still an important element of diversity; the impact that a teen’s family setting has on the teen’s outside life cannot be ignored. Most studies in this area have focused on portrayal of families in television media; however, some authors have written about the role of family structure in the young adult novel, focusing on how teen fiction can be used to teach about the diversity of family types and other family issues.¹⁹

Sexual Orientation: Several content analysis studies have been published relating to the portrayal of LGBT characters in fiction for young adults.²⁰ These studies have found that portrayal of LGBT characters varies from novels which present homosexuality as a problem to be overcome to novels which are sympathetic to the character or view homosexuality as simply one relatively unremarkable facet to the character’s personality and lifestyle. In general, most research on this topic agrees that while some instances of problematic portrayals of LGBT characters persist, the trend is toward a more complex, sympathetic representation of these characters.

Socioeconomic Status: The 2009 American Community Survey found that 20% of children under the age of eighteen are living below the poverty line.²¹ One study found that texts offered to children in poverty often present poverty as a temporary problem, a construct which is far removed from the systemic poverty actually experienced by these children.²² On the other end of the class spectrum, YA books about the fabulously wealthy (i.e. the Gossip Girl, A-List, and Privileged series) are enjoying robust sales despite what many see as negative or even damaging portrayals of teenage sex, drugs, and the “mean-girl” □ lifestyle. In a 2006 article, Naomi Wolf harshly criticized these books for their depictions of class issues: “In the world of the “A-List” or “Clique” girl, inverting Austen (and Alcott), the rich are right and good simply by virtue of their wealth...Success and failure are entirely signaled by material possessions.” □²³

Disability: Numerous studies have attempted to quantify and/or evaluate fiction for children and teens that includes characters with physical or mental disabilities.²⁴ These studies stress the importance of such literature, especially in educational settings where disabled students are integrated into mainstream classrooms. As one researcher states, “Reading good literature can do much more than teach literary skills. Promotion of positive attitudes toward inclusion and students with disabilities must take place.” □²⁵

Thus, literature that includes diverse characters gives adolescents “an opportunity to see their own faces reflected in the pages of good books.” □²⁶ Yet it is not only their own reflections which are of value for young adults; encountering characters unlike themselves can be of equal value. As Hazel Rochman states in her book *Against Borders: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World*, “Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community; not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others.” □²⁷ Providing a diverse collection of young adult literature is not merely about increasing test scores or leisure reading; some researchers maintain that such

literature is vital for overall success in life. One such researcher argues that adolescents who never see themselves reflected in literature may develop a decreased sense of self-worth and may come to believe that they have little value within either the school or social community.²⁸

So if diverse texts are championed by research, why aren't they more visible in libraries that serve young adults? Studies have identified several barriers to the use and collection of such titles. One barrier is a lack of education and training among educators and librarians regarding diverse texts.²⁹ Another, perhaps more critical, obstacle is the scarcity of titles written by authors from diverse backgrounds.³⁰

Despite these barriers, building a diverse library collection for young adult patrons is possible. Given time constraints experienced by all professionals, including librarians, identifying categories of items which fulfill a demonstrated need is an important goal of professional research. The study described below compares three categories of young adult literature in terms of character diversity; the goal is to assist librarians by providing guidelines which will help them identify booklists that more accurately reflect the diversity of their young adult populations.

Research Methods

Included Titles

Three categories of young adult fiction were analyzed to determine their relative levels of diversity in terms of protagonists. The three categories of literature included in the study are:

1. *Award-Winning Young Adult Fiction*: This category included fiction novels which won either the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature, the Printz Honor, or the YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults (BBYA) award between 2000 and 2009. Fiction titles appearing on both the Printz and BBYA Top Ten lists were only counted once.
2. *Teen-Selected Top Ten Fiction Titles*: Each year, fifteen teen book groups at libraries across the country nominate a list of current young adult titles to be included in YALSA's "Teens' Top Ten" contest. In August and September, teens are allowed to vote for their three favorite titles through the YALSA website. The ten titles that receive the most votes are announced each year during Teen Read Week. Fiction titles appearing on this list between 2003 (the first year this list was published) and 2009 were included in the study. This group represents a middle ground between the award-winning books (which are determined by adults and are generally considered to emphasize literary quality over popularity) and the bestselling books discussed below.
3. *Bestselling Young Adult Fiction*: The ten top-selling young adult fiction titles for each year between 2000 and 2009 as determined by *Publishers Weekly* made up the third group of titles in this study. The *Publishers Weekly* bestsellers list includes both children's and YA titles; children's titles were discarded from the list and only items published for ages twelve and up (as determined by book review sources) were included in the study. Only "frontlist" books published in each calendar year were included to eliminate duplications.

Books appearing in more than one of the above categories were counted once in each applicable category. The data collected were compared across subgroups and with the actual demographics of the United States teen

population, as determined by U.S. census data and other demographic resources such as the National Center for Education Statistics. ‘

‘Coding Categories

As discussed above, diversity has more than one dimension. This study examined dimensions of gender, race, nationality, religion, family status, socioeconomic status (SES), sexuality, and disability (presence or absence) for protagonists of each title. Most books had only one protagonist, but some titles had multiple main characters; in those cases, all protagonists were analyzed. For each dimension of diversity, the following categories were used:

- Gender: Male and Female were the only categories included in this study; no transgendered or third-gendered protagonists were found.
- Race/ethnicity: U.S. Census categories for race were used in this study: White, Black/African American, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian. An additional category of “Other”□ was included for protagonists who did not belong to any of these groups.
- Nationality: Birth country was recorded for protagonists.
- Religion: The category for this dimension included three major religions: Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Two additional categories were included: “Not Mentioned,”□ for titles which do not specify a religious background for their protagonists, and “Other”□ for titles in which the protagonist practices a religion other than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.
- Family structure: Categories for family structure were adapted from Nisse (2008).³¹ Protagonists were coded as having Dual Parents if they lived in a home with two biological parents or one biological parent and a stepparent. Protagonists were coded as having a Single Parent if they lived with only their biological mother or father. Two categories were used for protagonists being raised by non-parents: Guardianship by a Relative or Guardianship by a Non-Relative. If the protagonist lived on their own, they were placed into the Orphan/No Guardian category.
- Socioeconomic status: Protagonists were coded as belonging to either the Low, Middle, or High socioeconomic class. “Low”□ was defined for this study as lacking some basic needs such as food or shelter, “Middle”□ was defined as having sufficient resources to meet all basic needs, and “High”□ was defined as having an abundance of resources.
- Sexuality: Protagonists in this study fell into four sexual identity categories: Straight, Gay, Bisexual, and Questioning. In cases where the protagonist had no demonstrated romantic interest within the novel, the character was coded as being straight.
- Disability: Characters were coded as either having a disability or not based on the criteria defined by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: “An individual is considered to have a ‘disability’ if s/he has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.”□³²

Two additional pieces of information—genre and setting—were recorded for each title. Genre determinations were made with the assistance of the NoveList database and tag clouds from LibraryThing. Even with the assistance of these resources, many titles did not clearly fit into a single genre, and in such cases the ultimate decision was made by the researcher. Four setting categories—Rural, Suburban, Urban, and Other—were used to describe the predominant location of each title. The “Other”□ category was used when a variety of settings appeared in the same book with no single setting achieving clear prominence, as in several of the action and adventure or fantasy books.

