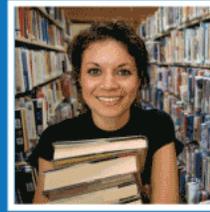
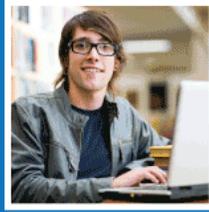


# *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*



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## **Editor's Message**

When the *JRLYA* Advisory Board developed the journal's call for submissions about "Movements that affect teens (for example, #metoo, #whatif, #blacklivesmatter)," the committee left the theme open for interpretation from authors about what these movements might mean for teens. The three authors whose work is featured in this issue, looked at movements that affect teens through the lens of literature, and how literature reflects certain movements.

### *#wndb; #metoo*

In the first part of a two-part series, Kasey L. Garrison examined the portrayals of various facets of culture in a sample of teen literature from two Australian book awards in her article, "What's Going on Down Under? Part 1: Portrayals of Culture in Award-Winning Australian Young Adult Literature." Garrison found that the most prevalent cultural theme was gender, which was situated in stories that focused on issues of harassment or body image. From her analysis and discussion of culture in this sample, Garrison concluded that Australian literature for teens holds a great deal of potential to serve as the impetus for discussions about social justice issues and movements such as the #metoo movement.

### *#curestigma; #stigmafree*

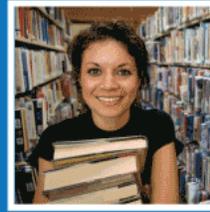
Responding to the increasing number of books for teens being published about people with mental illness, Diane Scrofano explored how the narratives of characters with mental illness are being situated. In her article, "Disability Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness," Scrofano used the narrative categories of restitution, chaos, and quest narratives to understand how characters with mental illness were being portrayed in 50 novels for teens. Scrofano discusses the implications of each narrative category and recommends that librarians and educators try to share more stories of mental illness in which characters have full and meaningful lives beyond their illnesses.

### *#antiwar*

In her paper, "One, Two, Three, Four! We Don't Want Your F\*\*king War! The Vietnam Antiwar Movement in Young Adult Fiction," Deborah Wilson Overstreet examined the depictions of the anti-Vietnam War movement in young adult novels, through the lens of three distinct narrative structures. Her findings suggest that the ways in which this sample of books

depicts the responses of and to the anti-war movement, may not align with the historical record. Wilson Overstreet concluded her research by discussing the importance of providing today's teen readers with accurate depictions of activism in order to help readers understand how they can effectively make their voices heard.

***Robin A. Moeller***  
***JRLYA Editor***



## **One, Two, Three, Four! We Don't Want Your F\*\*king War! The Vietnam Antiwar Movement in Young Adult Fiction**

Dr. Deborah Wilson Overstreet, Associate Professor of Language Arts Education, University of Maine at Farmington

### **Abstract**

This study of the representation of the anti-Vietnam War movement in 53 young adult novels published from 1967 to 2018 includes every young adult novel that lists the Vietnam War as its first or second Library of Congress subject descriptor. The teen characters who participate in the antiwar movement or question our government's war policy are regularly ignored or vilified. Only 32 novels acknowledge the existence of an antiwar movement. Most novels equate antiwar sentiment with aggressive anti-soldier action, even though the historical record does not bear this out. When young readers are repeatedly shown protesters as vicious idiots who regularly attacked veterans, they learn that there is no legitimate way to question our country's war policies. When they're never shown active-duty GIs (many of whom were teens) and veterans who worked tirelessly as antiwar activists, *this* dishonors veterans. These representations, combined with images of protesters ubiquitously spitting on veterans and shouting "baby killer" at them, have served to discredit the antiwar movement and the young people involved in it.

### **Introduction and Literature Review**

There's no doubt that teens are fully participating members of today's social movements (e.g., the Women's March, Black Lives Matter, environmental causes). After the Parkland shooting, teens newly invigorated the gun control debate, founding Never Again MSD and organizing the

March for Our Lives protest. The Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline were largely begun by the One Mind Youth Movement.

Youth activism, of course, is far from new and has many historical forebears. There are children's and young adult books, both fiction and nonfiction, that show, for example, young people's involvement in Germany in the White Rose movement, fighting Hitler's fascist government. Throughout the civil rights movement in America, teens and college students were involved in marches and protests, as well as in organizing Freedom Schools and participating in the Freedom Rides. Children and teens were integral in the 1963 Children's March in Birmingham.

Many teens were involved in the Vietnam antiwar movement. The war in Vietnam was fought by younger soldiers than in previous wars (the average age in Vietnam was nineteen, whereas the average age in World War II was twenty-six).<sup>i</sup> Boys were eligible for the draft at eighteen and could therefore be both soldiers and veterans while still teens. The antiwar movement was populated by teens, and while the movement was not exclusively the work of adolescents, they were regularly involved. Since the Vietnam antiwar movement can serve as a historic model for current political action, it's important to see how teens involved in the movement have been portrayed in literature.

