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Hunky Cajuns and Gay Sextons:

Diversity as Represented in Adolescent Book Reviews

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Abstract

The call for increased diversity in books for adolescent readers should play a role in decisions about purchasing books for library and classroom shelves, and book reviews are an instrumental tool in making these decisions. The research project described here sought to conduct a close examination of book reviews in order to assess whether or not elements of diversity are described in reviews, how they are described, and the degree to which reviews accurately and comprehensively reflect and communicate issues of diversity in the books being reviewed. Through an examination of reviews written about books popular with teens, this research reveals important trends in the portrayals of diversity in these books. It also reveals the complexities of identifying diversity, of describing representations of diversity in short texts like book reviews, and the disconnect that exists at times between reviews and the content of books (in terms of diversity). The article closes with recommendations for librarians and those who review books in response to the call for more diversity in books written for teen readers.

The need for diversity in the representations of characters and experiences in books for adolescents has long been recognized by librarians, teachers, and writers of adolescent literature. The most recent push for diversity, collected under the banner of the "We Need Diverse Books" movement (http://weneeddiversebooks.org/), has brought these concerns to the twenty-first century and to a new generation of readers. Diverse representations in books matter in the way they present mirrors to teen readers who see their own unique experiences and situations in the books they read; they also present windows into the lives of others, and in so doing encourage readers to develop empathy and understanding for those who may seem unfamiliar.

The call for diversity represents challenges for those who select books for library or classroom shelves and who want to select a broad range of representations in those books. Given the

explosion in adolescent literature in the past decades, it is unreasonable to expect that librarians and library workers can examine each potential book choice; that amount of reading would be prohibitive. So teen services librarians, school librarians, and others involved in these decisions often rely on published reviews of books to guide purchasing and selection; it stands to reason that those who are concerned about diversity may also be examining those reviews to identify potential diverse titles for their collections.

In this context, it makes sense to explore what reviewers might say about diversity in their reviews, including examining how they explicitly and implicitly describe diverse representations in books and how well readers can make judgements about those representations based purely on the review (as opposed to a reading of the complete book). This examination can help inform librarians, teachers, and others who rely on these reviews to make decisions about diversity in their collections.

Review of the Literature

Diversity in literature, particularly in works aimed at youth audiences, has often been the focus of scholarly discussion.[1] The latest iteration of the conversation has refocused the attention of the youth literature community on the issue.[2] The topic of diversity is one that permeates the professional gamut, from scholars who read and write about books to the publishers who produce them.[3] All of the professionals who work with the creation, production, and distribution of literature to youth certainly have a stake in the process of championing diversity, so it is clear that there is a role for everyone to play.

In the discussions of diversity to this point, the focus has mostly rested on those with responsibilities for creation and production (i.e., writers and publishers). The focus of scholarship seems to rest mostly with the fact that diversity does not exist or critiquing why diverse representations are flawed.[4] Writers ask for more attention to diversity from those who create literature and extend a call to publishers to focus on producing a more diverse catalog.[5] There is little doubt that these kinds of conversations are significant and will do much to make the community aware of the issues.

However, within this conversation it seems there is a significant lack of discussion on the role that disseminators play–the librarians, teachers, parents, and others who work with organizations like libraries and bookstores to get books into the hands of youth. These individuals can certainly champion the cause of diversity by buying books with diverse representation and by seeing that they get into readers' hands. In considering these groups there are some fundamental questions that must be considered. How do disseminators make themselves aware of the issues surrounding diversity? How do disseminators find diverse literature and how do they get diverse books into the hands of readers? While some of these questions have been directly addressed by researchers like Jamie Naidoo and Sarah Dahlen, there is still much to do in this area.[6] In reviewing the literature in this area, it is clear that there are important questions about how librarians ascertain diversity in the book selection process and, in particular, the role that book reviews may play in attending to issues of diversity as part of the selection process. (The term paratext will be used in this article to refer to materials like book reviews that accompany published books and are used to make purchasing and selection decisions.)

The role that book reviews play in book selection particularly for teen services librarians is complex, and sadly one that is not much discussed in the research literature. What is clear is that that book reviewing in general is a discipline focused on assisting librarians in finding books: As Joyce Milton notes "young adult reviewing … is not directly for young adults but for librarians concerned with young adult services."[7] It is also clear that many librarians consider book reviews to be a main resource in the book selection process.[8] However, beyond a few studies that focus on the use of reviews in academic libraries, there is little to say about how public librarians and youth librarians in particular use book reviews.[9] Nevertheless, since they are considered to be a major book selection tool, it seems reasonable that they could be used to better understand how these paratexts could be used to assess and find diverse books.

Research Questions

If librarians want to select and promote diverse books, they need to be aware of diverse representations in the books that are available to them. Because reading every book published every year is an impossible task, book reviews are likely to be prime resources for determining if diversity exists in a book. This leads to the question of how book reviews may or may not represent diversity in books written for adolescent audiences. The research team settled on two research questions to guide a content analysis of diversity as depicted in book reviews of adolescent literature:

1. To what extent are elements of diversity described in book reviews and what aspects of diversity do these book reviews reveal?
2. Do book reviews accurately and comprehensively reflect and/or communicate issues of diversity?

Methods

To look at diversity in book reviews our research team found it necessary to first narrow the field of adolescent literature. The researchers decided to focus on books that librarians would most likely buy but may not always have time to read, and felt that the most likely candidates for this group of texts would be those represented on the Young Adult Library Services Association's Teens Top Ten Lists. Nominees for this annual list are chosen by teenage readers from across the United States and the final ten titles chosen each year are chosen by teenage voters. This process results in annual lists that arguably best represent the most popular books among teen readers each year. Because of their obvious broad and tested appeal to teens, books on these lists could be considered must-buys for most library collections; they may or may not, however, be must-reads for the adults who work with teens. Since professionals focus on a very broad range of books, it is likely that they will also spend time with books teens are not reading in order to promote those and will have less time to read books that teens are already scooping up.

Even though buying considerations were foremost in the selection of the Tens Top Ten as an ideal subject for study, there is another strong reason to select this group. It is clear that librarians and teachers care about what interests teens as they try to find books these readers will like; we must also recognize, however, that adults control the discussion of issues in adolescent literature, and it behooves professionals and researchers to seek to include the voices of the adolescents for whom this literature is written. It may certainly be that teens care about the exact same things

that professionals do and that they talk about it in the exact same way as the adults do.[10] But it is just as likely (or perhaps even more likely) that teens do not care about what adults care about in the same way that adults care about it. In order to incorporate teens' feelings and choices into this adult-managed conversation, the researchers felt that using books chosen by teens was at the very least a good start to showing that teens and their interests are relevant to this discussion of diversity.

The research team identified winning titles from this list (since and including 2005) in order to identify a contemporary view of diversity in books published for teens; this process resulted in a list of 100 books (ten from each of the ten years surveyed). Paratextual information for each of the books on the list was then gathered. To do this, reviews of each book were collected from the primary industry sources: Publisher's Weekly, School Library Journal, Booklist, Kirkus Reviews, and Voices of Youth Advocates (VOYA). (Note that not every book had a review from every source.) These reviews were collected in a Microsoft Word document, and each of the four researchers who took part in this analysis were randomly assigned to 50 of the 100 titles; the paratext for each book was consequently coded twice for indicators of diversity.

In a pre-coding meeting, the four researchers met and brainstormed different kinds of diversity that they thought books written for teenagers could explore. This was a wide-ranging discussion of the possibilities, and after significant discussion, the team arrived at a list of categories: nationality, gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, religion, intellectual or emotional disorders, physical appearance (including physical disability), and socio-economic. With this list of categories or codes, an initial analysis of twenty titles was conducted, with each coder analyzing the paratexts of ten titles (with each title's paratexts being coded twice). In this and all other stages of the coding process, the researchers individually conducted a close reading of each review for their assigned titles, focusing on words and phrases that would suggest the book's treatment of any of the above-mentioned types of diversity. Once this initial coding was finished, those phrases were then inputted into a shared spreadsheet where the results of coding were gathered and maintained.

After this initial coding phase, the research team met again and shared notes on the process. They shared results from the spreadsheet and described the process for identifying specific phrases as evidence of the book's treatment of a certain kind of diversity. This meeting was critical to establishing reliability in coding this initial set of data. And based on that initial coding work, the initial list of codes was expanded to include a code for physical or terminal illness. At this point, the researchers then finished coding the rest of the titles and inputting results into the shared spreadsheet; no other changes to the list of codes were needed after this initial meeting.

When this coding was complete, the team met to review the results of the coding. In some instances, coders did not agree on identifying attributes of diversity based solely on a reading of the paratexts, so researchers sought to clarify a "threshold" that the paratext's wording would have to cross in order to qualify as representing diversity in each category. For instance, in the reviews of *Looking for Alaska*, one coder indicated a "positive" for the diversity category of physical appearance given the mention in one review that Pudge, the book's main-character, was "skinny." However, in discussion with the group, it was decided that since the review did not indicate that this character wrestled with issues of weight that might cross a threshold that would have us consider it a book that represents diversity in this area, it would not "count" in totals for that category.

Once all the paratexts had been coded, the analysis of these results proceeded in two directions. The first sought to gather general, descriptive results about the kinds and frequency of diversity presented in these books based on the paratexts. To do this, researchers converted the shared spreadsheet (with its phrases from the book reviews that suggested treatment of diversity) into a simpler sheet that simply indicated the presence of treatments of diversity according to the paratexts. This sheet then allowed us to gather descriptive data about the kinds of diversity implied by these paratexts and the frequency of representations of different kinds of diversity.

The second direction of the analysis sought to identify how accurately or comprehensively these paratexts identified the diversity as represented in the actual books. To explore this, researchers identified a set of "case studies," choosing books whose full content could then be compared to what would have been assumed based on the paratext. Researchers looked at some reviews for books that they had not read and were unfamiliar with, to speculate about what they might infer about diversity based on the reviews alone. As a comparison effort, the team also chose cases where they were familiar with the books and could compare the content of the books to their paratexts.

Results

This section shares the results of the content analysis, organized around the two central research questions. This section will first address the question of what kinds of diversity were represented in the paratextual information about these books. Then, attention turns to consider the comprehensiveness of these reviews and how well they represented the diversity present in the books.

Before addressing specific results, it should be noted that this analysis was complicated by the popularity of speculative fiction (fantasy, science fiction, or even paranormal romance) with these teenaged readers. Representations of diversity take on different surface features in a fantasy novel (where perhaps members of the dwarf or elf races are discriminated against) or a paranormal romance (where a werewolf might have to hide his true identity while enrolled at a high school) as opposed to representations we might expect in a book of realistic fiction. While the researchers wrestled with the way these different genres could potentially represent issues of diversity, it did not seem appropriate to teens' interests to eliminate titles of speculative fiction; and, in fact, our analysis found that these titles often dealt with issues of diversity within the speculative worlds they had created. But in the interests of reporting the results here, the choice was made to categorize the results in ways that distinguish realistic from speculative fiction.

Is There Diversity?

The results of the coding of the paratexts can be viewed in Table 1. According to the analysis, it seems clear that teens are reading and enjoying books that feature a variety of diverse representations. Each year's list of books represented a range of diversity, with no year seeming to feature more diversity than another. While it might have been assumed that more recent lists would feature a higher quantity of diverse titles, given the more recent focus on diversity in publishing, this did not seem to be a pattern witnessed in the analysis of books popular with teen readers. From this data it seems that the simple answer to the first research question is that, yes, diversity is represented in popular books identified by teen readers. However, the comprehensive answer may not be that simple. Books featuring diversity were clearly in the minority, relative to

the total number of books in each list each year, especially when speculative fiction titles are removed from consideration. (Since individual titles might feature more than one marker of diversity, the numbers given in the table may represent individual titles counting more than once.) This might be explained as a reflection on the interest (or lack thereof) that teen readers have for diverse representations, but it may also be a reflection of the overall lack of diverse representations in the books on offer for those making these lists of teen favorites.

Table 1. Number of books under each category of diversity, by year. First number is the number of titles from realistic fiction (realistic, mystery, romance); second number, in parentheses, indicates number of titles in speculative fiction (fantasy, science fiction, dystopian, paranormal romance).