Literature databases were used as the primary data source for this study, with the actual titles being used when necessary to confirm ambiguous data or to determine missing data. The primary review sources consulted were NoveList and the Children’s Comprehensive Literature Database (CCLD), both of which contain basic bibliographic information and reviews for a range of titles. Reviews incorporated into each database record come from *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)*, *Booklist*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, and a variety of other sources. Tag clouds on LibraryThing (<http://www.librarything.com>) were also consulted for some titles and were of particular help when determining genre. Characters were coded as belonging to one of the above categories where explicitly stated in the review sources or where clearly inferable from the original text. For some titles, even when the title itself was consulted, some characteristics of the protagonist remained ambiguous. In those cases, no further effort was made to acquire the missing data.

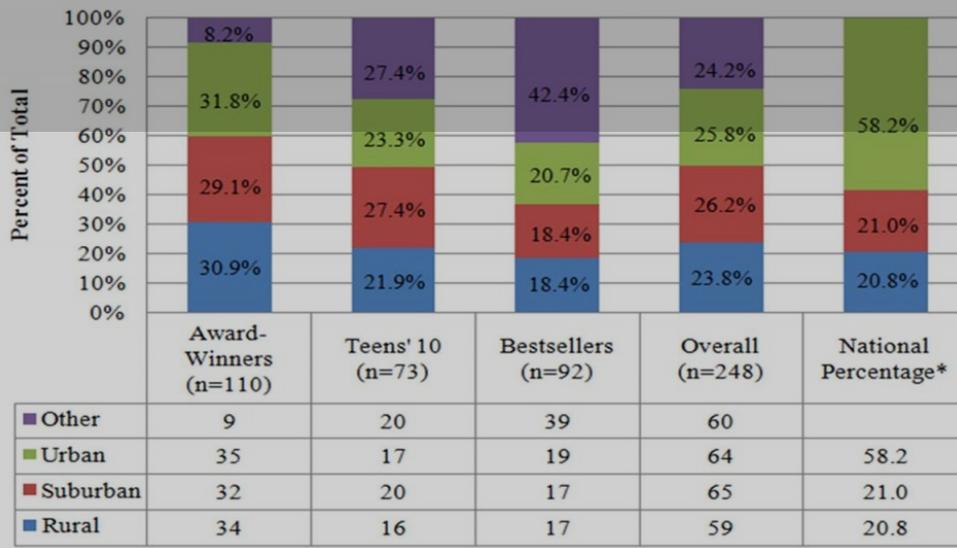
Results

A total of 248 unique titles were included in this analysis—114 award-winning novels, 74 Teens’ Top Ten novels, and 92 bestselling novels. Some books appeared on more than one of these lists. Over 90% of titles were successfully coded for all variables; of the remaining, no book had more than three uncoded variables. The key findings from this study are reported below.

Underrepresented Protagonist Categories

Several categories of protagonists were underrepresented in the data set across all three study groups when compared to actual U.S. demographic information. Urban-dwelling protagonists, who comprised roughly one-fourth of the overall sample, are one such underrepresented group. In reality, over half (58.2%) of United States residents live in urban areas (cities which have a population greater than two hundred thousand), with the remainder of U.S. residents evenly divided among suburban and rural settings.³³ The award-winning category had the highest percentage of urban settings, at 31.8%; only 20.7% of bestsellers took place in urban settings. For a full breakdown of novel settings, see Figure 1.

Figure 1: Novel Setting



Source: Federal Highway Administration

a full breakdown of novel settings

‘Minority-race (non-white) protagonists are also underrepresented across all three categories of titles. Overall, 81.1% of protagonists in the sample were white; this compares to a national percentage of 56.7% white among children and teens ages nineteen and under.³⁴

The award-winning titles category exhibited the most racial diversity; in this category, 65.6% of protagonists were white, 10.4% were black, and 4.8% were Hispanic. The bestsellers category exhibited the least racial diversity among protagonists; in this category 92.6% of protagonists were white. Hispanic protagonists were particularly underrepresented among these books: Hispanic protagonists comprised 3.7% of this sample, but nationally, 21.3% of children and teens are Hispanic.³⁵

Table 1 includes complete data for protagonist race.

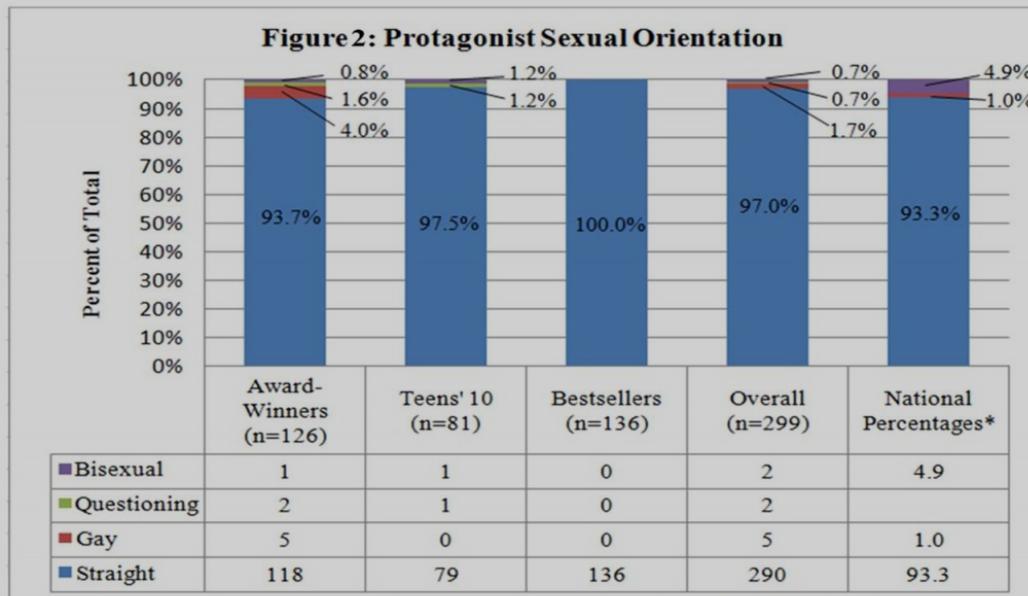
Table 1: Protagonist Race and National Demographic Data

	Award-Winners (n=125)	Teens' Top Ten (n=78)	Bestsellers (n=136)	Overall (n=297)	National Percentages*
White	65.6% (82)	89.7% (70)	92.6% (126)	81.1% (241)	56.7%
Black	10.4% (13)	2.6% (2)	1.5% (2)	5.4% (16)	15.3%
Asian	6.4% (8)	1.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	3.0% (9)	4.1%
Hispanic	4.8% (6)	3.8% (3)	3.7% (5)	3.7% (11)	21.3%
Biracial / Multiracial	3.2% (4)	1.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.3% (4)	3.2%
American Indian	2.4% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.0% (3)	1.3%
Other	7.2% (9)	1.3% (1)	2.2% (3)	4.4% (13)	0.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *American FactFinder: 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates* (2009).

Table 1 includes complete data for protagonist race.

LGBT protagonists were underrepresented within the bestsellers category, where all one hundred and thirty-six coded protagonists were identified as straight or as having no romantic preference within the novel. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual protagonists were found among the award-winning and Teens' Top Ten titles, where their prevalence was similar to actual U.S. demographics among teens.³⁷ See Figure 2 for a complete breakdown of results in this category.