I grew up in the late 1960s and early 1970s in a military family in Washington, DC. My father was in the US Navy, and my parents, while mostly conservative, didn't seem particularly political, at least to my child's mind. Even though no one I knew went to Vietnam, the war's presence loomed large in our house as it surely did in most homes at that time. The war dominated the news, and fighting against the war consumed the streets. Even though this was surely the defining event of American culture in the late twentieth century, I never learned anything about Vietnam in school—during the war or in its aftermath. The movement against the war didn't even rate a mention in my education.

In his groundbreaking book *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, Loewen examined the most frequently used American history textbooks. He found that information about Vietnam was both minuscule and misleading.<sup>ii</sup> Sadly, this echoes what FitzGerald<sup>iii</sup> and later Griffen and Marciano<sup>iv</sup> found in their earlier studies of the Vietnam War in school history texts—that not only was the war given short shrift and the antiwar movement practically unmentioned, but that both were presented inaccurately. This is problematic on many fronts. Not only is teaching about the war

important, but Bigelow insists that “no study of the war would be complete without examining the dynamics of the massive movement to end that war.” He goes on to insist that “there is an entire history of resistance [to war] to which students have been denied access.”<sup>v</sup> Loewen agrees, adding that the lack of information about the war in textbooks “makes the antiwar movement incomprehensible.”<sup>vi</sup>

Not teaching about those who protested our government’s war policies in Vietnam is sadly unsurprising because Americans seem peculiarly incensed by antiwar activity. Both the Vietnam War and the antiwar movement continue to echo through our culture and policies these many years later. One need only remember Senator John Kerry’s 2004 presidential campaign to see how his prominent role in the antiwar movement—particularly his leadership of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) and his participation in the Winter Soldier hearings and the Dewey Canyon III protests—were actions his adversaries found entirely unforgivable.

Having learned that an organized antiwar movement could be quite compelling, President George H. W. Bush attempted to use public resentment toward the Vietnam antiwar movement to head off any antiwar sentiment in his 1990 buildup to the Persian Gulf War.

The [first Bush] administration argued that opposition to the war was tantamount to disregard for [the troops’] well-being and that such disregard was reminiscent of the treatment given the Vietnam veterans upon their return home. By invoking the image of antiwar activists spitting on veterans, the administration was able to discredit the opposition and galvanize support for the war.<sup>vii</sup>

Of course, by conflating antiwar action with anti-soldier sentiment, he rendered opposing war policy practically unthinkable. During the Persian Gulf War (1990–91), Operation Eagle, for example, was a program designed to create support for the troops by going into public schools in Massachusetts and, among other things, asking kids to write to soldiers. When people objected, “the press and grassroots conservatives construed their objections as anti-soldier.”<sup>viii</sup>

Given all this, it’s unsurprising that Americans have many misconceptions about the Vietnam antiwar movement and its relationship with active-duty service members and veterans. The more common misconceptions include the assumptions that anyone who was against the war was by extension against soldiers and veterans, that soldiers and veterans wouldn’t be involved in antiwar activity, and finally that there was an extremely antagonistic relationship between the

antiwar movement and soldiers and veterans, who were assumed to hate one another. However, the historical record doesn't bear this out.

Even though there has been antiwar activity against each war that America has ever fought, the Vietnam antiwar movement is the one that students are most likely to have heard of. The American war in Vietnam officially ended in 1975, but our views of the war and what happened in the United States because of the war continue to influence us. Since we can't count on school history textbooks to thoroughly or accurately explain the Vietnam War and the antiwar movement, where can we turn? For many teachers, historical fiction becomes practically a second textbook. We defer to YA fiction to teach about (or in this case, be the only mention of) one of the most divisive moments in our nation's history. Fundamentally, we might ask ourselves why any of this matters. What difference does it make how Vietnam antiwar activists and activities are written in YA novels? More than forty years after the end of the war, I believe it's crucial that we examine the role of the Vietnam antiwar movement in YA fiction because our next generation of war supporters and protesters are given powerful examples in these texts. Adolescent readers should clearly be shown that the actions of earlier teens had an impact through the antiwar movement.

## Research Questions

- How is the Vietnam antiwar movement represented in young adult fiction?
- Is the representation historically accurate?
- Is the representation affected by the category of the novel or its date of publication?

## Method

I used two simple criteria for including a novel in my study. First, the Library of Congress's category "Vietnam War, 1961–1975—Fiction" had to be the book's first or second subject-area descriptor. Second, the call number had to begin with "PZ7," indicating fiction written for a non-adult audience. There are currently 53 novels that meet these criteria. No YA novel that fits these criteria was eliminated, so this is, in essence, an exhaustive collection.

In order to make analysis more meaningful, the novels are divided into three narrative structure categories. The first category, "Combat," consists of 25.5 texts published in the fifty-one years from 1967 to 2018. As the name indicates, these novels contain at least some scenes of

combat in Vietnam. This is the largest group with the widest range of publication dates. The second category, “Response to the War,” consists of 18 texts published in the thirty years from 1971 to 2011. These books are set entirely in the United States during the war. Common plot lines for this category involve young men deciding to enlist, protest, or leave the country; the reactions of families of those whose loved ones are in Vietnam; and the antiwar movement. The third category, “Returned Vet,” consists of 9.5 texts published in the thirty-five years between 1980 and 2015. These books are set in America during and after the war and explore the experiences of those who fought in Vietnam. Some texts begin immediately as vets return from Vietnam, and some are set many years later. (Note: The “.5” books from the Combat and Returned Vet categories refer to a single novel, Ellen Emerson White’s *The Road Home*. This book is divided in half. The first half of the novel is titled “The War” and squarely fits into the Combat category; the second half, “The World,” fits just as neatly into the Returned Vet category.)