	Nationality	Gender	Sexual Identity	Race/ Ethnicity	Religion	Intellectual/ Emotional Challenges	Physical Appearance	Socio-Economic Issues	Physical Illness
2005	1 (0)	3 (1)	1 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0)	2 (0)	1 (1)	2 (1)	2 (0)
2006	0 (3)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (5)	0 (4)	0 (1)	0 (1)	0 (3)	1 (1)
2007	2 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (3)	2 (1)	2 (4)	1 (2)	1 (0)	1 (0)
2008	1 (2)	0 (1)	1 (2)	0 (5)	0 (0)	2 (1)	1 (0)	1 (0)	1 (0)
2009	0 (2)	2 (1)	0 (0)	0 (4)	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)
2010	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (4)	1 (1)	3 (1)	1 (0)	1 (0)	2 (1)
2011	0 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (5)	0 (1)	0 (2)	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)
2012	1 (1)	0 (1)	0 (1)	1 (1)	1 (0)	4 (1)	2 (1)	0 (3)	2 (0)

2013	0 (1)	0 (3)	0 (1)	0 (2)	0 (1)	2 (4)	2 (2)	3 (2)	1 (1)
2014	0 (0)	1 (0)	0 (0)	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (3)	1 (1)	1 (2)	0 (1)
2015	0 (4)	1 (1)	0 (1)	1 (2)	0 (0)	2 (3)	0 (1)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Total	5 (25)	8 (9)	2 (5)	6 (34)	6 (8)	19 (22)	9 (9)	12 (13)	10 (4)

In terms of other patterns, researchers noticed that diverse representations of race or ethnicity and intellectual or emotional disorders seemed to be most prominent. The former category of diversity was particularly present in titles from the speculative fiction genres, while representations of emotional disorders were clearly the most popular for readers of realistic fiction. This latter pattern suggests an increased interest on the part of readers for representations of characters who struggle with issues like depression or learning challenges.

Another anticipated pattern was an increase in the number of books featuring diverse representations of sexuality or sexual identity (again, given recent increased interest in this manifestation of diversity); however, there seems to be no particularly significant increase in these titles over the ten years surveyed in our analysis. While adult scholars, librarians, and other interested parties may be concerned about seeing increased representations of sexual diversity, this evidence does not suggest that teens are identifying these among their picks for best books. Another category of diversity which didn't appear as frequently as others was religious diversity; the smaller numbers for this category are not surprising, however, given that portrayals of religion are more rare in publishing either because of a perceived lack of interest for treatments of religious and spiritual experiences or because publishers see this as fraught territory that they are hesitant to explore (Campbell, 2015).

How Well is Diversity Represented?

The researchers were also interested in how well the paratexts represented diversity and found that in many cases, these book reviews featured references to diversity as long as it played a significant role in the plot progression. This does not apply to all reviews however. There are many reviews where we did not code for any diversity. Without reading the book if it hard to know if the reviewer did not mention any possible diversity because it played no part on the plot, because there simply was no diversity in the book, or they simply overlooked the diversity within the book and failed to mention it in a review. That is where using these reviews to evaluate the presence or treatment of diversity in the book itself can be challenging. Some reviews were blatant in their mention of diversity while others were veiled or lacking. Part of our research was to read multiple reviews for each book and those reviews differed. While some reviews would mention a diverse aspect of a book, other reviews would not.

For example, the reviews for *Firegirl* by Tony Abbott vary in discussing the diversity present in the book. Of the five reviews examined, only two of them mentioned class prayer in the book, which was coded in this analysis to suggest religious diversity. If a librarian was looking through book reviews to find more religious books to add to his library, depending on which review he read, *Firegirl* may be a book he'd consider. In contrast,, every single review for Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor & Park* mention Eleanor's abusive homelife and Park's Korean heritage. In this case, every review of this book was clear in pinpointing these elements of diversity within the novel.

Some reviews are very clear about the presence of some of these representations, which likely emerges in the paratext due to the central importance of such issues to the book and its characters. The reviews for *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson, for instance, were very straightforward about what the characters are dealing with in the novel. Publishers Weekly's review's first sentence is: "Acute anorexia, self-mutilation, dysfunction families and the death of a childhood friend." This is one review that clearly writes of the diversity readers will find in this book. Another book that garnishes reviews that speak of diversity is *Every Day* by David Levithan. All the reviews for this book mention the fact that "A", the main character, inhabits different bodies and falls in love with different people and "sometimes he is a boy, sometimes a girl; sometimes he is gay, sometimes straight, sometimes he is ill, more often well" (Booklist). Multiple reviews referred to "A" as "genderless" and Kirkus' review mentions "teens of different races, body shapes, [and] sizes." Voya writes in its reviews that "A" also deals with "drug addiction . . . [and] suicidal thoughts." These three sentences alone reference multiple diverse characteristics and challenges. This book, however, is only one of a few that has reviews that so blatantly showcase the diversity within the book. Since this entire book centers around a "genderless" body inhabiting character it would have been hard for reviewers not to mention it but there was a definite push in all the reviews to showcase the diversity that Levithan writes about.

These explicit reviews seemed to be in the minority; many reviews glanced over diversity or provided veiled references to potential diverse representations. Kirkus' review of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is a good example of a review that does this. The reviewer writes about the adventures that Greg, the main character in these books, faces while going through middle school: "Largely through his own fault, mishaps seems to plague Greg at every turn, from the minor freak-outs of finding himself permanently seated in class between two pieced stones and then being saddled with his mom for a substitute teacher, to be forced to wrestle in gym with a weird classmate who has invited him to view his 'secret freckle.'" It is unclear here if this "weird" friend of Greg's is a homosexual boy or just some middle school boy trying to be funny. If this "weird friend" is homosexual, which a reader cannot know just from this review, would this book be labeled as "diverse" for having a homosexual classmate? There is no way to infer, just from this review alone, whether or not there is more diversity in this book than is led to believe by the reviews.

In other cases, it was clear to the research team that book reviews could have featured more explicit references to diverse representations given the content of the book. *Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein is an example of one such book. Wein's book tells the story of two women who actively participate in World War II, including one who is acting as a spy and is captured and tortured by the Gestapo. The book turns gender expectations on their heads and explores

unexpected and likely unfamiliar roles that women played during this war, a treatment that certainly answers the call for diverse characters and representations. However, coders for the paratexts for this book did not highlight any references to diversity. In the reviews, there are no references to the absolute amazing accomplishment it was for young women to be flying planes or spying during WWII. This would have been a perfect moment for reviewers to emphasize the great gender divide during the war and how brave and courageous and plucky these women were for breaking barriers and forging new ground in the fight for equal rights. Unlike *Code Name Verity,* those reviewing *The Sweet Far Thing* by Libba Bray made sure to mention that the main character, Gemma, "chafes not only at the physical constraints of a corset but at the myriad restrictions place on women. Her quest is to break free." In this review, which explicitly mentions the fact that women were fighting for greater rights for their gender, a reader looking for diverse representations will know they are to be found in Bray's book.

Some reviews left out diversity entirely but because the researchers had read the book they were aware it was in the text. For example reviews for, *Girls in Pants: the Third Summer of the Sisterhood* by Ann Brashares, did not indicate any diversity. In this case, if one were to rely only on the paratext to inform one of the diversity in this book, one would think there was nothing in this book that made it any different from other "chick-lit" books about teenage friendships. In a closer look at the book itself, one finds that there in fact are elements of the story that could be categorized as diversity. For example, one of the main characters, Carmen, is Latina and her heritage plays a big role in her personal identity throughout the series. Issues of grief and mental health are explored in this book as well. In previous books in the series we find that Bridget suffers from depression. These sorts of issues are explored in this installment as well, as the four friends are preparing to go to college and experiencing transitions in life. Although not the most diverse book on the list, we can see that it is, perhaps, more diverse than the paratext would initially suggest.

In short, the answer to the second question is less clear than the answer to the first question. If the facet of diversity in the book (whether it be gender, sexuality, or emotional disorders) played a strong role in plot events or characterization, mentions of these would often appear in the paratexts. However, reviewers could not always be counted on to note these diverse representations even when they were integral to the book. Similarly, some reviews provided vague hints at representations of diversity that may have overstated the case or made judgments difficult for those seeking to make diversity a factor in book selection.

Discussion

The lack of clarity experienced in investigating the second research question relates to several challenges that emerged in the process of this analysis. Coupled with the findings from the first question, this sheds light on some significant issues that emerge as a result of this research.

Definitions are Difficult

Perhaps the most obvious challenge that arises in identifying "diversity" in texts like these comes from the different definitions of diversity in use in the discourse around literature for children and adolescents.[11] For some, diversity may only refer to race or to ethnicity while others may see diversity coming from social or economic class or a range of other demographic characteristics. Some may see diversity as including people with illness, mental and physical, and still others

would put religious belief or upbringing in the diversity column. At the risk of complicating the coding process too much, the team decided to have the operational definition of diversity cover a wide field (including nationality, gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, religion, intellect, physical appearance, socio-economic, physical illness). Although we hoped that this broad range of diverse aspects to humans would allow a comprehensive picture about the type of diversity seen in YA book reviews, arguments could be made against this choice and the codes chosen for the analysis.

Another challenge with defining diversity regarded specificity. Our analysis quickly revealed the challenge of "sorting" different terms and phrases into nine kinds of diversity. If we look at diversity as simply being aspects of life that make us different from one another, the categories are potentially numbered in the hundreds rather than the small number of characteristics we have used for this study. In the case of the categories we did choose, a second challenge was in identifying just how explicit a review had to be (or could be) before it was counted as communicating something significant about diversity. Take, for example, our work with the category of emotional/intellectual diversity. The team initially agreed that emotional/intellectual diversity would include problems such as depression, anxiety, and other diagnosed mental illnesses. During coding, though, it was decided to also include issues similar to grief or debilitating anger, thus making the emotional/intellectual category broader. A more specific category might have been "mental illness" or "learning disabilities." However, if the team were to break apart every aspect of emotional/intellectual diversity then the categories would have been overly numerous and perhaps too narrow. It was essential in the analysis to make general assumptions about the broader aspects of diversity so as to keep the study informative and inclusive. Other categories used, such as physical illness and sexual identity, are not quite as broad and thus are an easier indicator of the aspects of the story within the book that caused it to be categorized as it was.

This challenge faced in defining diversity is representative of the broader challenge faced when experts in the field call for more diversity in books written for children and teenagers. Whose definition of diversity should dominate in this discussion? Are some markers of diversity valued over other markers? How detailed need we get when identifying diverse books? As with any term that becomes widely used in academic discourse, scholars looking to expand the discussion around diversity will need to be clear and forthright about how they define the concept.

Paratexts are Limited

It is clear that the paratexts studied here are, by design, superficial representations of the larger novels being reviewed, and thus they do not always capture the complexity of each book. The nature of the review format strips down the text, revealing only the most essential elements. The many limitations of the paratexts to indicate diverse books were clear in the research and often ran contrary to the researcher's presumptions about the paratexts themselves. As reviewers and consumers of reviews, the researchers thought that recent reviews represent very precise depictions of diversity, given the increased interest in diversity over the past decade. It would seem that with so few words at one's disposal a reviewer would select them very carefully and use words that were accurate and understandable markers of diversity. Additionally it was also assumed that if a reviewer included an item in the review, it was likely to be something that was of significant merit and essential to the review and the book. Again, with so few words it seems a

focus on only the items that entail the most overarching and important parts of a text would be included.

However, the results suggest that this was not always the case: Many reviews used vague language and included information that may not have been vital to representing the book. While many reviews did indicate clear representations of diversity (i.e. bisexual, biracial, Korean-American), others offered only indeterminate language that only raises questions about potential diversity. For example a review of *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult, makes note of "ethical issues." Given that this book deals with topics that delve into the purpose of life, it may certainly be that these "ethical issues" could surround some aspect of religion, but with such broad language it is impossible to tell. Another example comes from *Captain Hook: The Adventures of a Notorious Youth* by J.V. Hart, where the main character's "unusual appearance" is noted. Again this language indicates something unexpected, but without clarification we can only speculate if this means that there is some kind of diversity present in the text. This proved to be one of the greatest limitations of the paratexts. The oblique references to possible diversity make it difficult to determine if the reviewer intended to bring out a diverse aspect of the book.