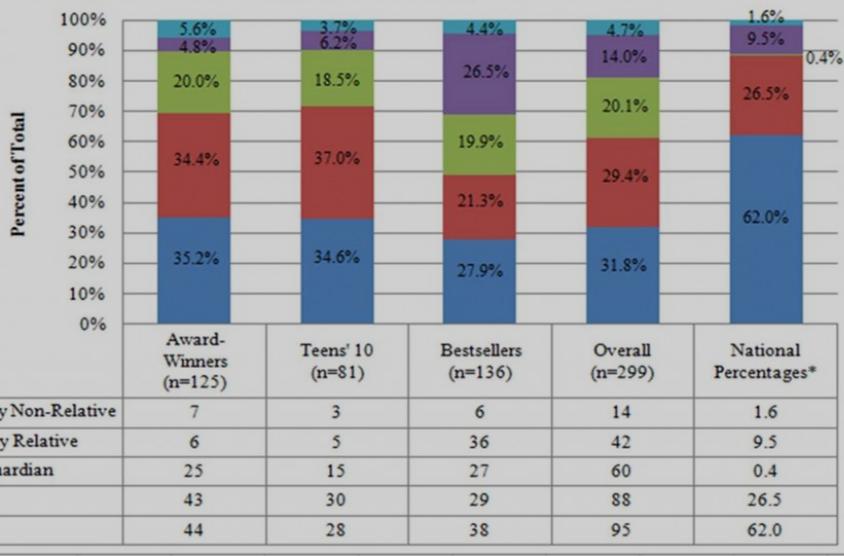


Source: Debby Herbenick et al., "Sexual Behavior in the United States: Results from a National Probability Sample of Men and Women ages 14-94," *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 7, suppl. 5 (2010): 255-265

complete breakdown of results in this category

Protagonists raised outside of a dual-parent home (68.2%) were overrepresented in this sample; nationally, 68.0% of children and teens live in dual-parent households.³⁸ Similarly, roughly 20% of protagonists in this study were orphans or had no guardian; this is much higher than the actual national percentage of 0.4%.³⁹ These percentages did not vary greatly among the three title categories. Results for protagonist family structure are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Protagonist Family Structure

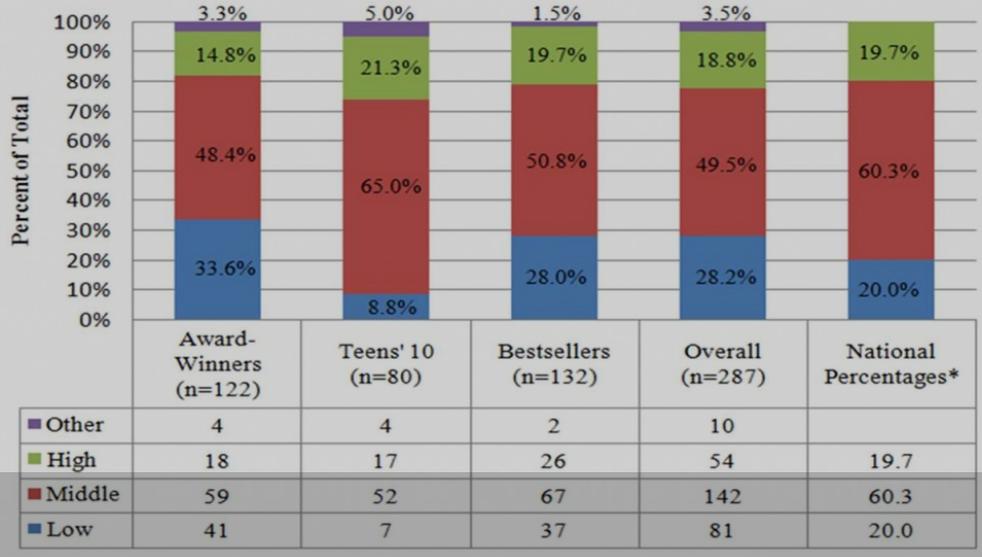


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *American FactFinder: 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates* (2009).

Results for protagonist family structure

For award-winning and bestselling titles, higher percentages of protagonists were identified as belonging to the low socioeconomic class (33.6% and 28.0%, respectively) than the actual percentage of children and teens in poverty in the United States (20.0%).⁴⁰ Full results for protagonist socioeconomic status are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Protagonist Socioeconomic Status



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *American FactFinder: 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates* (2009).

Full results for protagonist socioeconomic status

Cross-Category Comparisons between White and Minority Protagonists

Looking across all three categories of books, there were 241 white protagonists and 56 minority-race protagonists. When compared to white protagonists, protagonists of color were:

- more likely to be featured in realistic fiction (42.0% of minority protagonists vs. 25.7% of white protagonists) and historical fiction (26.0% vs. 8.9%) titles;
- less likely to be featured in fantasy (10.0% of minority protagonists vs. 31.9% of white protagonists), humor (0.0% vs. 8.9%), and action and adventure (2.0% vs. 5.8%) titles;
- more likely to be male (58.2% of minority protagonists vs. 46.1% of white protagonists);
- more likely to be identified as religious (25.0% of minority protagonists vs. 8.0% of white protagonists);
- less likely to be part of a dual-parent home (25.9% of minority protagonists vs. 33.2% of white protagonists) and less likely to be raised by a related guardian (5.6% vs. 16.4%);
- more likely to be an orphan or to have no guardian (27.8% vs. 18.0%) and slightly more likely to be part of a single-parent family (31.5% vs. 28.6%);
- more likely to be in the low socioeconomic class (44.2% vs. 24.3%) and less likely to be in the high socioeconomic class (7.7% vs. 21.7%);
- more likely to be identified as gay, questioning, or bisexual (5.4% vs. 2.5%);
- more likely to have been written by a male author (59.2% of books featuring a minority protagonist were written by males vs. 48.9% of books featuring a white protagonist);
- much more likely to have been written by an author of color (38.3% vs. 1.0%); and,
- more likely to have been written by an author from the United States (83.3% vs. 68.4%).

Discussion

Where should librarians turn to find ready-made booklists that reflect the diversity of their service populations? The results of this study show that if YA librarians rely only or mostly on bestseller lists for collection development, many young adults from diverse backgrounds will be underserved. The bestsellers list was fairly balanced in terms of protagonist gender, contained a large percentage of foreign-born characters, and included a diverse range of titles as far as protagonist family structure and socioeconomic status. However, non-white, LGBT, and religious protagonists are underrepresented on this list, as are protagonists identified as having a disability and those living in urban areas.

The Teens' Top Ten list fared a bit better than the bestsellers list in some categories and a bit worse in others. The Teens' Top Ten list featured slightly more urban, LGBT, disabled, and non-white protagonists. However, this list also has deficits in comparison to the bestsellers list and to national demographics: male protagonists are underrepresented, as are protagonists in the low socioeconomic class, and religious protagonists are still rare.

Overall, the award-winning books most closely matched the actual demographics of the U.S. teen population, although even this list had some shortfalls. This list was fairly balanced in terms of its protagonist gender

breakdown and included a higher percentage of urban protagonists than the other two groups. The award-winning titles had the highest percentage of non-white protagonists and included at least one protagonist from each racial group identified by the U.S. Census (the only list which did so). This list also included the highest percentage of religious protagonists and the highest percentage of protagonists from the low socioeconomic class (who are actually overrepresented on this list compared to national data). Award-winning titles featured LGBT protagonists at a rate that is consistent with national estimates. These titles also featured disabled characters more commonly than titles in the other groups.