## Findings and Discussion

### *Combat Novels*

The Combat novels represent the widest range of publication dates and the widest range of experiences. Soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and nurses are all featured—as are both draftees and enlistees. The very first mention of the antiwar movement in any YA Vietnam novel was in *Special Forces Trooper* (1967), a GI Joe–like tale. Two young men, during their Green Beret training, go to a movie prefaced with a newsreel. They “ground their teeth when an anti-war demonstration was shown: beatniks . . . carrying signs that intimated that all servicemen serving in Vietnam were prime patsies.”<sup>ix</sup> The idea that GIs were disgusted by the antiwar movement is a common theme in YA fiction.

*Fallen Angels* (1988), perhaps the best-known YA Vietnam War novel, contains only a few oblique references to the antiwar movement. Members of the squad around which the novel is centered discuss a stateside newspaper that has an article about young men burning their draft cards. One soldier says that these people are doing what they think is right. Another responds inexplicably: “That’s why we got four- and five-man squads. . . . ’Cause those jerks are home smoking dope and burning their draft cards. You get blown away because you don’t have a full

squad, you can thank those creeps.”<sup>x</sup> Instead of talking about exactly how they thought antiwar sentiment was wrong or misinformed, the anti-antiwar characters issue an *ad hominem* attack on protesters and leave it at that. And, of course, the idea that troop numbers were diminished as a direct result of the antiwar movement is incorrect. In *Casualties of War* (2013), the fourth in a five-book series, Beck, an air force mechanic, is home on leave when he spots an antiwar demonstration—one of only three mentions of the movement in the entire series. Along with signs protesting Monsanto and Dow Chemical is the obligatory “Babykiller.”<sup>xi</sup>

*Stand Down* (1992) is the fourth book in another five-book series, Echo Company. The first four novels in the series detail the experiences of protagonist Michael Jennings and his squad, and the fifth begins in Vietnam, but ends in America as Michael goes home. He hates the army and the war. What he truly detests, though, are young protesters who also have college deferments that prevent them from being drafted. He mentions this repeatedly, saying, for example, that even draft evasion was “better than protesting with a deferment snug in your back pocket.”<sup>xii</sup> This sentiment is common in these novels. College students received draft deferments until 1971, and since they had no immediate chance of being drafted, their motivations for protesting the war could be seen as less self-interested. Without deferments, draft-age, antiwar young men could be accused of protesting the war because they were afraid to go to Vietnam.

Rick Ward, the protagonist of *Search and Destroy* (2005), knew that “the war was wrong . . . The Vietnamese had a right to decide for themselves what kind of government they wanted. The US was actually interfering with that.” However, he still enlists in the army to go to Vietnam. In his army training, he’s told that “college students and protesters . . . were traitors to America.” Throughout the novel, he’s dismissive of anyone who works to end the war, and his fellow soldiers viciously “wished they could insert into college campuses . . . and tear up a crowd of protesters with an M-60.” When Rick returns home, he’s invited by his ex to speak at a demonstration knowing that he “could be a powerful spokesman for the vets against the war.”<sup>xiii</sup> Rick is astonished that she thinks he would even consider it.

*The Road Home* (1995) and *The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty* (2002) were both written by Ellen Emerson White, also the author of the Echo Company books (under the pseudonym Zack Emerson). In *The Road Home*, Rebecca, a nurse in Vietnam, thinks about the men she treats. In her mind, they’re “the most unselfish and generous people she’d ever known,” but in America, people “were calling these guys baby killers.”<sup>xiv</sup> *The Journal of Patrick Seamus*

*Flaherty* is part of Scholastic’s My Name Is America series of YA novels that purports to examine history through fictionalized diaries. Patrick, a marine at Khe Sanh, cringes when he thinks of his girlfriend at college and wonders “if she’s turned into an I-Hate-the-War hippy, and marches around carrying signs,” which is ironic given that throughout his “journal,” Patrick rails about how much he hates the war and hates being in Vietnam. After he returns home, “as an ex-Marine, Patrick did not feel comfortable being on a college campus” because “antiwar protests were everywhere.”<sup>xv</sup>

The “Life in America in 1968” section at the end of the novel would likely appear to a young reader as nonfiction. This example is a reference to the Tet Offensive:

The antiwar movement intensified. Increasingly, veterans returning home from Vietnam were treated with great disrespect and sometimes even cruelty by Americans who were against the war. Veterans were shocked to find themselves accused of being “baby killers” or “warmongers.” Anyone in uniform was treated as an enemy by the antiwar movement.<sup>xvi</sup>