In addition to vague language, we note that some reviewers brought possible diversity to the fore even when it may not have been an integral or essential part of the text. There is little doubt that each reviewer will find different things in a text and that in writing reviews many can disagree about what is worth mentioning. So while we don't wish to downplay the value of different perspectives, it seems that sometimes items mentioned in the reviews may have given a false sense of diversity. For example in a review for Meg Cabot's *Abandon*, the "gay cemetery sexton" is mentioned. It seems that the mention of this rather minor character's sexual identity could lead readers to infer that there is a treatment of diversity in this text that is not really there. On closer inspection of the content of the book, it is clear that the sexual identity of this character is barely mentioned and it is not an important part of the larger story to any degree. Additionally, the sexton is elderly, which could make his sexual orientation of minor interest to teen readers seeking an accurate representation of their own life experiences. A similar instance was seen in reviews for *Poison Princess* that mentioned a "hunky Cajun" character; but examining the book reveals that the treatment of the Cajun background is minor and doesn't meet a real definition of a diverse representation.

Building on the call for authentic and integral representations of diversity in books, it seems that reviews should do their very best to represent the most accurate picture of diversity. While our research found that many reviews did represent diversity in accurate and clear ways, the reviews with vague language and seemingly unnecessary mentions lacked the clarity and directness the researchers (and, we suspect, those using these reviews to make purchasing decisions) hope for. The clear limitations of many of the paratexts presented a challenge to the researchers but also reveal a challenge for those who rely on these texts to select diverse books. While librarians may use book reviews to attend to issues of diversity as part of the selection process, it is clear that they must be very critical about the information represented in the reviews so as not to be misled by limited or vague information.

Speculative Fiction Versus Realistic Fiction

The last challenge confronted in the study was in relation to diversity as defined by genres. Throughout the study the researchers separated the books into two main genre categories:

realistic fiction and speculative fiction. We defined realistic fiction as characters and experiences that closely resemble something that could reasonably be found in reality; genres that fell into this category included realistic fiction, romance, historical fiction, and mystery. Speculative fiction was defined as fiction that involved either an alternate universe, a fantasy land, or something of supernatural nature; this could also include tales of a "what if" nature. Genres included within this category were fantasy, paranormal, dystopian, science fiction, and so on.

From the beginning, it was clear that a majority of the top ten books each year were fantasy or paranormal romance books, genres which lend themselves to fantastical creatures and species. As these books were coded it was extremely difficult to determine when and if these fantastical creatures and species were intended to or could be categorized as diverse. For example, it was tempting to identify werewolves as a marker of diversity because they lived in a population of fairies and they were the minority. However, when a creature does not exist in reality, identifying it as diversity seemed to run counter to the motives of the diverse movement to better represent the reality we see in the world every day. Initially it was suggested that we not code these genres at all, but ignoring these titles would have discounted a significant number of books that teens are reading and enjoying. They were coded as best as possible, taking into account that many teens reading these books may identify with a character that is different from other characters even if that character is not human. In most cases, authors gave these characters human traits and had them express human emotion. Teenagers reading these books can identify with those elements and could potentially find diversity within the chapters of these genres.

One case that provides an example of this is the book *Cinder* by Melissa Meyer, with its main character, Cinder, who is a non-human cyborg. Given the science fiction setting, we might be inclined to reject it as being able to explore diversity, but the reviews for this book are very clear in saying that, as a cyborg, Cinder is a "second class citizen." It is possible then to make the case that Cinder is living as a diverse character without all the opportunities afforded to other characters–a situation that could certainly be reflective of similar challenges we would read about in diverse books in realistic fiction. This character is a good example of how fantasy and science fiction, while seemingly not seen as diverse genres, can have characters that speak to outliers and diverse situations and should not be completely discounted when talking about diversity.

The challenges with definitions of diversity within genres further shows how difficult it is define the scope of diversity. It is also clear that more research needs to be done in this area to determine if teen readers are engaging with fantasy from a perspective of diversity or not. Knowing better how the readers themselves are interpreting these books would go a long way toward developing a more concrete understanding of what role fantasy plays in the conversations about diversity.

Implications

The challenges revealed by the research underscore that fact that diversity is a complex issue and that much more work needs to be done by professionals in all venues to extend and deepen the conversation about how diverse books can be produced, distributed, and read. While the research does provide insights into the conversation, its intent was never to provide a definitive view of diversity. However, what is added by this research to this complex discussion does reveal a few implications for professionals.

For librarians, our research indicates that while reviews show some diversity, their ability to delve into the rich complexities of diverse representations is limited. While librarians and teachers rely on reviews for building collections and recommending books to readers, if their goal is to find diverse representations, looking at professional reviews alone may be a sometimes-ineffective method. Just being aware of the limitations of review sources is a good first step. This knowledge allows professionals to understand that they may have to extend the types of para-texts they consult in book selection to sources beyond professional book reviews. Conclusions from this study also suggest that professionals should, when possible, look at a wide range of review sources. Since review sources give an even more limited perspective of diversity it is critical to look at several sources in order to ascertain the most comprehensive view of diversity in any one book.

For those writing book reviews, we suggest that, in conjunction with calls for publishers to produce more diverse catalogs, a call should go out to reviewers to be more critical about when and how they represent diversity in their reviews. With so many vague or missing representations of diversity, it is clear that reviewers could be more focused on ensuring that reviews give an accurate picture of diverse representations. For example, reviewers could use a wider bank of rich descriptive words that will capture the aspects of diversity accurately. Also, reviewers should critically look at any and all diversity in a book in such a way that those elements of diversity that are critical to a book can be sufficiently communicated. Reviewers can be very thoughtful about the conversations surrounding diversity so as to focus more on diverse aspects but not at the expense of addressing aspects of diversity that are unimportant or not really present in a book.

Conclusion

The call for increased representations of diversity in books is a critical one. Adolescent readers can benefit greatly from seeing their own experiences mirrored in the characters they read about at the same time as they can gain increased empathy and understanding for those whose experiences are not so similar to their own. The analysis of the book reviews conducted here suggests that there are a variety of diverse representations among those books that teens choose as their favorites, even though numerically those diverse books still represent a minority of books on teens' lists.

Those who make decisions about books for teen readers naturally turn to book reviews to help them make those decisions, and if they are equally interested in bringing more diverse books to teens' attention, it stands to reason that these book reviews can provide insights into the diversity represented in these books. Our findings here suggest that identifying books with diverse representations based on book reviews may not be a straightforward matter. Given the format of book reviews, reviewers may not feel like they can provide the amount of detail about a book that would accurately capture these diverse elements of a book, or reviewers may not feel it important to make mention of these elements in their reviews. The research described here indicates that references to diversity in book reviews should be carefully balanced with the other demands of the genre, and that those using book reviews to make decisions about forming more inclusive and diverse library collections should use them thoughtfully.

We are also sure that there are many additional questions left unanswered by this research. In the field of adolescent literature, it would behoove us to have wider and more forthright discussions

about how we define diversity, and how diverse representations are identified in books or in the paratextual information around books. Many of those discussing diversity in these books are adults, and it makes sense as well for us to consider how teenage readers view diversity and their feelings about its importance in the books they read. Given the importance of diverse representations to our readers, these are questions and discussions we are eager to have.

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The Real Deal 2*: How Autism Is Described in YA Novels

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Abstract

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is often considered one of the invisible disabilities. Youth at the higher end of the spectrum may seem to have quirky behaviors, but otherwise appear to be like everyone else. Those with more severe ASD are commonly misunderstood and thought to simply have disciplinary issues. This study examined 100 young adult novels published between 1968 and 2013 inclusive in which a character was labeled as having ASD to determine how the authors described the disability in each of the books. Those descriptors were then aligned with the diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder found in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.* A total of 7,921 descriptors appear across the 100 books studied, and 6,094 (77%) of them map on to the first two *DSM-5* diagnostic criteria categories. "Having unique obsessions" was the most frequently appearing descriptor present in the books. In 1,827 (23%) instances, the descriptors did not fit within the diagnostic criteria, indicating that the criteria may miss some elements of the ASD experience that authors themselves deem important.

Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurological disability that is typically diagnosed around age five and affects as many as one in sixty-eight American children.[i] Although it is a formally recognized condition defined for medical and psychiatric personnel by the

fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*),[ii] knowledge of this condition among "neurotypical" people would predominantly come from personal encounters and also depictions in culture. One of the most important sources of cultural depiction is literature written for teens.

Literature Review

This study reviewed the descriptions of persons with ASD in young adult novels and examined how and where they matched and did not match clinical terminology and diagnostic criteria. *DSM-5* was taken as the benchmark, even though it was published in 2013, after all of the novels. *DSM-5*'s premise is that while diagnostic language and conceptualizations of disorders may change, the disorders themselves—clusters of human behaviors—do not change. Witness numerous attempts to diagnose literary and historical figures by *DSM-5* criteria (try googling Shakespeare and *DSM-5*). The disputed inclusion and then exclusion of homosexuality as a disorder represents a significant deliberate effort to make the manual conform to what is believed to be true.

How accurate is the depiction of ASD in young adult literature? What does and does not match? And what areas of the ASD experience are reflected in the depictions that are not seen in the *DSM-5*? When librarians interact with patrons—parents, teens, friends—one primary concern with the use of literature about conditions is its veracity. Is an engaging story conveying an accurate depiction of the subject?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers "ASD an important public health concern" and reports that "more people than ever before are being diagnosed with an ASD."[iii] Although the reason for the increase is unclear, research published in 2012 estimated the prevalence of ASD to be one in eighty-eight children in the United States.[iv] In 2014 that rate was increased to one in sixty-eight.[v]

The American Psychiatric Association publishes the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the tool most commonly used by professionals to define the criteria for diagnosing a psychosocial disorder. An updated version, commonly referred to as *DSM-5*, was published in 2013. The new edition combines the different types of ASD under the heading "299.00 Autism Spectrum Disorder."[vi] The full *DSM-5* criteria may be found at the CDC website, http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html.[vii]

In 1986 Madeleine Will, then the assistant secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the U.S. Department of Education, called for increased placement of students with mild and moderate disabilities into regular education classrooms.[viii] The result of this initiative has been an increased number of students with ASD who are educated outside of segregated special education classrooms and more exposure of teens who do not have disabilities to their peers with autism. Young adult literature can therefore act as a mirror and a window: a way for youth with ASD to see depictions of people like themselves (the mirror) and a way for their peers without the disability to gain deeper understanding of those around them (the window).[ix]

Autism spectrum disorder is often considered one of the invisible disabilities. Youth at the higher end of the spectrum may seem to have quirky behaviors, but otherwise appear

to be like everyone else. Those with more severe ASD can often be misunderstood and even thought to merely have disciplinary issues. It is therefore important that young adult literature have an accurate depiction of individuals with autism if it is to provide an honest mirror and window for youth. The research question of this study is: What is the correspondence between fictional depictions of the ASD experience in young adult literature and the accepted diagnostic criteria employed by the *DSM-5*? This is addressed in three parts:

- Accuracy (correspondence of depictions to *DSM-5*)
- Depictions that map to *DSM-5* criteria
- Depictions that are not captured by *DSM-5* criteria

Mary Anne Prater and Tina Taylor Dyches have—individually, together, and in collaboration with others—written extensively in the area of children's literature and developmental disabilities,[x] an umbrella term that includes autism spectrum disorder. Their work covers the full age range of youth literature, including young adult materials, and focuses on the objective coverage of the disabilities, potential educational usefulness of the materials, and listing the titles identified. Much has also been written about the role of fiction for youth that includes people with disabilities.[xi] This body of work generally focused on whether there was a positive or negative representation of the disabilities, but the authors did not address the specific terms used to describe the disabilities in the novels. Positive and negative representations are only one aspect of literary portrayals of autism. What if a positive depiction is an inaccurate stereotype, leading to unrealistic expectations, such as imagining that all autistic individuals can do advanced math as the main character in the movie *Rain Man* can? What if a negative one inaccurately conveys that autism is associated with violence toward others? Literature scholars need to move beyond simplistic studies of the portrayal of autism in young adult literature to consider these deeper issues and their potential effects on readers.

Methodology

This study examined 100 young adult novels published between 1968 and 2013 to begin to build a more complex understanding of the portrayal of autism in literature for teens. The first step was to define a body of source material. Using standard selection journals and numerous disability-related books and articles (see *Autism in Young Adult Novels*[xii] for a detailed description of that process), the researchers examined over 500 potential titles published from 1960 to 2013. From that candidate list, 100 young adult novels that included a character specifically labeled with ASD were identified. For this study, this selection criterion (explicit diagnosis) added consistency to the selection. For the purposes of the research question, which is interested in accurately depicted ASD experiences, explicit diagnosis creates a better starting point than non-explicit characterizations.