So does this mean that librarians can fully rely on award-winning title lists? No. Aside from considerations of readability and popularity of these texts versus bestselling titles, the award-winning list still falls short in some aspects of diversity. Along with the other lists, the award-winning list:

- lacks adequate representation of Hispanic protagonists,
- underrepresents protagonists in urban settings,
- underrepresents religious protagonists, and
- is heavily skewed toward a small number of genres.

Hispanic protagonists are severely underrepresented on all lists in comparison with the actual demographic data for U.S. adolescents and children. This may be because there has not yet been a major movement among scholars, parents, teachers, and librarians to push for titles for and about Hispanics and Latinos as there was for titles for and about African Americans in the U.S. in the 1970s.⁴¹ As the Hispanic and Latino population in the U.S. continues to grow, a movement for titles in this arena may be on the horizon.

All lists underrepresent urban-dwelling protagonists. However, this may be at least partially explained by the large numbers of historical fiction and fantasy titles included in this study. While books were coded as having urban settings if they took place in cities of the past or in fantasy cities, large numbers of these books took place in rural settings or had other/mixed settings.

The need for more titles featuring religious protagonists is confirmed in this study. Across all categories, religious protagonists comprise a small minority; protagonists from non-Christian religions are particularly rare. Most protagonists in the “other” religion category practiced a fictional religion rather than an existing one (for example, two of the protagonists in G. P. Taylor’s *Shadowmancer* practice a religion which resembles Christianity, but is not). Religion is a major part of life for many, if not most, children and teens in the U.S.; one recent study found that 65.3% of children and teens ages six to seventeen participate in religious activities once a month or more.⁴² The lack of young adult titles which address this aspect of teen life is puzzling; the idea that authors view religion as somehow “taboo” seems to be an inadequate explanation since authors and publishers seem perfectly willing to feature other, even more sensitive, issues such as teen sex, pregnancy, drug use, and physical abuse. More research into this question is necessary.

Each of the three lists included in this study is heavily skewed towards one to two genres. Thus, relying on any one of these lists would result in a collection which is lacking in several key areas. The award-winning titles are biased toward realistic fiction and historical fiction; fantasy, science fiction, action and adventure, and sports novels (all popular genres) are comparatively neglected. Among Teens’ Top Ten books, fantasy and realistic titles are

included at a high rate at the expense of other genres; among bestsellers, fantasy and humor novels together comprise the majority of titles.

Agosto, Hughes-Hassell, and Gilmore-Clough wrote about the scarcity of minority protagonists in genre fiction, particularly fantasy titles.⁴³ This study supported their conclusions; 31.9% of white protagonists were featured in fantasy titles, versus 10.0% of minority protagonists. Of the five minority protagonists who were featured in fantasy titles, one was black (a protagonist in G. P. Taylor's *Shadowmancer*), and the remainder were classified in the "other" category because they were described as being of a fictional race. Science fiction was a bit better; of the four minority protagonists, one was Asian, one was Hispanic, and two were other (alien). The tendency of authors to feature minority protagonists in realistic or historical fiction is an interesting trend and worthy of future research. This tendency may be an outgrowth of a repeated call among researchers for "culturally conscious"⁴⁴ or "enabling"⁴⁵ texts which challenge racial stereotypes, provide literary role models for minority teens, and connect with teens' cultural heritages. Authors who feature minority protagonists may be choosing to create such texts by directly confronting historical or contemporary racial issues (a task to which historical fiction and realistic fiction are well-suited) rather than dealing with such issues indirectly in a different genre.

Another interesting finding was that in this sample set, non-white protagonists were more than twice as likely to be identified as gay, bisexual, or questioning as white protagonists. The reasons for this are unclear; perhaps it is the case that authors who feature protagonists who are marginalized in terms of race are more willing to also feature protagonists who are marginalized in terms of sexuality. Further research would be interesting to see if these findings would be duplicated across a broader sample of young adult literature.

Another question that this research does not address, but which would be a potentially fruitful course of study, is why so little protagonist diversity (at least in several of the dimensions studied here) exists in bestselling young adult novels. To some extent, the market controls what sells and what doesn't, and it could be the case that books with minority protagonists are truly not as appealing to wide audiences. However, even if this is the case, we must begin to ask why that might be so. Are white, straight, middle-class teens uninterested in reading about characters who are different from them, and if so, could this be because the large majority of the books that they have read and enjoyed do not feature minority characters? Are minority teens not purchasing books, and if so is this because a) they simply don't want to read, b) they can't afford the books, c) there are not enough characters like them in the books to which they have easy access, or d) some other reason? How does the marketing of young adult titles differ between books featuring minorities and other books, and how much might those differences account for the dearth of minority protagonists on bestsellers lists?

Conclusion

The job of a youth services librarian in an era of decreasing budgets, decreasing staff, and increasing demand for services is not easy. Collection development is only one of many duties for a librarian, and reliance upon preassembled title lists such as those studied here is understandable when simply keeping a library open can at times consume all of a librarian's work hours. However, study upon study has demonstrated the importance of building a quality collection for young adult library users—a collection in which all users can find themselves accurately portrayed while also experiencing rich portrayals of characters which are unlike themselves. This study has demonstrated that while award-winning lists include more diversity on the whole than Teens' Top Ten lists or

bestsellers lists, no single list, or even a combination of these lists, is sufficient across all aspects of diversity studied here.

What does this mean for librarians? It doesn't mean that relying upon lists is necessarily bad—there are many valid reasons why both award-winning and bestselling titles deserve a place on library shelves. However, it does mean that these lists alone are insufficient, and purchasing plans which are based solely on such lists should be reevaluated to include more titles individually selected by librarians to increase diversity within the collection. Despite their lack of representation on commonly-used preassembled lists, such books do exist—the Library Booklists website links to hundreds of them (<http://librarybooklists.org/fiction/ya/yadiverse.htm>) and the journal *MultiCultural Review*, published four times annually, features new titles which include characters or subjects of differing “ethnicity, race, spirituality, religion, disability, and language” □ (<http://www.mcreview.com/>).

Whether or not libraries are ready for them, millions of children from diverse backgrounds will soon be finding their way into young adult collections for the first time. Whether they come back may well depend on whether the books they find there include characters whose racial, religious, socioeconomic, family, romantic, and health backgrounds reflect the diversity they see in themselves and in their communities. And whether they find those books depends on whether librarians are willing to embrace a broad view of diversity—looking beyond simply protagonists' race or ethnicity—and take the time to locate and purchase titles featuring protagonists from marginalized groups who are portrayed accurately and compassionately. If, as a profession, librarians can commit to doing this, then the overall diversity of our collections will increase along with the rising diversity of the populations we are serving. And perhaps, if every library in the country begins ordering titles that feature diverse characters and/or are written by authors from diverse backgrounds, we might even rewrite the bestsellers list and in so doing help to change the face of publishing in the United States. That is a lofty goal, and one that only people—not lists—can achieve.

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One Response to *Are All Lists Created Equal? Diversity in Award-Winning and Bestselling Young Adult Fiction*



[Karen Hildebrand](#) says:

March 13, 2012 at 8:03 pm

Hope you will check out the Notable Books for a Global Society Award List. Many of the concerns in this article are the very things we look for in our NBGS winners.