This unfortunate reality may be what our cultural memory tells us, but in actuality, little could be further from the truth. In extensive and separate studies of GIs (in-service in Vietnam, in-service *not* in Vietnam, and as Vietnam veterans) and their relation to the antiwar movement, Kerry,<sup>xvii</sup> Cortright,<sup>xviii</sup> and Lembcke<sup>xix</sup> not only found no animosity between the groups, but actually found great support. A reporter for *Life* magazine, Hal Wingo, interviewed GIs in Vietnam and found that “many soldiers regard the . . . antiwar campaign in the U.S. with open and outspoken sympathy” because “the protesters may be the only ones who really give a damn about what’s happening.”<sup>xx</sup> Perhaps more shocking are the reports of Vietnam vets being attacked not by young antiwar activists but by pro-war groups, such as the VFW.<sup>xxi</sup>

On the surface, it may seem unsurprising that men in the middle of fighting a war wouldn’t spend their time chatting about antiwar activity back home; however, what is quite surprising in these novels is that there’s no mention of the sizable antiwar activity of the troops themselves. No author of a Combat novel acknowledges the existence of a significant number of antiwar active-duty GIs. Only *Search and Destroy* and *On Blood Road* (2018) mention that there are antiwar veterans. Cortright and Lembcke both examine in detail the GI movement—antiwar activities by service members *during* their service. Often at great risk, GIs published antiwar newspapers and created coffeehouses that were places for GIs to talk about their antiwar activity.

As early as 1970, antiwar activity among active-duty GIs was present on “almost every American installation at home, abroad, and on the high seas.”<sup>xxii</sup> During the early 1970s, the strongest years of active-duty GI antiwar activity, a survey conducted at the request of the US Army showed that 37 percent of soldiers were “engaged in some form of dissent.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Veteran Hal Muskat reports that there were nearly 300 “antiwar newspapers, written, produced and published [by GIs] on bases all throughout the world.”<sup>xxiv</sup>

The antiwar movement appears in surprisingly few of the 25.5 Combat novels. In fact, there’s no acknowledgment whatsoever that anyone anywhere has any antiwar attitudes or actions in 17 of these novels. Nearly half of the Combat novels give no specific setting dates, which makes the likely presence of antiwar GIs more difficult to assess. Six novels make one or two offhanded mentions of the antiwar movement at home.<sup>xxv</sup> Only three novels make extensive comment.<sup>xxvi</sup> Publication date didn’t affect the appearance of the antiwar movement, with one exception: YA Vietnam Combat novels had been published for twenty years before an author chose to make more than one or two comments about antiwar activity. Otherwise, novels with no comments, minimal comments, and more extensive comments are spread fairly evenly across six decades of publication.

### *Response to the War Novels*

The 17 Response to the War novels have the most to say about antiwar activity. Published over the course of forty years, from 1971 to 2011, these novels are set in America during the war, from 1966 to 1971. For good or ill, the characters here are models for political action, especially since many are of middle, high school, or college age. Interestingly, the earliest book in this category, *One Day for Peace* (1971), is the most directly and wholeheartedly antiwar in the entire collection. *One Day for Peace* is the only book in this category published *during* the war; no other novel set in America during the war would be published for fourteen years. When junior high protagonist Jane’s friend is killed in Vietnam, she and her classmates become more interested in the war. They organize a multiracial and multiethnic Peace Committee and plan a protest march and rally that will culminate in the planting of a tree in a local park. This early novel acknowledges the FBI’s use of *agents provocateurs*. Jane’s classmate Donald explains to the committee that “the federal government doesn’t like peace committees. If a . . . committee could be blamed for [criminal activity], it would fall apart.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Donald was correct; Small notes

that under President Nixon, the FBI assigned 2,000 agents to infiltrate “domestic peace movements.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> The principal at Jane and Donald’s school tries to intimidate them out of their antiwar activity, calling them “rash” and insisting that their future careers would be “endangered” by “becoming known as activists” and that “responsible employers” wouldn’t hire activists who “stir up trouble.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Ultimately though, the adolescents’ antiwar activities are peaceful, patriotic, and largely accepted by the community. This representation of the antiwar movement, however, turns out to be in the minority, and this is the only novel in which all of the protagonists are involved in antiwar activity. It’s also notable that these are junior high students who have created a local antiwar group.

*And One for All* and *The Best of Friends*, both published in 1989, have similar plots. Two high school friends take very separate paths: one to war in Vietnam and the other to the antiwar movement. In both novels, the boys’ younger sisters and the rest of their families are also involved in what turns into significant conflict. In *And One for All*, when high school senior Wing Brennan thinks he’s been kicked off the basketball team, he drops out of high school and joins the Marine Corps. Wing’s friend Sam’s antiwar work becomes a barrier to their friendship. Wing’s father, Mr. Brennan, a WWII vet, comments that people participating in a peace march are “just dragging out the war” and “hurting our own men.” Later Mr. Brennan tells his family that antiwar activists are “traitors” who “were aiding and abetting the enemy . . . by making it look as if Americans didn’t support their own soldiers.”<sup>xxx</sup> This is a common sentiment in these novels, and one that’s rarely refuted. Even though most of the Brennan family agrees with this, eventually Wing’s seventh-grader sister, Geraldine, realizes that the antiwar movement is trying to end the war so that *no one*, including American soldiers, will be killed. Similarly, in *The Best of Friends*, the antiwar characters’ father objects to any questioning of the war, saying that government needs “the unconditional support of the American people if we are going to win.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