In the 100 books, the researchers identified 7,921 individual descriptors: words or phrases applied to characters that described their behaviors. The primary *DSM-5* diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder reads: "A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction" and "B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior,

interests, or activities."[xiii] A number of examples are given as illustrative information. Under "A. Deficits in social communication and social interaction," *DSM-5* provides three illustrative areas:

"1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity . . .

2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction . . .

3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships. . . ."

For "B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interest, or activities," four examples are listed:

"1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech . . .

2. Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior . . .

3. Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus . . .

4. Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment. . . ."[xiv]

Taking this diagnostic language, each of the researchers independently mapped each descriptor on to a particular *DSM-5* subsection or to "other" when the match was deemed insufficient. In initial coding, the researchers achieved 70% match (inter-coder reliability), and discussion resolved the remaining non-matches. This level of initial matching between two independent coders is appropriate for an exploratory study, particularly when the corpus is fiction, which by its nature strives for distinctiveness in tone and style.[xv]

The resulting data set consists of 6,094 descriptors coded by *DSM-5* category, originating novel, role of character (protagonist/secondary), and functional limitation level (mild, moderate, severe, or not specified). Preliminary analysis showed that the age of the character did not vary enough to warrant separate analysis. The 1,827 descriptors not fitting into *DSM-5* categories were coded as "other" and independently analyzed.

Results

The analysis of depictions provides data to test each part of the research question: accuracy, common elements of ASD found in both the novels and *DSM-5*, and elements of ASD not captured by *DSM-5*.

Accuracy

The depictions in the novels appear to be largely accurate, when defining "accurate" as reflecting the language of the *DSM-5*. There are 2,420 instances where descriptive words or phrases fit under "A. Deficits in social communication and social interaction" (30% of all descriptive instances, and 40% of DSM-mappable instances). Table 1 summarizes the number of instances in which various descriptors fit within each illustrative example

under the *DSM-5* criteria of "A. Deficits in social communication and social interaction" and the total number of books in which those descriptors were found.

Table 1: Descriptors showing "A. Deficits in social communication and social interaction"

Illustrative Examples	Number of Instances	Number of Books
1. "Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity"	1,688	100
2. "Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction"	585	89
3. "Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships"	147	50

Examples of descriptors that align with the first *DSM-5* criteria are as follows:

- A.1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, such as saying something inappropriate, can be found in *Marcelo in the Real World*. When his rabbi asks whether he learned about sex at school, rather than simply saying yes, Marcelo responds, "Sexual intercourse is how humans procreate. The erect penis of the man goes into the vagina of the woman."[xvi]
- A.2. Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors, such as having difficulty interpreting body language: In *The Half-Life of Planets*, the narrator, Hank, says, "Allie tells me there are signs everywhere in the way people act, in the tone of their voice, in the way they hold their head, and I can't read the signs."[xvii]
- A.3. Deficits in . . . relationships, such as not understanding sharing/taking turns/difficulty making friends: From *The Same Difference*: "Friends share their toys, she told me. Friends do nice things for each other, she said. None of it made sense at the time."[xviii]

Descriptors of the *DSM-5* diagnostic criteria "B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities" appear 3,674 times in the 100 books studied (46% of all instances; 60% of *DSM-5*-mappable instances). The number of instances that a descriptor fit this criteria and the total number of books where those descriptors are found is summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Descriptors showing "B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities"

Illustrative Examples	Number of Instances	Number of Books
1. "Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech"	941	84
2. "Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior"	872	88
3. "Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus"	996	60
4. "Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment"	865	92

Examples of descriptors that align with the second *DSM-5* diagnostic criteria are as follows:

- B.1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movement, such as Jason, who "flaps his hands, like when he is excited or just before he is going to say something," in *Anything but Typical.*[xix]
- B.2. Insistence on sameness, such as lack of flexibility or being rule-bound: In *Rules*, Catherine says, "He might not understand some things, but David loves rules."[xx]
- B.3. Fixated interests, such as unusual obsessions: Taylor Jane has a unique obsession with gerbils in *The White Bicycle*. When she becomes angry with her mother, she responds, " 'Walnut was the first of my series of gerbils!' I say, trying to hold on to the words before everything goes white. 'After Walnut came June, and after June came Charlotte, and after Charlotte came Hammy. And last fall, before I turned nineteen, I got my fifth gerbil, Harold Pinter.' "[xxi]
- B.4. Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input, such as sensitivity to touch: In *House Rules*, Jacob's mother says, "I reach out to comfort him but stop myself—a light touch can set Jacob off. He doesn't like handshakes or pats on the back or someone ruffling his hair."[xxii]

Frequently Seen Behaviors

The issue of "social-emotional reciprocity" is the most common deficit represented in the area of "A. Deficits in social communication and social interaction," with 1,688 instances found in all 100 books studied (21% of all instances; 70% of "A" instances). Table 3 lists the five most common descriptors found and their frequency under the first *DSM-5* diagnostic criteria.

Table 3: Five most frequently used descriptors showing "A. Deficits in social communication and social interaction"

Illustrative Examples	Descriptors (Number of Uses)
1. "Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity"	Is literal (274) Says inappropriate things (260) Doesn't respond to others (201) Doesn't talk much (143) Locked in own world (81)
2. "Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction"	Lacks eye contact (205) Stares (101) Difficulty reading facial expressions (75) Blank facial expression (40) Doesn't understand body language (29)
3. "Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships"	Lacks social skills (80) Doesn't play with others (20) Has no concept of personal space (11) Doesn't like interacting with people (7) Has difficulty making friends (7)

In the area of "B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities," the issue of "highly restricted, fixated interests" was the most common, with 996 instances found in 80 of the 100 books studied (13% of all instances; 27% of "B" instances). Table 4 lists the five most common descriptors found and their frequency under the second *DSM-5* diagnostic criteria.

Table 4: Five most frequently used descriptors showing "B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities"

Illustrative Examples	Descriptors (Number of Uses)
5. "Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech"	Repetitive behaviors (296) Rocks back and forth (186) Flaps arms/hands (171) Echolalia (107) Repetitive use of objects (57)
6. "Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior"	Likes order/routine (327) Precise (217) Rule-bound (107) Likes specific foods/drinks (48) Likes consistency of numbers (24)
7. "Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus"	Has a unique obsession (689) Perseverates on topics of interest (76) Is logical (29) Notices details (19) Focused (19)
8. "Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment"	Doesn't like to be touched/hugged (228) Sensitive to sound/noise (211) Sensitive to smell (66) Is a clean freak (47) Sensitive to feel of clothing (42)

When comparing primary characters to secondary characters, protagonists were more likely to be described as having an insistence on sameness—inflexibility, rules, and rituals. Secondary characters were more often (than primary characters) described as having incorrect nonverbal behavior, repetitive motor movements, and repetitive speech.

Repetitive motor behaviors are also much more likely to be used to describe characters with severe functional limitations. Authors use language about lack of speech reciprocity, fixated interests, inflexibility, and sensory overload far more often when the character has only mild or moderate functional limitations. Characters with severe functional limitations were described frequently as displaying repetitive motions and also lacking speech reciprocity.

Uncaptured Elements: "Other"

There were 1,827 of the 7,921 descriptors that the coders did not see as mapping onto established *DSM-5* categories (23%). These same behaviors, not described by *DSM-5*, appeared across many different books. For example, different authors saw lack of coordination as a telling or characteristic behavior for individuals with ASD, yet *DSM-5* does not include that in the diagnostic criteria. These descriptors were perhaps used for dramatic reasons or to reflect common behaviors exhibited also by those who do not have ASD. Alternatively, they could reflect inaccurate stereotypes of people with ASD. The *DSM-5* criteria focus on disability and problems, the "medical model" of psychiatry. For example, *DSM-5* does not provide "honesty" as a criterion, yet this is another common descriptor that was found. The researchers coded these as "other" and then examined them for patterns.

There appear to be two distinct patterns in the "other" behaviors: strong splinter skills (positive) and acting-out behaviors and strategies to minimize them (negative). Tables 5 and 6 show the number of instances where the five most common descriptors are found in these two areas.

Table 5: Five most frequently used descriptors of splinter skills

Splinter Skill	Number of instances
Excellent memory	135
Mathematically inclined	103
Musically inclined	23
Artistically inclined	18
Precocious/intelligent	16

Table 6: Five most frequently used descriptors of acting-out behaviors or strategies to minimize those activities

Behaviors or Strategies	Number of Instances
Screams	198
Meltdowns/tantrums	189
Uses calming strategies	185
Hurts others (bites, scratches, hits)	81
Self-injurious behavior	59

Discussion

Previous research has included some of the elements here. For example, Dyches, Prater, and Cramer studied two years' worth of children's books (reading level at picture-book age through ages 7–12) that had the keywords "mental retardation" or "autism."[xxiii] Only 12 books were identified, and they showed a great variety of depictions. This compares with the present study where within a larger (100 books) and more focused (autism only) corpus, distinct trends emerged. In a master's thesis, Weaver identified 42 picture books

depicting autism or Asperger's syndrome (the two were analyzed separately), but of these, 20 were nonfiction.[xxiv]

The previous study based on this corpus (100 young adult novels) compared depictions to reality in terms of research on the prevalence of particular broad attributes.[xxv] For example, in these novels 43% of protagonists with autism are female, while in CDC data only 18% of people with ASD diagnoses are female.[xxvi] This was a relatively simple comparison. Data from the books that seemed realistic—such as characters with mild functional limitations primarily being depicted in educational settings alongside peers without disabilities, and those with severe limitations being depicted as in special schools—illustrate the difficulty in comparison with reality. There is little national-level information on schooling prevalence for children with autism.

The purpose of this study was to go beyond the smaller scale of the previous studies to examine the details and nuances of character depiction. Novels, as a reading experience, soar or fail in terms of the richness of their style, characterization, and world-building. Windows and mirrors are foggy or clear depending on writing skill and what can be called the veracity or lived truthfulness of the scenarios authors depict. This is not precisely or statistically describable by means of the usual techniques of research validity, yet there is value in seeing how these micro-scale depictions reflect what the scientific community, as expressed in the *DSM-5*, has collaboratively determined to be an accurate portrayal of this spectrum of disorders.

The depictions of individuals with ASD provided in the young adult novels studied are for the most part consistent with the criteria provided in the *DSM-5*. These rich portrayals of characters, settings, and conflicts can show readers of all ages aspects of the ASD experience in a relatable and non-threatening way with an honest portrayal of reality.

In addition, this body of literature shows descriptions that go beyond the medical, problem-based mind-set of *DSM-5*. The authors of these novels see both strengths and challenges in the ASD experience. *DSM-5* would not, cannot, label "honesty" as a disorder, but several different authors depicted relentless honesty or candor as typical of a character with autism. While this is a positive portrayal, it is unclear whether or not it is accurate to suggest that people with ASD tend to be any more or any less honest than people who do not have ASD. On the other side, problems in controlling behavior are prevalent in these novels. Screaming, meltdowns, and biting others are behaviors that the authors decided were important to depict in the lives of these characters, but again, without strong supporting data, it is unclear how often people with ASD display these behaviors.

Conclusion

It would be wonderful if it were possible to compare prevalence of particular behaviors in these novels with prevalence of those characteristics in the real lives of people with autism spectrum disorder. However, medical and psychiatric research on ASD has been more concerned with etiology and treatment effectiveness than with prevalence of particular characteristics. Identifying and preventing the causes of autism and testing the efficacies of therapies are the primary focus of research funding and publication. Parents

can consult physicians, psychiatrists, and therapists for factual and scientific understanding and practical steps for their own particular situations. Previous literary studies were more limited, both in the number of books considered and in the depth of analysis.

Teens confronting ASD in themselves or others are left with a gap about "what is *normal*." Repetitive behaviors, meltdowns . . . and honesty? The depiction of autism in young adult literature is a vital resource to show siblings, classmates, and those on the spectrum themselves a rich portrayal of the potentials and challenges of this life with autism spectrum disorder. This study highlights the depth of detail available for adolescent readers with respect to people with ASD and suggests that this literature can help those with and without the disorder to better understand it.