[Reply](#)

More Powerful than a Locomotive: Using Graphic Novels to Motivate Struggling Male Adolescent Readers

Posted on [June 14, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



by Karen Gavigan

Abstract

Although the popularity of graphic novels is growing by leaps and bounds, there is currently little empirical research documenting their use with struggling male adolescent readers. The purpose of this article is to present the results of a study that examined the ways in which four struggling eighth-grade male readers responded to graphic novels during a graphic novel book club. During the twelve book club sessions, the students read self-selected graphic novels and discussed them with their peers. Findings from the study support the use of graphic novels with struggling male adolescent readers. Results from the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) revealed significant improvement in the students' value of reading and moderate improvement in their self-concept as a reader. Furthermore, the participants' responses to graphic novels indicated that reading graphic novels improved their reading engagement and had a positive effect on their reading motivation.

The gap in reading proficiency between males and females (favoring girls) has been well-documented through the years. In 2009, fifteen-year-old female students scored higher on average than male students on the combined reading literacy scale in sixty-five countries.¹ Additional studies have revealed that the gap between male and female reading achievement increases over time. For example, in 2008, nine-year-old girls scored an average of seven points higher than boys on standardized reading tests while seventeen-year-old girls scored eleven points higher than boys.² In addition, the average sophomore girl reads about as well as the average senior boy.³ By the time males enter high school, over half identify as non-readers.⁴ As Brozo states, "It is perhaps this long well-documented history of male underachievement that has helped contribute to an entrenched, popular perception, and indeed an expectation, that many boys simply will not become thoughtful, accomplished readers."⁵

Since disengaged readers are at risk of becoming poor readers, we must learn how to provide male readers with texts that are meaningful to their literate lives. It is essential that they become competent readers in order to become successful at school and in the workplace. Now more than ever, there is a need for literacy practices that will engage struggling male adolescent readers. There is a growing belief among many literacy educators that graphic novels can be a valuable literacy format for engaging students in positive literary experiences.⁶ However, although the popularity of graphic novels is growing by leaps and bounds, there is little empirical research that documents their use with male adolescents in school and library settings. This article makes the case that graphic novels can be used in schools and libraries as an effective literary medium for improving the reading motivation of

struggling male adolescent readers. An overview of the ways in which four struggling eighth-grade male readers responded to graphic novels is presented. In addition, implications for the use of graphic novels in schools and libraries are discussed and the recommendation is made for additional research to validate the use of graphic novels in school and library settings.

Graphic Novels and Struggling Male Adolescent Readers

Booth suggests that there are definite problems with the ways in which struggling male readers view themselves as literate beings.⁷ Struggling male adolescent readers are often reluctant to embrace school literacies due to a history of failed attempts. They may simply withdraw from reading activities in the hope that they will be less likely to be labeled as poor readers. As Tatum writes about struggling African American adolescent male readers, “Having insufficient skills and strategies to comprehend texts embarrasses the hell out of students.”⁸ Many educators and theorists believe that when male readers select engaging reading materials, such as graphic novels, it can help them find their reading voices by choosing to read rather than choosing not to read at all.⁹ For example, Thompson writes that graphic novels are skewed towards boys’ interests and naturally grab the attention of many male readers.¹⁰ Furthermore, in a longitudinal study of male reading habits, Smith and Wilhelm found that graphic novels were one of the few types of texts that actively engaged male readers.¹¹

Graphic novels reflect the impact of an increasingly visual culture on today’s youth. The non-threatening visual format of graphic novels often appeals to males and can foster an enthusiasm towards books and reading. The illustrations in graphic novels blend with the text, which often attracts struggling male adolescent readers who are intimidated by text alone. As McVicker found, visual literacy can open the door to reading for the challenged student because they help the reader comprehend the text, even when print alone fails.¹² Specifically, graphic novels help struggling readers make meaning from the text by examining the details in the illustrations and inferring what the artist intended.¹³

One reason many teachers use graphic novels in the classroom is to steer students toward more prose”□oriented texts such as the classics.¹⁴ The engaging illustrations and lower reading levels attract reluctant readers and are a means of exposing them to visual adaptations of the literary canon. Furthermore, reading the graphic novel counterpart of a title may inspire a reader to move on to the original version. Samuel Johnson once wrote, “[Y]ou have done a great deal when you have brought a boy to have entertainment from a book. He’ll get better books afterwards.”□¹⁵ More recently, Brenner, author of *Understanding Manga and Anime*, stated, “Even if a guy is a natural reader, as guys pass into their teen years, reading becomes a far less ‘cool’ thing to be doing. Comics (graphic novels), represent a widespread and still ‘cool’ way to read that will keep the spark of enjoying reading alive. When they’re ready, they’ll remember that reading can be fun, and will gradually branch out into other formats from traditional prose to poetry.”□¹⁶

Participating in a Graphic Novel Book Club

In order to examine the ways in which struggling male adolescent readers respond to graphic novels, I implemented a graphic novel book club at a middle school in central North Carolina. The participants in this study were four eighth-grade male students from Western Middle School (the school’s name and the names of participants in this article are pseudonyms). The school serves grades six through eight with a student population of 859. Western Middle School used the Accelerated Reader program as part of their language arts curriculum for

eight years before moving to a Sustained Silent Reading Program (SSR) in 2007. The participants were members of an eighth-grade language arts class that meets during the school's designated Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time. One of the criteria for the study was that each of the participants was a Level One reader, defined by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as one who "does not have sufficient mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area to be successful in the next grade level."¹⁷ Two of the participants were Caucasians and two were African Americans.

The study took place from September through December of 2009, during twelve graphic novel book club sessions. Throughout the study, the students read graphic novels of their choice from a collection of over ninety titles that I brought to the school. They had access to this collection throughout the semester. They were also able to access a large graphic novel collection available in their school library. Twenty minutes of silent reading time were included in each book club session followed by ten minutes of discussion. The discussion was focused on what the students read during that session rather than waiting until they completed their graphic novel. I facilitated the discussions using probe-based interview questions to help maintain the focus of the discussion during the sessions.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through the following means:

- Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP)
- Observations
- Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) logs
- Teacher interviews

A description of each is provided below.

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile

The Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) is an instrument that provided information about the participants' reading motivation by assessing adolescents' responses to graphic novels. Specifically, the AMRP elicited information about the value students placed on reading activities and their self-perceived competence in reading. The instrument was designed in 2006 by a team of eleven researchers to be used with adolescents at eight sites in the United States and Trinidad¹⁸ and is based on the original Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) designed to assess the reading motivation of elementary students.¹⁹ The AMRP includes two instruments: the reading survey and the conversational interview. The reading survey is a self-reporting instrument administered to a group, and the conversational interview is administered on an individual basis. The reading survey has twenty items based on a four-point Likert scale. The Self-Concept scale and Value of Reading scale each have ten items, with a possible total score of forty. The Self-Concept and Value of Reading scales were combined to give the total score. Examples of questions from the AMRP reading survey follow:

- Reading a book is something I like to do
 - Never
 - Not very often
 - Sometimes

- Often
- I am
 - A poor reader
 - An OK reader
 - A good reader
 - A very good reader
- When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel
 - Very happy
 - Sort of happy
 - Sort of unhappy
 - Unhappy

As suggested by the authors of the AMRP, I modified and adapted the conversational interview questions to better meet the needs of this study.’ I added the following questions that specifically pertained to graphic novels:

- Have you ever read a graphic novel?
- If so, how do graphic novels compare to other materials you have read?
- Do you feel that you are a good reader when you read graphic novels?
- Do you feel more confident reading aloud when you read graphic novels?
- What do you think about using graphic novels in schools?
- Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experiences reading graphic novels?