*Long Time Passing* (1990) gives us Jonas, son of an active-duty marine stationed in Vietnam. After falling for a girl who was involved in the peace movement, Jonas briefly skirts the edges of protest. This is the earliest novel to acknowledge the true physical danger that activists were often in, comparing them to civil rights workers in the South. Before Jonas enlists in the Marine Corps, he wonders if by carrying a sign saying “Get Out of Vietnam!” he has “betrayed” men in Vietnam.<sup>xxxii</sup> However, as Cortright shows, active-duty GIs and antiwar activists regularly worked together.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

*Come in from the Cold* (1994) is a complex examination of two high school protagonists: Maud, whose sister was killed while trying to blow up a building as an antiwar act, and Jeff, whose brother Tom was killed in Vietnam. Before his death, Tom confronts Jeff about Jeff's peace work. Tom, like many characters in the novels, does not separate being antiwar from being anti-soldier, telling Jeff that if "you hate the war, you hate the guys who do the fighting. You can't separate us from the dirty deed."<sup>xxxiv</sup> Like Jonas in *Long Time Passing*, Jeff is accused of being a "traitor" for working against the war while having a military brother.<sup>xxxv</sup> Marsha Qualey's *Come in from the Cold* contains multiple minor military characters who object to any sort of protest. A father who fought in World War II claims his antiwar son "dishonor[s]" him, and an antiwar mother won't attend a march because her brother-in-law in the navy is "honorable" and is therefore "so hurt by all the protests."<sup>xxxvi</sup> However, during a counter-protest to a VFW march, an antiwar group displays the sign: "Honor our soldiers by bringing them home."<sup>xxxvii</sup> This sign is more in line with how many active-duty GIs in Vietnam felt at the time. Lembcke cites a 1971 Senate study showing that there was no "evidence at the time that Vietnam veterans perceived the antiwar movement as hostile to them or their interests."<sup>xxxviii</sup> It's unsurprising then that Vietnam vets are shown as the lead figures in a major protest march. *Come in from the Cold* is the earliest novel to even peripherally include Vietnam veterans as actively involved in the antiwar movement. Ten years later, *Too Big a Storm* (2004), also by Qualey, uses many similar characters and structures. Mark, a Vietnam vet and the protagonist's friend, is initially reluctant to attend a march since he still had friends in country and it seemed "disloyal." However, as soon as he arrives at the march and sees plenty of other vets, he realizes that it's "important for vets to speak out."<sup>xxxix</sup> As Lembcke points out, the Nixon administration's attempts to "portray the antiwar movement as anti-soldier and therefore anti-American" were weakened by the existence of antiwar vets.<sup>xl</sup> Mark was correct that as a vet, he would have real credibility and that vets' "denunciation of [the war] could not be easily dismissed."<sup>xli</sup>

*The Greatest Heroes* (2000) echoes the plot structure of *And One for All* and *Best of Friends* (both 1989). Ken and Bryan are seniors; Bryan is antiwar, but even though Ken doesn't approve of the war, not wanting to displease his WWII vet father, he waffles about antiwar activity. Ken's father espouses a common parental view in these novels: he believes that any antiwar activity is treason, that activists are "yellow-bellied cowards," and that it's never acceptable to question the government. For him, peace marches are about "trying to bring . . .

down” the government,<sup>xlii</sup> although later in the same confrontation with his son, he claims that activists only want the war to end because they’re afraid to fight.<sup>xliii</sup> Ken’s girlfriend’s brother is a pilot in Vietnam, and she’s horrified that Ken might protest the war because that would be “demonstrating against” and “criticizing” her brother. Karen says that “the guys in Vietnam know about these protests,” which make them “feel like the people back home aren’t behind them.”<sup>xliv</sup> However, history doesn’t bear this out. In examining antiwar archives, Lembcke found that “by helping soldiers who were in service, especially those in Vietnam, the antiwar movement established a record of caring about soldiers’ needs” far more clearly than those who sent soldiers to Vietnam.<sup>xlv</sup> Ken thinks that the demonstrators are mostly kooks “who hated everything about society” and “hadn’t bathed in a while.”<sup>xlvi</sup> Here we also have this category’s earliest antiwar use of “baby killer” as a description of Americans in Vietnam, although with a slightly different spin: a speaker at the demonstration says that soldiers are “turned into . . . baby killers.”<sup>xlvii</sup> *The Greatest Heroes* portrays antiwar characters as show-offs looking for attention and violence. Ken mostly believes that demonstrators aren’t really about “being antiwar” as much as they’re just “being anti-[their] dad.”<sup>xlviii</sup> This kind of dismissal, along with an epilogue commenting that “protests grew more violent,”<sup>xlix</sup> serves to undermine any real examination of antiwar ideology or the role that young activists played.

*Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* (2002) is the companion novel to the Combat entry *The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty* (2002), both written by Ellen Emerson White, the author of 7 of the 53 novels in this study. White rarely acknowledges the antiwar movement in her many Vietnam novels, and hers is the earliest novel to include an antiwar character to directly call soldiers “babykillers.”<sup>l</sup> Teenage protagonist Molly has a brother, Patrick, who is a marine in Vietnam. While Molly is aware that she doesn’t know enough about the war to support it, she’s very pro-soldier and very anti-antiwar. She knows that even if she wanted to protest the war, that would “be betraying” her brother.<sup>li</sup> Molly is relentlessly contemptuous of antiwar activists. On a cold day with no demonstration, she surmises that “protesting the war and lounging around being groovy didn’t seem quite as tempting as usual.”<sup>lii</sup> Characters’ refusal to engage in a substantive way with antiwar ideas is a common theme in these books. Much like the “Life in America in 1968” historical notes in *The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty*, we’re told that young men burned draft cards, but that it was an empty gesture because they already had student deferments. Their main motivation was that it “just looked good on television.”<sup>liiii</sup>

Fourteen-year-old protagonist Cory's brother Sonny is drafted in *Sonny's War* (2002). After Cory learns more about the war and the antiwar movement from Lawrence, her antiwar teacher, she wishes that she knew more about Sonny's thoughts about the war. She assumes that Sonny would "think [she] was being a traitor" if she even asked because "it wasn't smart to be against the war if you were actually in it."<sup>liv</sup> Of course, many GIs in Vietnam were very actively "against the war," although this perspective is not included in the novel. Lawrence, Cory's young teacher, is eventually fired for his antiwar work. Lawrence is undermined as a character by turning out to be mindlessly violent and dishonest and by kissing and sexually desiring a fourteen-year-old girl. The one demonstration that is portrayed turns quickly into a riot where protesters demolish all the businesses in a small downtown.

In *Letters from Wolfie* (2004), junior high student Mark's teacher has been ordered by the school board *not* to ask students to discuss Vietnam in history class, although "pro-war teachers are able to speak their views."<sup>lv</sup> Mark donates his beloved dog, Wolfie, to the army to send to Vietnam. The VVAW appears in this novel, first in news footage and then as they join Mark's protest to get Wolfie back. Mark's father is horrified that the veterans "looked like . . . hippies" and that they were "mailing their medals back."<sup>lvi</sup> As he watches the footage, Mark's father hopes that "our boys" in Vietnam don't see this, as if by expressing antiwar ideas, the vets have ceased to be *ours*. At Mark's march, the VVAW members introduce themselves to Mark's mother and ask her and other mothers of GIs and vets to join them; she does, pushing a vet in a wheelchair. VFW members shout insults. As Mark's injured brother returns from Vietnam, Mark worries that "someone might say something awful" to him because Mark knows that "when soldiers came home, people spat on them."<sup>lvii</sup>

Like *Caribou* (1985), *Summer's End* (2005) focuses primarily on draft evasion as many of the draft-age characters burn draft cards and prepare to head to Canada. The decision to avoid the draft splits an extended family in which many characters are pro-war and others aren't so sure. Assuming that men in Vietnam would be betrayed and offended by draft evaders described as "cowards," thirteen-year-old Grace's family is surprised that when Cousin Willie, in Vietnam, learns of Grace's brother Collin's decision to go to Canada, Willie's only response is "good."<sup>lviii</sup> No real antiwar activity is shown, but Grace never misses a chance to disparage and minimize it. To her, everything is a "sit-in" (the author even refers to the 1970 shooting of students at both Kent State [four killed, nine injured] and Jackson State [two killed, twelve injured] as sit-ins).

Grace describes a sit-in as “kids . . . sitting around on lawns like they were at a picnic . . . smiling into the camera and holding up two fingers in a V that meant ‘peace.’”<sup>lix</sup>

*Georgie’s Moon* (2006) also shows no direct antiwar activity, but seventh-grade protagonist Georgie “hates” anyone who isn’t staunchly pro-war.<sup>lx</sup> When her classmate Craig comments that people shouldn’t blindly accept the government’s war policy, Georgie physically assaults him. Even though the attack is significant enough that it takes several adults to pull Georgie off her victim, she isn’t punished for her pro-war violence. Lisa, another classmate, describes her older sister Carla as having antiwar sentiments, but quickly adds that Carla isn’t “one of those [activists] who are angry at the soldiers,” which is a common present-day misconception. Lisa reports that Carla “told [her] about this soldier who came on campus. . . . Some guys beat him up just ’cause he wore a uniform.”<sup>lxi</sup> Statements like these used to attempt to discredit antiwar activity are common in the later books in this category.