Notes

[i] Jon Baio, "Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder among Children Aged 8 Years—Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 Sites, United States, 2010," *Surveillance Summaries*, vol. 63, no. 2 (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014), http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6302a1.htm?s_cid=ss6302a1_w (accessed August 25, 2014).

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[v] Baio, "Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 8 Years – Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 Sites, United States, 2010."

[vi] American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, 50–51.

[vii] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): Diagnostic Criteria," 2014, http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html (accessed August 25, 2014).

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Teen Book Covers: What's Missing?

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Abstract

One of many important objectives for teen services librarians is to develop a relevant and current collection of materials. This collection should be representative of the community in which the library resides and the teens in that community. It is important for teens to be able to see themselves in books as both characters and writers. The writing of this paper was triggered by a group of teens advocating for more books (covers specifically) in their collection reflecting the vast diversity of the town in which they live. This paper contains results of a survey of 6,785 teen fiction book covers, across six different libraries and two bookstores in metro Boston and southeastern Massachusetts. Correlations drawn using the collected data reveal that the current state of books in both libraries and bookstores is lacking when it comes to racially diverse covers. This data can be used to further the discussion already under way concerning the need for more racially diverse teen books and the responsibility of teen service librarians to advocate for change.

Introduction and Research Questions

The focus of this study is diversity on teen book covers (meaning books marketed or geared toward teens, usually ages 12–18). The reasoning behind this study lies in some honest feedback from a group of teens who regularly attend programs at the Randolph Turner Free Library (Massachusetts), where about 40% of the slightly over 32,000 residents are African American.[i] When asked how to improve the teen collection, the resounding response was "more books with black people on the cover[s]."

After assuring the teens that they have a right to access to books with cover art featuring relatable characters, I sat down to buy some new books. Although there was some older fiction and some titles labeled "urban" fiction available, it was difficult finding many books with diverse characters on the cover. As a twenty-something, white, female librarian, I wondered if this issue could be widespread and possibly caused by general unavailability of books representing diverse teens on their covers. Based on my own experiences, I suspected that white character representations graced the covers of a majority of teen books, but I couldn't find research to support or negate my suspicion.

To address these questions, I undertook the research project described in this paper. It involved a survey of over 6,000 bookstore and library titles and spanned metro Boston and southeastern Massachusetts.

Literature Review

A large body of literature dealing with diversity on teen book covers is available. Whether it is in literary journals or professional blogs, this literature covers the history, trends, equality, and diversity of teen book covers. In an article by Cat Yampbell discussing the history of teen book covers, it is clear that photographic depictions of people have become very popular (as well as other renderings of characters).[ii] Therefore in this study, it was expected that there would be a large proportion of character representations on teen book covers to survey.
Why do teens need diverse book covers? In addition to requests from teens themselves, there are other reasons that support the need for more such materials. Donna Miller discusses the current trends in photographic covers and how publishers "need to keep tabs on youth culture to produce cover art that is relevant."[iii] Teens want to read about characters and experiences that are relevant to their own lives.

Research has also addressed the question of why diverse representation is lacking on teen book covers (specifically among fiction titles). In an article in *Publishers Weekly*, Beth Feldman describes publishers as knowing they "can't please everyone." She suggests that it is frequently easier to create existing covers with ambiguity of race, age, and gender in order to avoid narrowing the pool of teen buyers.[iv] In fact, Yampbell relates that not all illustrators are required to read the entire book before creating a cover, thus leading to possible misrepresentation of characters. This could be another reason why vagueness on book covers is simply easier for the illustrators/designers to create.

In late 2015 *Kirkus Reviews* began identifying characters by race and/or identity in book reviews, suggesting that "the American audience for these books is rapidly closing in on the moment when it will be majority-'minority.' "[v]
Having diverse characters represented on teen book covers is important for teens. It is often difficult to accomplish this since authors, publishers, and illustrators must coordinate to avoid misrepresentation of characters on book covers. This paper specifically addresses representations of diversity on book covers and not the equally (if not more relevant) significant topic concerning a lack of characters of color in teen books. The Cooperative Children's Book Center examines most U.S. trade-published children's and teen books, and it reports statistics that show low occurrences of culturally diverse characters.[vi] The effects of this low occurrence are described in detail by Walter Dean Myers in a *New York Times* opinion piece citing the impact literature had on his search for identity as a black teenager.[vii] Taking it one step further, research done by Casey Rawson compares titles on preassembled booklists (often used by libraries to order material for their collections) to demographic data on U.S. teens, and she concludes that these lists are not sufficient if we mean to adequately represent diversity through characters in these books.[viii] Finally, the #WeNeedDiverseBooks movement began as a Twitter exchange in 2014 and is now a widely publicized organization promoting diversity with a mission statement of "putting more books featuring diverse characters into the hands of all children."[ix]

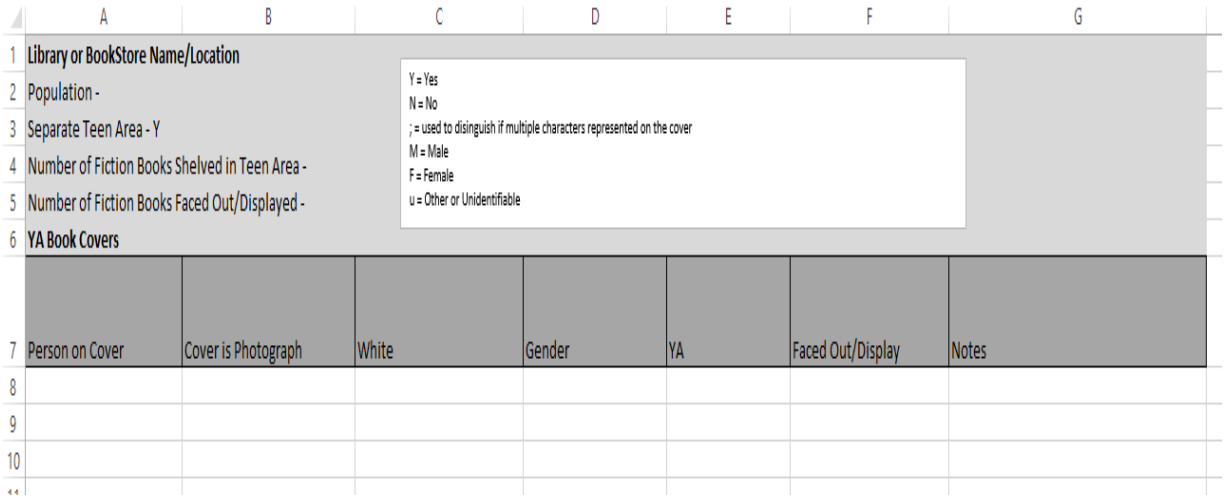
One of the more commonly discussed issues related to teen book covers is apparent racism and whitewashing. Annie Schutte mentions that often the covers are changed due to feedback after releasing the advance reading copies, the hardcover, and finally the paperback. She focuses on drawing out examples of whitewashing on popular teen fiction book covers. "Whitewashing happens when a publishing company represents a non-white character on the cover of a book with a white representation."[x] One of the books she uses as an example is *Liar* by Justine Larbalestier in which the main character is described as being black.[xi] The advance reading copy caused an uproar as it was a depiction of a very light-skinned woman, so it was officially printed with a black woman on the cover (although still relatively light-skinned). Schutte then goes on to describe the issue of silhouetting on teen book covers. Although silhouettes are artistic and a great way to allow readers to use their imaginations, Shutte has found an overwhelming number of books in which silhouettes are used to depict non-white characters. Not only is it important to gauge the numbers of white character representations on covers in relation to non-white characters, but we must also factor in the idea that silhouettes, shadows, cloaks, and so on may play a part in promoting obscurity in place of representing non-white characters.

In an article in *School Library Journal*, Allie Bruce describes her attempts to explain whitewashing and silhouetting to a sixth-grade class. When she asked the students why they thought publishers would purposely avoid depicting people of color on teen book covers, their response was "Do they think it won't make as much money?"[xii] Bruce suggests that the answer is most likely yes, and that publishers probably conduct surveys/focus groups that lead them to believe that depicting people of color on YA book covers might cause reduced profits.
While bookstores might prefer limited diversity in book cover illustrations in order to maximize sales and profits, what are the implications for public libraries, where there is a mission to serve all teens and to provide diverse teen collections? This study examines just how large the gap is between libraries and bookstores when it comes to diverse teen covers. It also examines how large the gap is between white and non-white representations on teen book covers. Finally, it compares the levels of ambiguity used on covers across the survey sites.

Method

The process began with the creation of a list of features found on teen book covers, shown in table 1. This list was slightly altered as better ways of describing these variables were formulated throughout the analysis process. The final list of features includes gender, age category, type of cover art, notes, and racial diversity. The data compiled for these teen covers is based solely on the author's perception of these variables. While this could be considered a limitation of the study, the idea behind this research is to show how covers are perceived, as opposed to looking for empirical variance, making observation an appropriate method for the study.

Table 1: Variables used on spreadsheet for data collection purposes



Six public libraries located in the metro Boston area and southeastern Massachusetts were selected based on population: two urban libraries, two suburban, and two rural. These libraries are referred to as Libraries A–F throughout this paper (A/B = urban libraries, C/D = suburban libraries, E/F = rural libraries). One chain bookstore and one independent bookstore were also selected within these areas (referred to throughout this paper as Bookstore 1 and Bookstore 2). A breakdown of these locations can be seen in table 2.

Table 2: Libraries and bookstores by population level, selected for data collection

Location	Library A	Library B	Library C	Library D	Library E	Library F	Bookstore 1	Bookstore 2
~Population	600,000+	100,000+	50,000+	25,000+	11,000+	10,000+	35,000+	55,000+

"US Census Bureau: State and Country Quickfacts," last modified 2009, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/25000.html.

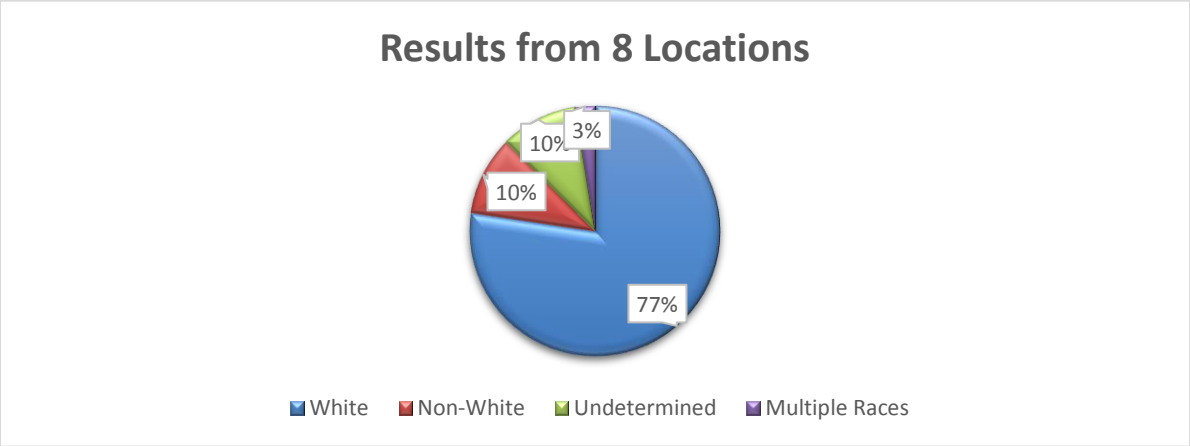
Next, each teen section at these locations was visited to be surveyed (all of which had a separate area for teens and their collections). The visits were not prescheduled (to avoid any bias), and a staff member was informed of the survey upon beginning each assessment of the teen collections, to be sure entry into the area was permitted (all locations were visited either during school hours or later in the evening to avoid encroaching on the teenagers' space). Each teen fiction book cover was individually surveyed for variables, and duplicate copies of the book were not considered. Only teen fiction was included in the survey (other specialized collections and summer reading materials were excluded). The data collection took a total of two weeks (with approximately 3–4 hours spent at each location), and all results were collected on a spreadsheet. To see a breakdown of data, refer to table 3 and graph A.