Observations

I observed the participants during their time spent in twelve graphic novel book club sessions. I took detailed notes during each session and I tape-recorded the participants’ comments and responses to questions. Throughout the study, the participants selected their books quickly and sat down to read when they arrived for their sessions. They appeared to be engaged with the titles they read for the twenty-minute reading periods. With almost every graphic novel they selected, the students methodically read their books sentence by sentence and picture by picture. I rarely had to discipline them in the sessions because they were so absorbed in studying the pictures and reading the text. Although I allowed them to select another book if they realized that the one they selected didn’t interest them, they seldom returned a title before they had completed it.

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) Logs

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) logs were used by the eighth grade language arts teacher to determine what books her students read throughout the semester. The literature logs also elicited their responses to the books. The SSR reading logs allowed me to examine the reactions of the participants to the graphic novels they were reading, both in and outside the context of the graphic novel book club. In addition to listing the book’s title, author, and genre, the students were asked to provide a rating for their book from one to five stars, and to indicate whether they would recommend the book to a classmate. Unfortunately, three of the participants did a poor job of including their ratings and recommendations, and Jim’s reading log was the only one that was complete. The ratings that he

gave for the graphic novels he listed ranged from three to five stars. Furthermore, he recommended all but one of the graphic novels he read to his classmates.

Teacher Interviews

I interviewed the language arts teacher three times throughout the study. These conversational interviews enabled me to learn about the students' literacy behaviors in the context of their classroom and school library when I was not in these settings. The following questions were asked during each of the teacher interviews:

- What types of behavior have you observed with the participants in their responses to graphic novels
 - In your classroom?
 - In the media center?
 - In the book club sessions with their classmates?
- Do the participants discuss graphic novels, and if so, what do they say
 - With their classmates?
 - With you?
 - With the media specialists or other teachers?
 - In the book club sessions with their classmates?
- Do the participants talk about the visuals in graphic novels? If so, what do they say?
- Have you observed any changes in the reading self-concept of the participants since they began participating in the graphic novel book club? If so, please describe the changes you have observed.
- Have you observed any changes in the ways the participants value reading since they began participating in the graphic novel book club? If so, please describe the changes you have observed.
- Do you have any other comments regarding graphic novels and the ways in which the participants respond to them?

A Promising Format for Reading Motivation and Comprehension

In terms of this study, reading graphic novels improved the participants' reading engagement and had a positive effect on their reading motivation. Furthermore, the use of graphic novels helped to aid the participants' knowledge of vocabulary and facilitated their reading comprehension.' The results of the study follow:

Findings from the AMRP Scores

Value of Reading Scores

The scores from the AMRP survey instruments demonstrated that all four of the participants experienced an increase in their value of reading after the graphic novel book club intervention. The pre- and post-raw scores are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Value of Reading Scores

The average increase in the Value of Reading raw scores was 4.25 for the four participants, an average increase of 10.25 percent. Even with the small sample size, the increase was significant, as shown by a paired t-test ($t=6.76$, $df=3$, $p=.003$). The fact that all of the participants' Value of Reading scores increased over the course of the study suggests that they developed a greater appreciation for reading than they had before the graphic novel book club intervention. Furthermore, the participants read a total of sixty-three graphic novels during the two-month study. Frank read seventeen titles, Matthew read fifteen titles, Bob read ten titles, and Jim read twenty-one titles. Given that the participants were struggling adolescent readers, this would be considered by many to be a large number of titles read over a short amount of time.

Self-Concept as a Reader Scores

As indicated in the table below, Frank and Matthew had increases of two points in their raw scores for Self-Concept as a Reader. However, the raw scores of Bob and Jim remained the same.

Table 2: Self Concept as a Reader Score

The fact that the increases for the participants' Self-Concept as a Reader scores were not significant is consistent with a previous study's finding that boys tend to think they are bad readers.²⁰ Furthermore, Pajares and Valiante conducted a study that demonstrated a decline in academic self-efficacy when students progressed from elementary to high school.²¹ Given that the research shows evidence of lower academic self-efficacy among secondary students, it is not surprising that only two of the participants in this study had two point increases while the Self-Concept of the Reader scores for the other two participants exhibited no growth. Although the Self-Concept as a Reader scores were mixed, there were indications from the conversations and interviews that pointed to signs of moderate improvement in the participants' reading efficacy.

Findings from Student and Teacher Observations and Interviews

Value of the Visuals in Graphic Novels

It was apparent from the students' comments that both their comprehension and motivation to read were enhanced by the illustrations in the graphic novels they read. The combination of pictures and text in graphic novels served as a scaffold that facilitated their reading comprehension and motivation. As Bob stated, "I just like having pictures and I like the captions. I don't like reading paragraphs."□ In addition, Jim described why he believed he was an effective reader when he read graphic novels: "Because I can understand mostly what's happening right away...If you don't understand something, maybe the picture can help you out a little."□ Similarly, Frank stated, "When I see the pictures, it tells you a lot more of what's happening and like when there are words that you don't know, you just look at the pictures and it tells you what they're doing."□ Frank also believed that reading graphic novels improved his vocabulary development. He stated that he was a better reader after reading graphic novels "...because I can understand it more. Vocabulary discussion makes you a better reader."□ The combination of sequential art and text seemed to help the participants make meaning of vocabulary and content that they may not have been able to comprehend in text-only literature.

Value of Graphic Novels in the Book Club Sessions

The students' responses show that they also valued their time in the book club sessions. They found the discussions to be meaningful, and they appreciated the time away from the larger class setting. For example, after the sixth session, Frank asked if we could begin meeting twice a week. He commented that he enjoyed the sessions and could "read better" than when they were in their classroom for SSR time. The other boys echoed his comments and they voted to change our schedule so that we could meet semiweekly instead of weekly.' In addition, the language arts teacher reported that the boys "really look forward to participating in the sessions" and asked her repeatedly, "When is that lady coming back?" The boys' enthusiasm about participating in the socially-situated book club discussions suggests the importance of a reading community for adolescent readers. This builds on a recent Canadian study of teen readers, which showed that the participants exhibited positive attitudes toward the act of reading for pleasure in a social context.²²

Value of Graphic Novels in the Classroom and Library

The language arts teacher commented that the participants were "eager to get their books" when they came into language arts class for SSR time. She added, "They pull the graphic novel cart out as soon as class starts." She also reported that they sought out the graphic novel collection during their visits to the school library. Frank was frequently seen looking at the graphic novels on the graphic novel carousel in the school library when their class went to check out books. The teacher also observed Frank asking the school librarian to help him locate a particular graphic novel. Finally, during the fifth book club session, I asked Bob if he would be interested in checking out graphic novels in the school library and he answered, "Yes, there are so many good ones."

Even though two of the participants did not show an increase in their AMRP Self-Concept as a Reader scores, their comments reflected their beliefs that their experiences with graphic novels helped to improve their reading. For example, when asked, "Do you feel that you are a good reader when you read graphic novels?" all of the participants responded "Yes!" Frank stated, "I felt like I was a better reader than I would [be] reading a regular book...because I can understand it more." Their comments suggest that the unique and engaging format of the graphic novels provided meaningful and active reading experiences for the boys. Jim described his reading experiences with graphic novels in the following way, "...they're more funner [sic] to read than a regular book... they're easier to read. It's like it's shorter, but it's kind of more information in a way."