Recent high school graduate Ryan in *War and Watermelon* (2011) doesn’t want to go to college, but he also doesn’t want to go to war. He’s ready to commit to the antiwar movement, which he feels holds the ultimate goal of “bringing down the establishment.”<sup>lxii</sup> Unlike many characters in the other novels in this group, the teens here never doubt the movement’s efficacy: “Those idiots in Washington will know they’d better start listening to our generation.”<sup>lxiii</sup> In order to “make enough noise to get this war ended,” Ryan takes his twelve-year-old brother Brody to a vigil held to force military recruiters off a college campus. After some police harassment, the protesters are arrested. Even so, Ryan insists to Brody that “every voice makes a difference.”<sup>lxiv</sup>

*Battle Fatigue* (2011) situates Vietnam antiwar activists as being parallel to the Germans who worked against their Nazi government before World War II. However, the general public and especially the police fail to see them that way. As a young college student, the protagonist Joel finds it puzzling that “a lot of people seem to feel really threatened by anyone who opposes war, as though there is some basic right that we are trying to take away from them.”<sup>lxv</sup> In studying public reaction to the antiwar movement, Foley found that even while holding antiwar attitudes themselves, “most Americans also regarded those who sought to end the war as equally worthy of contempt. Those who tried to end a villainous war are themselves seen as villains.”<sup>lxvi</sup> This is one of the few Response to the War novels that directly addresses the work of antiwar veterans. Dickey, Joel’s neighbor, has returned from his war year in Vietnam embittered and

antiwar. Joel realizes that we “live in a world where war is accepted, and soldiers are heroes. But if Dickey doesn’t feel like a hero, no one wants to hear from him.”<sup>lxvii</sup>

The Response to the War novels are uniquely positioned to explore or even refute the intricacies of the antiwar movement, its goals, its accomplishments, its specific actions, but this rarely happens. Antiwar activity is more frequently discussed than shown, and vaguely describing a character as “active in the peace movement” is common.<sup>lxviii</sup> Most specific activist groups (e.g., the SDS, Women Strike for Peace, SNCC, Mobe) are never mentioned, nor are many specific important demonstrations. The well-known shootings at Kent State are briefly referenced in four novels, and the police riot at the 1968 Democratic Convention in two. A few other events (e.g., People’s Park in Berkeley, Oakland’s Stop the Draft action, the October 15 Moratorium) are mentioned once. Most antiwar events are not mentioned at all. In many of the novels, young activists speculate that their work won’t accomplish much. In *Come in from the Cold*, Jeff, who even occasionally shares this doubt, encourages protest, saying that “if we don’t do something, it will just get worse next time,”<sup>lxix</sup> which may be the real model that these novels serve.

Even though the novels rarely show antiwar activists and active-duty GIs or returned vets working together or at least supporting one another, history tells us that this was actually the case.<sup>lxx</sup> Given the first President Bush’s Persian Gulf War strategy of misrepresenting earlier antiwar activity,<sup>lxxi</sup> it’s important to note that antiwar characters aren’t written as antagonistic to soldiers, active duty or veterans, until books published after the Gulf War (1990–91).

### *Returned Vet Novels*

The 9.5 Returned Vet novels are set from 1968 through 2015. Three novels feature vets who returned *during* the war,<sup>lxxii</sup> the rest are set years later. The earliest three books to feature returned vets as the central Vietnam-related character each only mention the antiwar movement briefly and in one scene: *Where the Elf King Sings* (1980), set around 1977, and *Travelers* (1986) and *Charlie Pippin* (1987), both set in 1985, contain nearly identical descriptions of the vets’ encounters with antiwar activists. Bill, the protagonist’s father in *Where the Elf King Sings*, has severe PTSD as a result of his time in Vietnam. After Bill’s war buddy Kurt effortlessly gets him into a VA treatment program, Kurt tells Bill’s family about his own arrival back in the States. At the airport was a “welcome-home committee”: “a group of antiwar demonstrators shouting

murderers at us.”<sup>lxxiii</sup> In *Charlie Pippin*, the title character’s veteran father never wants to talk about the war, even when sixth-grader Charlie does a school report on the topic. When Charlie interviews her older family members about her father’s experiences, her grandfather asks, “How would you feel coming home in uniform on crutches and being called a babykiller? Some young white girl had the nerve to spit on my son at the airport.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> When teenage Jack in *Travelers* was a very young boy, his father was killed in Vietnam; in high school, Jack is finally determined to meet some of his father’s war buddies. The wife of one buddy reports that her husband Ed was determined to go out in his uniform. At dinner one evening, “some self-righteous college students . . . called Ed a ‘baby-killer.’”<sup>lxxv</sup>

*Tough Choices* (1993) is the earliest Returned Vet novel to be set during the war. The story opens as the Morgan family arrives at the airport to pick up eldest son, Mitch, as he returns from Vietnam. As is commonly represented in this category, there are protesters waiting. When the family escorts Mitch to their car, they’re accosted by protesters, who yell, “Hey, Baby Killer!” Mitch is confused, but a young woman continues, “How many babies did you murder in Vietnam?” When Mitch insists that he’s “one of the good guys,” the protesters laugh and “spit on the ground.”<sup>lxxvi</sup> Before Mitch and his family can get in their car, the protesters throw eggs and beer bottles at them. Mitch’s sixteen-year-old brother Emmett participates in antiwar demonstrations and marches and plans to attend a “Die-In” where protesters cover themselves with red paint and pretend to be Vietnamese civilians killed by Americans. This novel is part of Scholastic’s *Once Upon America* series, which insinuated that it should be used as a supplemental American history text (a *Publisher’s Weekly* endorsement on the back of the book says that the series “breathes color and life into a social studies curriculum”)—which makes its representation of the antiwar movement even more important. Much like the “Life in America in 1968” notes in *The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty* and *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?*, *Tough Choices*’ seemingly factual notes tell us that “the people protesting the war often said and did terrible things to soldiers coming back from Vietnam. . . . Soldiers were spit on. They had garbage thrown at them. They were told they should have died in Vietnam.”<sup>lxxvii</sup>