Table 3: Breakdown of all location data collected

	Total Teen Books	Books with Character on Cover	White Character	Non-White Character	Multiple Races Represented	Undetermined/ Ambiguous
Library A	1,143	773	572	88	27	86
Library B	526	340	208	97	9	26

Library C	265	160	125	11	2	22
Library D	1,609	1,045	827	86	26	106
Library E	495	258	184	36	7	31
Library F	1,457	944	781	76	27	59
Bookstore 1	747	412	320	22	3	51
Bookstore 2	543	320	258	16	5	40
Totals	6,785	4,252	3,275	432	106	421

Graph A: Overall results for teen book covers displaying representations of people, for six libraries and two bookstores combined

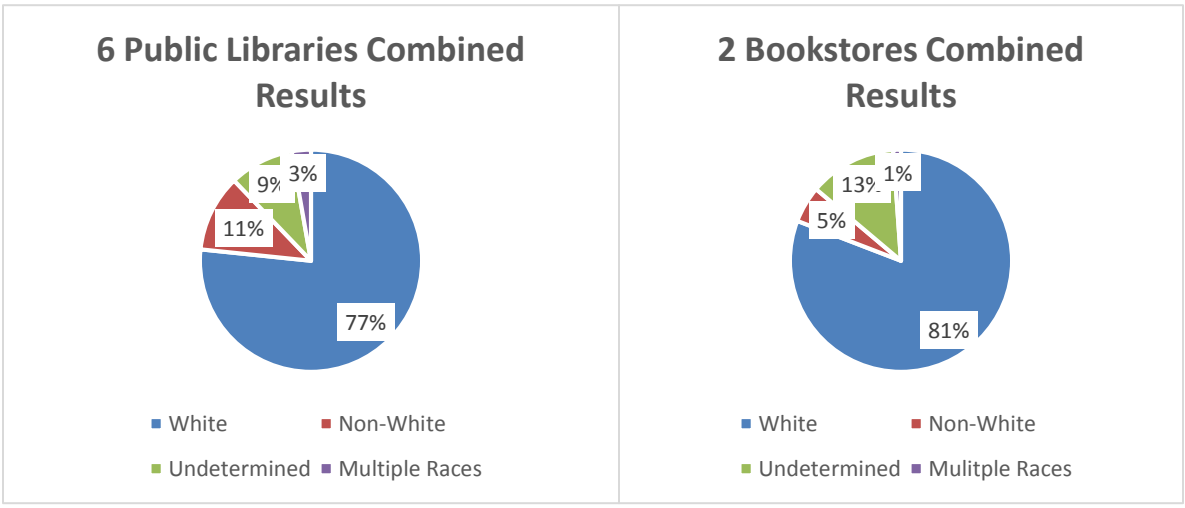


Due to the nature of the research, analysis was mainly focused on the question of race (assumed white vs. assumed non-white) and also on the level of perceived visual ambiguity of the covers in reference to representation of diverse characters.

Findings and Discussion

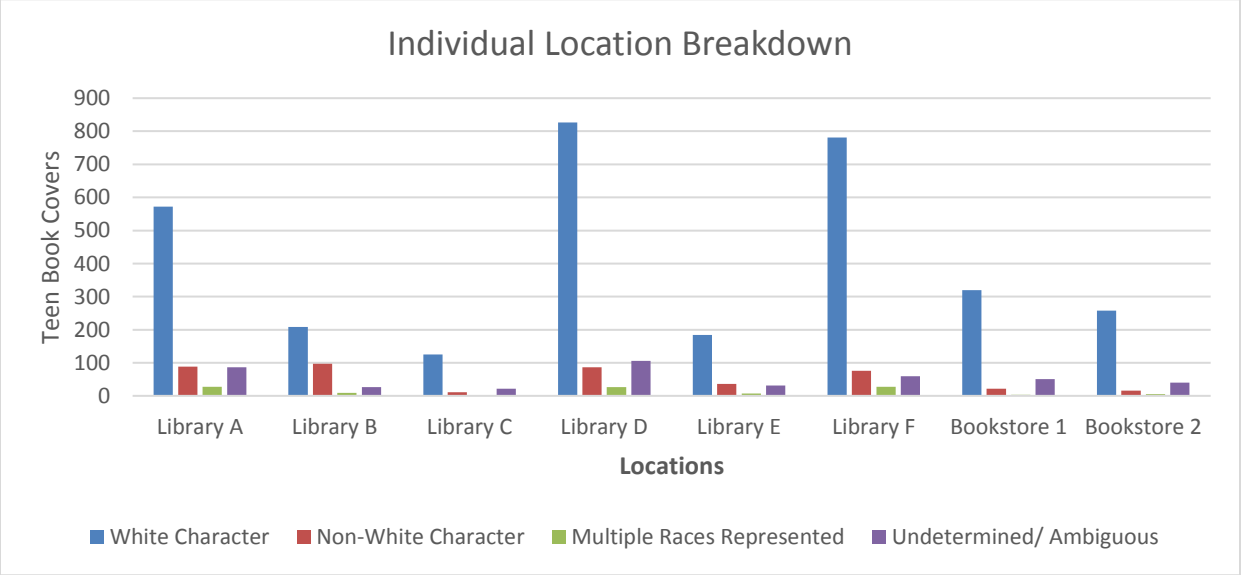
In total for all eight locations, 6,785 covers were surveyed (4,252 of which depicted representations of people). Out of the 4,252 covers, 3,275 (77%) were representations of white people, 432 (10%) were non-white, 421 (10%) were unidentifiable, and 106 (3%) represented characters of more than just one race on the cover. According to these calculations, on average, over three-quarters of teen books on both the library and bookstore shelves featured a character whom I perceived to be white. The six libraries and two bookstores had very similar results with only a few differences in numbers. A comparison can be seen in graph B.

Graph B: Comparison between six library totals and two bookstore totals



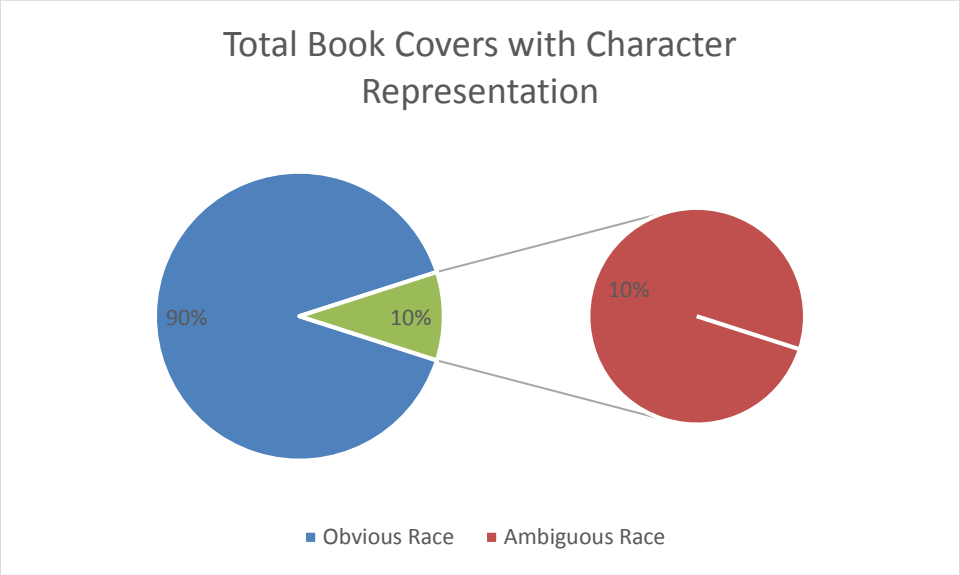
The average of the six libraries showed 77% of the books having white characters on the covers, and the two bookstores showed 81%. This is not a large difference; however, libraries did show more diversity with a higher percentage of non-white characters and a lower percentage of characters of ambiguous race, on covers. Out of all eight locations (see graph C), Library B (which was located in a very diverse neighborhood) had the most even breakdown of variables. Library A also had a larger amount of diversity than Libraries C–F. Library E appears to have a more significant amount of diversity. However, from notes collected during the survey process, a large number of the non-white characters appeared to be Native American. While this town does not have a large Native American demographic (in comparison with the entirety of Massachusetts), it does have special collections dedicated to the history of Native Americans, which may be the cause for the large amount of diversity shown in its teen book covers.

Graph C: Breakdown of eight locations surveyed



While it is quite clear that there is limited diversity on the teen book covers examined for this study, there was also considerable ambiguity in the depictions. As discussed in the literature review, this could either be a way to allow readers to use their imagination when reading about the characters, or it could potentially be a way to conceal the fact that a character may be a person of color. Ambiguity might also provide a solution for publishers who may not want to draw distinguishing lines between possible stereotypical characteristics of certain races, in order to avoid backlash. Or if illustrators are not required to read the entire book in order to create the cover art, perhaps using a silhouette is not just an artistic way to represent a character, but a way of depicting a character of a race that is unknown or unfamiliar to that illustrator. The results from all eight locations show an almost equal number of non-white covers and ambiguous covers (at approximately 10% each, see graph D). This is interesting considering the idea that some elusiveness on covers may have a purpose other than mere aesthetics.

Graph D: Ambiguous representations of characters vs. non-ambiguous for all eight locations



There are a number of limitations to this study. The first is that it only covered the metro Boston and southeastern Massachusetts area. Some of these towns may have specific histories that are reflected in their teen collections. Some of the libraries did not have dedicated teen services librarians. The selection of variables themselves was a limitation as there was only one researcher to perceive diversity on the teen covers. I am white, a librarian, and grew up in the areas in which this study took place; each of these factors may have interpreted my perceptions of the cover art. Finally, there were many limitations when it came to the books themselves. Only teen fiction was surveyed; however, not all books were arranged to accommodate this type of research. At one of the bookstore locations, the shelves were being stocked at the time of the survey so the number of books and where they were being displayed was mutable. Some of the libraries surveyed were smaller branches of main libraries. These branches may have had specialized collections, and one in particular was very new and therefore had mostly newer teen fiction books on the shelves. Also, in the locations without a dedicated teen services librarian, it was obvious that the collections were on the older side, affecting the currency of the results for this study. Finally, this survey was performed toward the end of the school year, and therefore

almost all locations had a separately displayed or labeled collection containing local summer reading books. These, as well as separately shelved or labeled urban fiction collections, were not considered as part of the survey.

In order to reduce limitations and biased or inconsistent data, I kept the data collection process systematic and very rigid: the variables surveyed remained extremely similar or the same for each location, the amount of time looking at each cover was similar, and only teen fiction books were considered, as prescribed in the original research agenda.

Conclusions

While much more research can and should be done on this topic (across larger areas and possibly even virtually with eBooks and Amazon holdings), this study did find meaningful results. It was predicted that there would be a much larger percentage of representations of white people than people of color on teen fiction covers. This was expected due to my personal experience in libraries and a long history of reading teen fiction. The results, however, showed even lower representation of non-white characters than I had expected, as well as even lower representation of multiple races on the same book cover. If almost 80% of the teen fiction covers that depict people represent white characters (see graph A), I expected that at least the other 20% would represent characters of color. Looking at the average results from all eight locations it appears that only 13% (non-white and multiple races represented) are diverse. The other 10% in question are covers with characters whose race is ambiguous (whether it is to hide a character's diversity or for aesthetic purposes, it is impossible to say). These covers depict characters that are hooded, cloaked, silhouetted, or in some way hide the ethnicity of the character portrayed. It is possible that libraries may be slightly more in tune with the needs of their diverse patrons than bookstores, as they showed a slightly higher percentage of diversity on teen fiction covers. This research is an attempt to create a more transparent discussion regarding diversity on teen book covers. It is now time to consider the possible causes of the lack of diversity shown here. Could it be due to a lack of diverse authors? Is it a failure to communicate with illustrators/artists? Is it poor marketing techniques by publishers? Is it outright racism? These are questions we need to answer in order to ensure that our teens have access to books that proportionally reflect the diversity of our society.

To build on this work, the data collected in this survey could potentially be used to study gender on teen fiction covers, representation of age groups on teen fiction covers, and even the popularity of one medium of cover art over another. For the purpose of this study, the perception of racial diversity on covers was the main focus, in order to better understand this issue and educate the specific group of teens who initially posed the idea. Besides focusing on developing a more diverse collection for these teens (with more diverse cover art), a meaningful conversation about the dominance of "whiteness" on teen book covers is now possible.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Melanie Kimball of Simmons College for her unfaltering guidance and support throughout the initial writing and editing phase of this paper.