The participants' conversations with their peers in the book club sessions seemed to pique their interest in reading additional titles and discussing what they read with others. Gambrell asserts that students are more motivated to read when they have opportunities to discuss what they read with others.²³ The language arts teacher commented that the participants frequently recommended graphic novels they had read to their classmates. She also reported that the boys took pride in being selected as research participants. Their involvement in the book club sessions helped them begin to identify themselves as readers. Furthermore, the ability to display their comprehension of the graphic novels and to communicate their feelings about them gave the participants more responsibility and authority in the classroom. It helped them experience the unique role of being knowledge-providers, which positively affected their reading self-concept.

Value of Graphic Novels across the Curriculum

The sequential art in graphic novels often engages readers more effectively than the expository information found in textbooks and other curriculum-based materials. For example, Jim enjoyed reading several graphic novels

based on historical events, such as the *Trojan Horse: The Fall of Troy*,²⁴ *The Battle of the Alamo*,²⁵ and *The Red Badge of Courage*.²⁶ When describing *The Red Badge of Courage*, he commented, “It showed a lot of the details. It showed like where they are and all the people who were there. I liked it.”□ He also made the following comment after reading some nonfiction graphic novels: “...if it’s fun to read, I can focus more on it, and I won’t stop reading the book. If it is too hard, I won’t really like it, and I might give up on it.”□ In addition, when Jim was asked if he would tell his science teacher or history teacher about the graphic novels he read, he replied, “Yes. They would be good for information.”□

When asked, “What do you think about using graphic novels in schools?”□ all four of the participants’ responses were positive. Matthew, for example, said he thought that it would be “good...so that people can understand more about books.”□ All of the students remarked that graphic novels were “fun”□ and more readable than traditional texts that they were required to read in school. Frank commented, “They’re cool books and I like to read them. Probably other kids would like to read them, too.”□ As these and other comments from the participants imply, struggling male adolescent readers may become more willing to engage in reading across the curriculum when teachers and librarians allow them to utilize nontraditional texts, such as graphic novels, that adolescents are motivated to read.

Furthermore, the participants read across a variety of genres, including nonfiction, biographies, mythology, and fantasy. As evidenced by the variety of titles the participants read, the large assortment of storylines and information met their diverse reading needs. Jim, for example, was drawn to classic adaptations, while Matthew enjoyed reading manga titles and books about superheroes. Bob enjoyed the NBA All-Star biographies and high-action titles, and Frank enjoyed reading series titles such as *Little Lit* and *Graphic Dinosaurs*.

Value of Graphic Novels as a Bridge to Other Literary Experiences

Graphic novels often served as entry points or bridges to other literacy experiences for the participants in this study. Frank, for example, enjoyed reading the graphic novel version of *The Jungle Book* and went into great detail when describing the plot.²⁷ Frank and I discussed the fact that Rudyard Kipling wrote the original version of *The Jungle Book*. Although I do not know if Frank will ever read the original title, he may never have been exposed to Kipling’s classic if he had not read the graphic novel version.

Jim also frequently chose to read graphic novel adaptations of classics, selecting more graphic novel renditions of classics than any of the other book club participants. Some of the classic adaptations that he read included *The Invisible Man*,²⁸ *The Red Badge of Courage*,²⁹ *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*,³⁰ *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*,³¹ and *The War of the Worlds*.³² Each time he read a graphic novel adaptation of these titles, I asked Jim if he would be interested in reading the original versions and he responded that he would. An additional literary connection was made when Jim indicated that he would like to read another biography about Bob Marley after reading the graphic novel biography of the famous reggae singer.

Another bridge to literary experiences occurred with Bob. When the study began, the language arts teacher referred to Bob as a “non-reader.”□ He read on a third-grade reading level, the lowest level of the four participants. After the study ended, the teacher informed me that Bob voluntarily signed up to participate in another book club. It was her belief that reading and discussing graphic novels fostered Bob’s literary learning and stimulated his interest in pursuing other reading activities.

Graphic Novels in Schools and Libraries

The findings from this study have promising implications for fostering the reading motivation of struggling male readers in today's libraries and classrooms. Using more meaningful literacy resources can engage struggling readers and help them to become motivated and active readers. As stated by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), "The degree to which students can read and understand text in all formats and all contexts is a key indicator of success in school and in life."³³ However, if teachers and librarians are expected to use popular media materials, such as graphic novels, they should be provided with effective, ongoing professional development opportunities such as workshops, required readings, and discussion groups to develop expertise in using graphic novels in schools and libraries. Furthermore, administrators should provide additional and sustained funding for school and public libraries in order for students, teachers, and public library patrons to have access to quality graphic novel collections. Finally, despite the fact that many literacy theorists support the use of graphic novels with adolescent readers, there is a need for additional scientifically-based research to support their use in schools and libraries.

Conclusion

Addressing the reading needs of male adolescents may be one of teachers' and librarians' toughest challenges. The quest to improve the literacy lives of male adolescents must include an examination of the texts that these young men value. Librarians and teachers can play a significant role in engaging adolescent readers by identifying and honoring the texts that male adolescents want to read in order to help them value reading and expand their views of themselves as readers.³⁴ The findings from this study are an important step in determining whether or not graphic novels are a promising literary format for male adolescents, especially those who struggle with reading. The responses of the students who participated in the graphic novel book club can help teachers and librarians determine whether or not graphic novels are a potential tool for a better literary world for male adolescents.

As Guthrie notes, it is essential that we identify effective literary strategies for engaging adolescents who struggle with reading, since increasing the reading motivation of students has been shown to have a positive effect on reading achievement.³⁵ Because of their potential for connecting boys to books, there is a need for studies to determine curriculum-based best practices for using graphic novels to motivate adolescent males to read. If advances in research regarding graphic novels bring positive changes in the literacy lives of male adolescents, the results could be "more powerful than a locomotive."³⁶

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YALSA Research Committee Poster Session

Posted on [June 14, 2011](#) by [Anna Lam](#)



by **Sandra Hughes-Hassell**

The YALSA Research Committee is charged with stimulating, encouraging, guiding, and directing the research needs of young adult library services, as well as compiling abstracts and disseminating research findings. In response to this charge, the Committee is hosting a poster session at ALA's Annual Conference, which will highlight current research focused on young adults and libraries. The poster session will be a full-length conference session and will allow LIS faculty, librarians, and students to share their research in a less formal setting. The session is scheduled for Saturday, June 25, 2011' from 4–5:30 p.m. in room 356 of the Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, LA.' Additional information about the conference is posted at www.tinyurl.com/yalsaac11.

Ten' posters will be on display. The titles and abstracts for the posters, as well as the contact information for the presenters, are below. The Committee encourages you to attend the session and to talk with the researchers about their work.

Title: Growing Up with Harry Potter: What Motivated Youth To Read?

Colette Drouillard, PhD

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Abstract: The overarching question of this descriptive and interpretive study was “What motivated youth to read the *Harry Potter* series?” □ Defining the focus and parameters of the study were three more specific sub-questions: Of the young readers who participated in this study, what are the general reading interests, habits, and attitudes towards reading? What factors did the young readers identify as initially attracting them to *Harry Potter*? What factors did the young readers identify as motivating them to continue to read *Harry Potter*?