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What We Know: Planning, Implementing, and Assessing a Media Literacy-Themed Summer Camp

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Abstract

Information and media literacy are essential for today's children and teens as they navigate an increasingly saturated information environment. Educators at all levels must seek to communicate and teach the skills that students need to evaluate, understand, and use information in engaging and innovative ways. This paper highlights such an effort by librarians and staff at Florida Institute of Technology in the planning and implementation of a camp called "What We Know: Understanding Media and Its Influence." The camp was administered by five library staff and attended by ten teens between the ages of 12 and 16. Throughout the camp, staff used campers' feedback and surveys to gauge the impact of the program. Camper age differences proved to be the biggest challenge to camp success. Overall, 78% of attendees reported that camp was more enjoyable than predicted. Qualitative data gathered through discussion and peer-to-peer interactions indicated that, in general, camp attendees gained increased awareness of problematic issues in media. Future camps will include a more focused age range and more hands-on activities.

Introduction

Perceptions of digital, informational, and media literacies often paint a picture that does not accurately represent reality.[i] Teens and young adults may often find themselves in academic settings unprepared for college-level research and lacking the necessary skills to critically

evaluate what they see, hear, or read.[ii] Students from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to lack digital literacy competencies, including the ability to use information and communication technology (ICT).[iii] How can universities and colleges address this gap in student knowledge? Through coupling a need for stronger information literacy with an institution's need for community outreach, educators can help bridge the gap in student education and prepare today's junior high and high school students for higher-level thinking and further education.

Defined as a group of abilities and competencies covering information discovery, understanding, and use, information literacy may be introduced to students by way of media literacy.[iv] As part of information literacy, media literacy focuses on the use, creation, and understanding of media in various forms.[v] Another subset of information literacy, news literacy, focuses on differentiating journalism from other media.[vi] Using familiar media such as television, social media, and Internet resources, media literacy may be used to teach critical thinking. In line with these ideas, library staff and faculty at Florida Institute of Technology set out to plan a media literacy camp geared toward secondary school students. This paper treats the inaugural camp as a case study and discusses the planning, execution, evaluation, and assessment of the camp and the need for improvements in future endeavors.

Literature Review

Participatory digital media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, message boards, and chat rooms) require social media literacies that can be defined by the following five categories: attention, participation, collaboration, network awareness, and critical consumption.[vii] While students liberally connect and communicate with others (attention, participation, collaboration), most do not understand the ramifications of their digital interactions on a larger public scale (network awareness and critical consumption).[viii]

The growth of civic engagement via digital participation has been long debated with two broad schools of thought: one school contends that information seeking, social networking, and Internet use empower users to have a voice and provide an outlet and forum for creative expression, while the other school of thought states that online information seeking and socializing create a distraction from other forms of community and civic participation.[ix] While any form of participation propels users from a passive role to a more active one, participation does not necessitate an engaged and media-literate consumer.[x] Media and digital literacies are now necessary to exist in our information-dense society, as the ability to effectively navigate and filter both media input and communication output is an essential life skill. This skill requires assessment and analysis of news sources, point of view, and motivation, as well as an understanding of how to contribute to the discourse in a civil, socially responsible, and ethical way.[xi]

Information literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, and news literacy are increasingly overlapping in today's world, particularly for teens and young adults as they become politicized. And despite the demonstrated need for media-literate consumers, online interactions between students and teachers rarely occur until college, potentially leaving teens unprepared and lacking certain key literacies and digital etiquette.[xii] Furthermore, teens of parents with lower socioeconomic status are already less likely to be information and digitally literate.[xiii] According to Walther, Hanewinkel, and Morgenstern, the prevailing approach to media literacy emphasizes

shielding students from harmful media effects. More recently this has been replaced by the "immunization approach," where individuals with more information are better able to "withstand" any potentially harmful effects of media.[xiv] Vraga and Tully also discuss the role of media literacy education in how viewers evaluate or identify bias in news. They acknowledge that whether "news media literacy is effective in helping audiences identify biased news content" is still an area for research.[xv] Mihailidis and Thevenin argue that apolitical media literacy education is problematic because the responsibility of education is to address injustice. Media literacy education can equip students to address injustices, but not if it is presented apolitically.[xvi]

Though formal education about media consumption is largely non-existent (and may in fact be pushed aside in favor of digital "literacy"), many teens are still active users of all types of social media and use it in their daily lives.[xvii] Unfortunately, many secondary school policies often restrict digital communications between teachers and students, creating an educational vacuum where media literacy could be effectively taught.[xviii] School districts and parents prefer to sustain an apolitical approach to education regarding media consumption, an ineffective approach that inhibits students' critical analysis skills.[xix] At the university level, where the restrictions and barriers faced by secondary school teachers are less formalized, librarians and instructors can more easily interact with students in an online setting.[xx] Librarians at the university level have a unique opportunity to instruct students in becoming critical consumers of media.[xxi]

Students should possess the skills to evaluate mass media sources effectively and critically in order to fully participate in our information-rich society.[xxii] As Dilevko explains, it is important for "students to move away from passive reading of news media sources and move towards being able to decode the social context of mainstream news and develop informed and negotiated reading practices."[xxiii] Stand-alone programs that target specific media literacy outcomes may be the preferred educational approach.[xxiv]

A number of libraries have implemented outreach programs or camps for children, particularly during the summer months when most schools are not in session. These creative programs have proven beneficial to children, parents, and libraries, providing entertainment and active learning, and increasing library attendance and community outreach.[xxv] Godbey et al. note, "While many outreach programs are librarian-driven and focus on helping students develop information literacy or lifelong learning skills, the programs can also serve as part of a broader recruitment effort on the part of the university."[xxvi]

Summer camps are not unfamiliar in the library world. Darien Library in Connecticut developed a three-day technology camp targeted toward teens within the community.[xxvii] Ludwig offers tips for hosting a teen camp, which includes promoting camp as much as possible, basing the lessons around projects instead of all lectures, allowing for creativity, and getting feedback from students, ideally with an evaluation form at the end of each day and at the end of the camp session. She also notes the importance of breaks, even if they are not very long.[xxviii]

Several academic libraries have implemented successful summer camps focusing on information literacy or similar topics. University of North Carolina at Pembroke offered two summer camps, one for children and one for teens.[xxix] UNC Pembroke's camps ran for two weeks and were scheduled for three hours per day. Although no formal assessment was performed, camp leaders noted that campers "developed . . . as intellectuals," had more confidence in using an academic library and its resources, and now had experienced the "hustle" of college life.[xxx] Other examples

include Parma-South Library branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library (Ohio), which has held summer science camps for three consecutive years.[xxxi] Their camps were held for two hours per day for five days and included a weeklong project, an art project, a literature component, a music component, hands-on activities, short videos, and guest speakers. Camps were deemed successful despite a lack of formal assessment. Staskus stresses the importance of having adequate time to plan for the camps and eliminating activities that were too dull, complicated, or expensive.[xxxii] Staskus also notes that groups of two to four students were more successful at completing camp activities than students working alone.

Methods

Florida Institute of Technology (Florida Tech) is a private research university located in Melbourne, Florida. First established as Brevard Engineering College in 1958, Florida Tech maintains programs in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, aviation, and liberal arts. Evans Library, built in 1984, is currently the university's sole library facility. Every summer, Florida Tech hosts numerous academic, athletic, and artistic summer camps as part of a community outreach initiative. In keeping with its own community outreach initiative, Evans Library held its inaugural summer camp in the summer of 2015. The methods outlined in this paper describe the topics and activities addressed in the camp, as well as the organization and planning process.

The camp, "What We Know: Understanding Media and Its Influence," began as an information literacy camp targeted toward teens ages 12 through 17. As camp planning progressed, the overall tone and content of the camp shifted from information literacy to media literacy, focusing on the messages and media that teens encounter on a daily basis. The camp was administered by five librarians and attended by ten teens between the ages of 12 and 16.

"What We Know: Understanding Media and Its Influence" took place over a period of five consecutive afternoons in June 2015. During the initial planning process, each day of camp was assigned a theme or topic. These themes built upon one another and provided the baseline for planning lessons and activities during the duration of camp. Incorporating standards from the knowledge practices and dispositions of the Association of College & Research Libraries ,[xxxiii] camp organizers decided upon the following activities, topics, and themes:

Day 1: Introductions, and Why We're Here

Day 1 covered introductions between campers and camp staff, as well as an introduction to the overall theme of the camp. Activities included name games, discussions about copyright, and a tour of the library facilities.

Fishbowl Activity: Why Do We Have Media?

Objectives:

- To assess campers' levels of media literacy.
- To assess campers' opinions on media, censorship, and objectivity.
- To encourage campers to begin engaging with subjects covered in camp.

Library staff utilized a "fishbowl" discussion on media and censorship to gauge camper knowledge levels. Fishbowl discussions foster non-confrontational discussions by only allowing participants within the "bowl" (discussion table or area) to discuss the assigned topic.

Participants were seated in a circle, where the total number of chairs equaled half the total number of campers. The number of active participants at any time equaled the number of chairs minus one. Non-active participants and observers were asked to sit or stand silently outside the bowl. A designated moderator began the discussion by introducing pre-selected topics: Why do we have media? Why is media important? As the discussion progressed, campers leaving the bowl were replaced by observers. Camp staff members who participated in the activity were instructed to not steer or direct the discussion in any way.

Day 2: Creating Information: People, Purpose, and Perspective

Day 2 of camp focused on information creators and the ethics surrounding the creation and dissemination of information. Discussions included ethics scenarios, social media ethics, whistleblowers, information bias, interviewing scenarios, and how information is spread.

Understanding Primary and Secondary Sources

Goals:

- Campers will be able to identify sources as either primary or secondary.
- Campers will be able to identify the main characteristics of primary and secondary sources.

Campers were divided into two groups and presented with a pile of resources that included books and journals. Campers were asked to identify primary and secondary resources among the items presented to them. Points were awarded to each team for each correctly identified resource.

Information Domains

Goals:

- Campers will be able to recognize the type of Internet source based on domain name.
- Campers will be able to evaluate different types of domains for potential bias.

Using the same two teams from the primary and secondary source activity, campers were given a particular domain type (.gov, .edu, .com, and .org) and asked to list websites using that domain type. Campers were given ninety seconds for each domain type and awarded points for each correct answer.

Who Creates Information?

Goals:

- Campers will be able to demonstrate that facts and opinions are not the same.

This activity included a presentation on social media's role in the information landscape, ethics in news, and whistleblowers. After the lecture, campers engaged in an interviewing activity that illustrated the unreliability and subjectivity of eyewitness accounts. For the activity, campers were split into two groups consisting of "witnesses" and "interviewers." Witnesses represented five different and conflicting eyewitness accounts of the same event. Campers in the interviewers group were tasked with determining the true course of events based upon the conflicting reports.

Day 3: Data, Information, and Manipulation

Day 3 focused on how data and news are manipulated and packaged for consumption. Campers learned of various data-manipulation techniques, including truncated axes and misuse of

cumulative growth. Other topics included "reality" television, hoaxes, and sensationalism in the media.

Sensationalism in the News

Goals:

- Campers will be able to analyze the manner in which news is broadcast in today's world.

Campers were shown a playlist of news broadcasts from the 1950s, '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s, and present day and asked to compare and contrast differences between each decade.

Propaganda and Spin

Goals:

- Campers will be able to identify how news items are manipulated.
- Campers will learn about media manipulation tactics through direct experimentation.

After learning how news broadcasters can spin stories to have new and different meanings, campers were asked to do the same. Campers were presented with a selection of age-appropriate "odd" news stories from the *Huffington Post* and asked to change the overall tone and meaning of their selected story without altering any essential facts. After rewriting the story, campers were presented with the opportunity to record their own broadcast version.

Day 4: Why Am I Hungry? Advertising and Its Impact

Day 4 examined how advertising impacts and shapes our views of the world. Discussions on branding, product placement, and targeted advertising were followed by a marketing exercise.

Product Placement

Goals:

- Campers will be able to recognize product placement in movies, television shows, and other media.
- Campers will learn about the ways in which music and color can be used to manipulate emotions and persuade consumers to purchase products.

Along with discussing the ways in which media producers include strategic product placements, this lesson included an activity on brand recognition. Campers were asked to identity brands based on slogans and jingles, demonstrating the pervasiveness of advertising in daily life.

Targeted Advertising

Goals and objectives:

- To encourage campers to ask questions regarding ads.
- To have campers address the following questions regarding targeted advertisements:
    - Is this accurate or realistic? Why or why not?
    - What is this ad trying to tell me? Do I believe it?
    - Is this ad trying to sell a product or lifestyle? Do I want what the ad is selling? Why or why not?
    - How might this ad affect me, personally, or others that come to mind?

This activity utilized a prepared playlist of commercials and advertisements. Videos spanned a variety of products and years, but remained age appropriate for campers. Foreign language

commercials were also included to help campers analyze non-verbal advertising. The following questions were asked as each video played, allowing for discussion time after:

- What do you think?
- Who is this ad targeting?
- How can you tell?

When campers were hesitant to voice their thoughts, the following prompts were used:

- Who do you see?
- What is happening?
- Who do you not see?

After the discussion, campers were given the opportunity to market their own products using what they had learned. Campers were given a choice of various "marketable" items such as empty boxes and bottles, and asked to develop and record a commercial that marketed these items to an atypical audience.

Day 5: Do You Know What I Mean? Research and Reporting

"What We Know: Understanding Media and Its Influence" camp concluded with a visit to the university's radio station, where campers were given the opportunity to record their own media messages. Campers were also asked to participate in a short camp assessment on day 5.

Assessment Methods

Evaluations leaned heavily on the side of qualitative assessment due to the small sample size and experimental nature of the camp. Quantitative assessment was limited to analysis and grading of camper-produced projects from days 3 and 4. Parent evaluations focused on their impressions of the camp's value, both financially and educationally. This camp functioned as a pilot project for future camps, and post-camp evaluations examined the experience as a case study.

Through an initial student-led discussion, staff gathered baseline data to determine participants' level of understanding regarding journalistic ethics, media literacy, politicized topics, and civic engagement. This process began on the first day of camp with a fishbowl discussion designed to allow staff to evaluate where campers placed on the spectra of media, information, and digital literacy. Staff members were able to utilize this information to track campers' progress during camp through both formative assessments and activities.

Throughout the week, staff conducted formative assessments to measure comprehension of content and gathered qualitative data via activities and student projects. Two video projects were assigned: one asking campers to exaggerate or falsify a news story, and another one asking campers to advertise a product to an atypical audience. Three camp staff analyzed and graded the video projects based on the campers' ability to follow directions (five points), the final product's alignment with activity goals and objectives (five points), and completeness of assignment (five points) for a total of fifteen possible points. Camp surveys administered at the end of camp evaluated campers' perceptions of camp and self-reported media literacy gains.

Results

Media Literacy Gains through Discussions

Behaviors and activities that indicated an increase in campers' media literacy skills were noted by staff via observations and activities throughout the week. Campers facilitated several politicized discussions, allowing staff to evaluate their responses without instructor prompts. As the week progressed, campers led more discussions and raised more difficult and complicated questions than those initially asked, including questions regarding portrayal of hetero-normativity and traditional gender roles in advertising. Campers moderated each other successfully and encouraged one another to participate during these discussions.

Media Literacy Gains through Activities

Camper videos relating to falsified news stories received an average score of 11.1 out of 15 available points (table 1), while videos relating to advertising received an average grade of 13.8 out of 15 (table 2). Scores for both activities ranged from 7.5 to 15 (tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Scores for camper-created "Propaganda and Spin" videos

	Group 1	**Group 2**	**Group 3**	**Average**
How well did the group follow instructions?	2.6	4.0	4.3	3.6
How well did the product align with the activity goals and learning objectives?	2.3	4.3	4.3	3.6
Was the activity completed?	2.6	5.0	4.0	3.8
Totals	7.5	13.3	12.6	11.1

Table 2: Scores for camper-created advertising videos

	Group 1	**Group 2**	**Group 3**	**Average**
How well did the group follow instructions?	4.6	4.6	5.0	4.7
How well did the product align with the activity goals and learning objectives?	3.6	4.6	5.0	4.4
Was the activity completed?	4.6	4.6	5.0	4.7
Totals	12.8	13.8	15.0	13.8

Student Assessments of Camp

In the survey, 100% of campers claimed to understand the content presented during the week. When campers were asked what they learned at camp that they did not know before, responses covered news, media, information literacy, advertising, and digital literacy:

- "News is biased."

- “I didn’t know how 3-D printers work.”
- “Not so much learned as realized about advertising—the colors.”
- “1. Copyright laws, 2. About the other kids.”
- “I learned that they try to advertise products in movies or TV shows.”
- “Learning more about advertisements or on how you approach your audience.”
- “How to approach your audience in new ways.”
- “Find ways on how movies/shows secretly advertise.”
- “Advertising.”

Figure 1: Camper responses to the survey question “How did you sign up for camp?”

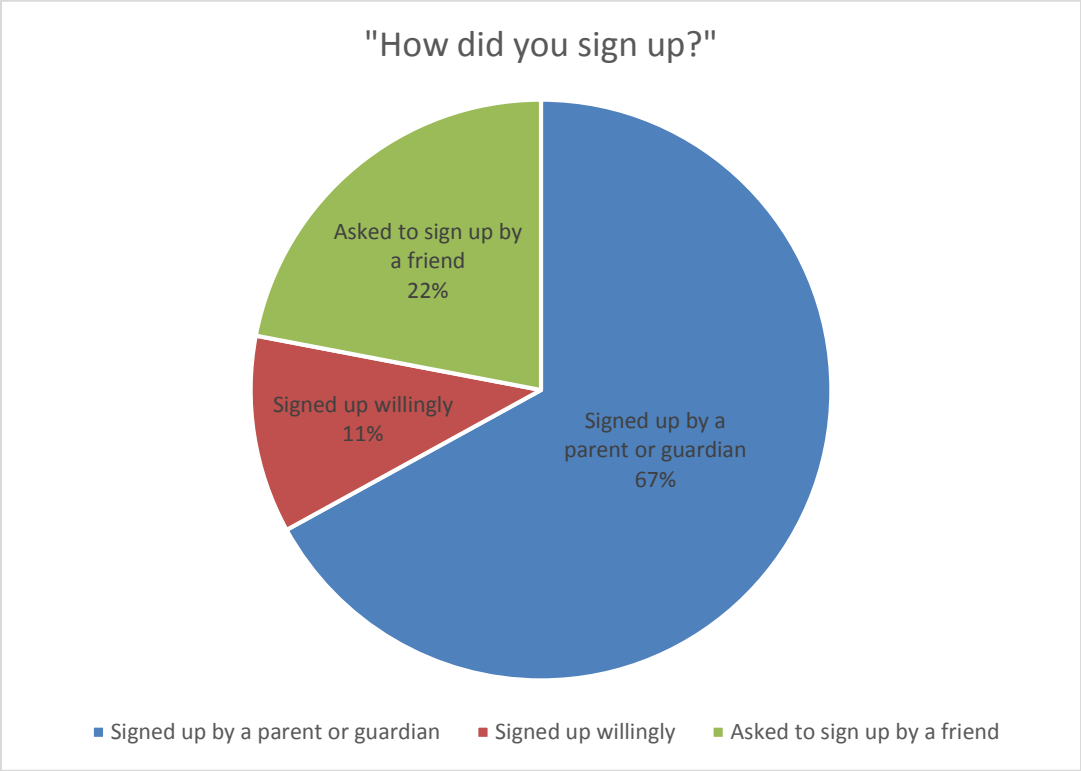

Figure 2: Camper responses to the survey question "What were your expectations regarding camp?"

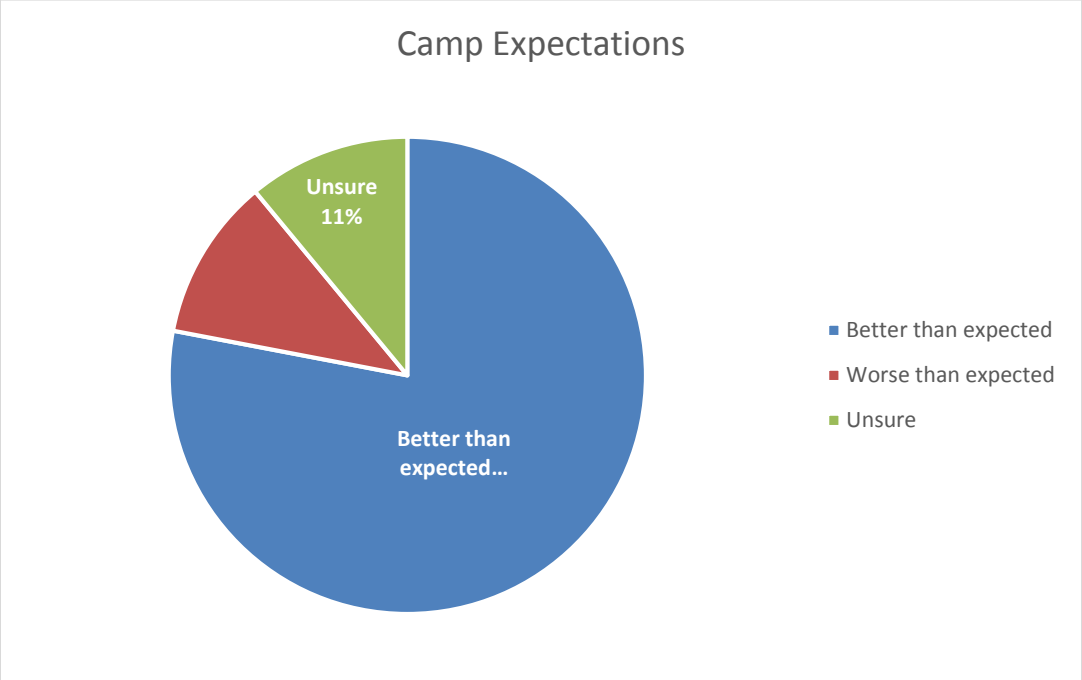

Table 3: Camper responses to survey questions regarding their understanding of the content covered

	Yes	No
Are you better able to understand news you see after this camp?	9	0
Are you better able to evaluate the ads you see after this camp?	9	0
Are you more aware of the influences of media after this camp?	9	0
Are you more likely to think before you create and post content after this camp?	8	1

Staff Assessments of Camp

Library staffers provided the following comments regarding camp:

- Limit age range to better adapt content and activities.
- Find dedicated space for the duration of camp.
- Dedicate fewer staff members and recruit teens/student employees to assist.
- Work more closely with Arts and Communication, the Crimson, FIT-TV (campus television station); continue working with WFIT (campus radio station).
- Have clearer goals for both staff and campers: media literacy vs. information literacy vs. social media vs. digital literacy.
- Incorporate more activities.
- Encourage partnered projects and activities that nurture the friendships campers develop.

Discussion

Qualitative data gathered through discussion and peer-to-peer interactions indicated an increased awareness of problematic issues in media, though more data must be gathered in order to determine if this awareness translates into more critical consumption of media over time. Self-reported survey responses indicated an increase in camper awareness of media literacy and issues, though the magnitude of this increase is unknown.

The age variation among campers proved to be one of the largest obstacles both in operating the camp and in evaluating its success. Though the average camper age was 13.3, campers ranged from 12 to 16 years old. This reflected a significant developmental difference between campers, which was particularly evident in their prior exposure to media and how campers responded to camp content and activities. This is consistent with previous findings, where both gender and age were found to be factors in the adoption of information and communication technology.[xxxiv] The oldest campers (at 15 and 16) did not fully participate or engage in video activities, though both fully participated in discussion-based activities. Despite a lack of engagement on the part of the oldest campers, scores from day 4's advertising activity indicate that campers were able to both understand and apply camp content.

While this pilot study leaned heavily on qualitative assessment, quantitative data could be obtained from future camps. The results of gamified activities, such as those on day 2, could be recorded for analysis later. Pre- and post-assessments of camper media literacy levels are also suggested as another means of measuring camp success. In addition, camp staff noted that clearer goals regarding activities and learning outcomes would be desirable in future camps.

Conclusions

Qualitative data gathered through discussion and peer-to-peer interactions did indicate an increased awareness of problematic issues in media. While indicators of awareness were present, additional data will be needed to determine if this awareness actually translates into more critical consumption of media over time. As noted by Vraga and Tully, the role of news literacy in teaching audiences how to identify biased content is still open for research.[xxxv] "What We Know: Understanding Media and Its Influence" camp addressed this research question, and the observations in the pilot project support this as a valuable research area.

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