A purposive sample of six hundred and seventy-one readers completed a web-based survey with results clarified or expanded via semi-structured interviews. The members of this unique-in-time group were born between 1984 and 1990 (eighteen to twenty-four years old at the time of the study), grew up in the United States, began reading the *Harry Potter* before 2000, and read each book as the series was published. The survey addressed the

relationship of young readers who grew up with *Harry Potter* and the factors these readers identified as impacting their motivation to continue reading Rowling's series during the ten years the books were published.

Title: LGBTQ Homeless Youth and Public Libraries

Julie Ann Winkelstein

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Abstract: While public libraries have begun to focus on the particular needs of LGBTQ youth, little research and few resources relate specifically to those who are homeless. This qualitative study addresses this critical topic by bringing together the voices of homeless LGBTQ teens, public librarians, and professionals and volunteers who are actively engaged in the lives of these marginalized youth. This research aims to provide insight into the everyday experiences and needs of this population, as well as ways in which public libraries could and do contribute positively to their lives.

LIS Education: An Analysis of Graphic Novels and Comics Pedagogy in American Library Association Accredited Programs

Elizabeth Figa, PhD

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Abstract: American Library Association (ALA)-accredited library and information sciences programs have a long history of pedagogy concerning varying literatures. Using publicly available information sources such as ALA websites, university and department websites, course catalogs, course descriptions, and conversations with youth services educators to gather data, the researcher presents an analysis of trends in library and information sciences curricula and courses that include and/or focus exclusively on graphic novels, comics, and/or sequential art education for library and information professionals. The researcher will present a model of key constructs that may form a best practice model for trends in graphic novels and comics pedagogy and suggested curriculum content based on the findings.

Title: New Immigrant Adolescents' Everyday Information Practices When Isolated from Peer Groups

Joung Hwa Koo

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore new immigrant adolescents' information behavior as they establish peer groups, which are an important part of adolescence. This ongoing study will provide an initial understanding of socially isolated teens' information behavior in daily life contexts. Because there are few studies

about immigrant adolescents' information behavior in the field of LIS, it will be a significant contribution to the literature to describe immigrant teens' information needs and seeking behavior. The results will fill a gap regarding both youth information seeking and the information needs of immigrants, and will inform librarians, educators, and other professionals who work with youth. This data will provide input for the successful design and delivery of information services and instruction for youth and a basis from which to support healthy growth for adolescents seeking to fulfill their information needs without the help of peers. Finally, the study will provide an initial understanding of information needs and seeking behaviors of people dealing with isolation and loneliness—for example, newcomers in an organization, transfers from other schools or organizations, or teens suffering from peer-bullying.

Title: Preparing Students for College: Academic Outreach to High Schools

Sandy Sumner

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Abstract: I am investigating ways academic libraries are offering outreach to local high schools. Several universities in Kentucky are forming partnerships with their local school librarians to better serve the needs of the high school teenagers, which better prepares them for entering college life. Research questions include: What kinds of different partnerships currently exist? What departments most commonly offer outreach partnerships? What are other states doing? How do school and university librarians benefit from this? What is most requested by school librarians, and what is most offered by university librarians? What impediments are there to partnering like this in other institutions?

Title: Protagonist and Author Diversity in Award-Winning and Bestselling Young Adult Fiction

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Abstract: Librarians often rely upon preassembled title lists, such as YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults (BBYA) list or the *Publishers Weekly* bestsellers list, to make collection development decisions. This study examined three such lists for the prevalence of diverse protagonists and authors with the goal of determining which list most closely aligns with actual demographic data for U.S. teens. Award-winning, Teens' Top Ten, and bestselling titles were included in the study. Overall, the award-winning title list included the highest percentage of minority authors and the highest percentage of protagonists belonging to most marginalized demographic groups, while the bestselling title list included the lowest percentages in these categories. However, all three lists underrepresented protagonists and authors from certain demographic categories. Based on these results, it is recommended that librarians supplement list-based collection development with purposive collection of titles featuring minority protagonists and/or written by minority authors.

Title: Researching Data Sets to Develop State Library Standards

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Abstract: In 2009, California began developing outcome standards for school library students and quantitative standards for library program factors that provide the conditions for students to meet library outcomes. In an effort to make those programs standards empirically based, the researcher analyzed three 2007–2008 reputable data sets: California’s school library data set, AASL’s School Libraries Count data set, and the national *School Library Journal* data set. The research clustered the standards into two sections: 1) baseline factors, and 2) statistical standards for resources. Findings revealed that school libraries that met the baseline standards were significantly different from libraries that did not. Once the baseline set of factors were determined, the researcher applied descriptive and correlational statistics to the data sets, with the resultant figures based on the average figures supplied by those libraries that met the baseline factors.

Title: A Safe Space? Homeless Teens’ Public Library Use

Vikki C. Terrile

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Abstract: I will present the methodology and preliminary findings from a study which explores how homeless and runaway youth use public libraries, their unique information needs, and whether they share the perception that public libraries are safe public spaces. The study, which is currently in the data collection stage, is an ethnographic study of a convenience sample of 25–30 teens living in family shelters or unaccompanied/runaway youth shelters in New York City. Data are being collected using participant observation, focus groups, questionnaires and interviews with teens in three to five temporary housing shelters and through homeless youth-serving organizations. The study is important because it explores the information and library space needs of a population that is often overlooked during discussions of either teens or people experiencing homelessness.

Title: Silencing the Internal Censor in YA Collection Development

Robin Fogle Kurz

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Abstract: What causes librarians to avoid collecting certain books for the teens they serve? This work-in-progress poster details the methodology and preliminary findings of dissertation research on how public librarians collect materials for young adults. Using mixed methods research, the researcher is conducting collection analysis and multiple in-depth interviews with youth services librarians in South Carolina who have been in professional positions for under five years. In addition to basic concerns around job security, these librarians often work in socially conservative areas with vocal racist and xenophobic subpopulations. Conversations with participants focus on intellectual freedom, the unique needs of teens of color, and the underlying fears of challenges. The collected transcripts are analyzed to determine at what point in the collection development process the meaning of the word “community” may shift from the teen readers librarians serve to the potential censors they fear. The poster also highlights past research on librarian self-censorship and potential future uses for mixed methods studies in teen library services research.

Title: A Tale of Two Covers: U.S. Teen Responses to Swedish and U.S. Book Cover Art

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Abstract: In order to sell books in the U.S., many publishers consider it necessary to Americanize the covers of international books that are acquired and translated into English. Drawing on Dresang’s Radical Change theory conceptualizing youth as competent and capable, and Rosenblatt’s Reader Response theory emphasizing that readers construct a personal response to literature, this study investigates the assumption that U.S. readers require Americanized book covers. The mixed methods pilot explores the responses of a diverse Los Angeles grades seven and eight advanced art class when comparing the original versus the “translated” cover art of Annika Thor’s *A Faraway Island* (Random House, 2009), first published in Sweden. The class of twenty-nine students was shown the paired book covers with artwork only, stripped of text, so the language and country of publication would not be apparent. The students completed a brief questionnaire and a follow-up focus group was conducted with six students. Descriptive statistics were gathered and content analysis was used to analyze the data. When asked to choose between the two covers, students overwhelmingly preferred the U.S. cover as the cover of a book they would like to read. Deeper analysis revealed a more complex picture of interest in and ambivalence towards the two covers.



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