*The Road Home* (1995) is the fifth book in the Echo Company series that details the combat experiences of a group of soldiers in Vietnam. While there, they meet Rebecca, a nurse. She figures prominently in much of the plot in the first four novels, which take place entirely in country. The first half of *The Road Home* is set in Vietnam; the second half in America. This is

the earliest book of the sample to acknowledge the experiences of women as Vietnam veterans. Upon Rebecca's return from Vietnam, as her bus leaves the army base, protesters launch an "egg barrage." Rebecca is "flipped . . . off" in the airport and then assumes that a smug young man was going to "spit on [her] bag."<sup>lxxviii</sup> The protesters are described as "motley," "grungy," and "whacked-out."<sup>lxxix</sup> When two of her cousins can't attend a welcome home party, Rebecca "figured they were . . . antiwar and . . . didn't want to speak to a fascist warmonger like her."<sup>lxxx</sup> *The Road Home* is the only novel to acknowledge the GI coffeehouses, created "so that off-duty soldiers could go and listen to people with long hair make radical pronouncements about the war. . . . The idea was to foment dissension among the ranks."<sup>lxxxii</sup> This is historically inaccurate. GI coffeehouses were increasingly common in the Vietnam era; however, they were founded and run by GIs and vets. Coffeehouses were harassed and attacked—by military police, local police, and right-wing groups. Some were bombed.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

*Lost in the War* (1998) features Mary Ann, a female vet and mother to the story's protagonist, although this time set a full decade after the end of the war. Mary Ann finally seeks treatment for her severe PTSD. Her daughters are surrounded by remnants of the war: their father was killed in Vietnam, their mother is debilitated by PTSD, their mother's new boyfriend is a vet, and their school's social studies class focuses on the war. Despite all this, the antiwar movement is only peripherally mentioned. Mary Ann tells a reporter that she tried to join the VVAW in a march but wasn't allowed to because "the public wouldn't believe that a woman could be a Vietnam vet, they said."<sup>lxxxiii</sup> While many women activists reported rampant sexism in the antiwar movement, Hunt reports that the VVAW "actively recruited women and asked them to serve in positions of power,"<sup>lxxxiv</sup> so Mary Ann's experience is less consistent with historical likelihood.

Set in 1977, *Greetings from Planet Earth* (2007) portrays Vince, a vet who has come back to America, but who hasn't gone back to his home. Vince's PTSD and disgust with the war keep him from rejoining his family, who have convinced themselves that he's MIA. The novel contains an airport scene common in the Returned Vet books: Vince's twelve-year-old son, Theo, is at the airport to pick up his grandmother when he notices a soldier surrounded by "boys with long hair." They scream, "Baby killer! How many babies did you kill over there?" The soldier "didn't seem like he could kill anyone. He looked like he was going to cry."<sup>lxxxv</sup>

*Walking Wounded* (2014), the fifth novel in a series that primarily details four friends' experiences in Vietnam, features a brief confrontation between protesters outside a navy recruiter's office and Morris, an active-duty sailor home on leave. Morris thinks of the demonstrators as "know-nothing fathead idiots . . . who are probably just covering up their own shame and cowardice" by protesting.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Morris is troubled when his air force friend Beck mentions his plans to join the VVAW and plans to "protest everywhere." When Morris writes to Beck, he says not to become a protester and then signs the letter, "your pal as long as you don't protest against me."<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Of course, Beck would be protesting the war not Morris, but Morris, like many other characters, doesn't see this distinction.

In all but two of these Returned Vet novels, protesters are seen verbally or physically assaulting vets. Historian Lembcke was so troubled by this present-day representation of Vietnam antiwar protesters that he set out to historically document the abuse. What he found flies in the face of our received perceptions.

The fact that there are no news reports of [protesters] spitting on veterans raises doubts about whether such incidents ever occurred, much less in a number that would justify the now-popular perception that the spat-upon Vietnam veteran is representative of the treatment veterans received upon their return home. If spitting on veterans had occurred all that frequently, surely some veteran or soldier would have called it to the attention of the press at that time. . . . There is no evidence that anyone at the time *thought* [this was] occurring. . . . Stories of veterans being abused by antiwar activists only surfaced years after the abuses were alleged to have happened. During the period in which soldiers returned from Vietnam, such stories were virtually nonexistent.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

Protesters in these novels conform to a stereotypical image constructed well after the Vietnam era.

These are the novels where we would expect to see evidence of the GI antiwar movement, of veteran antiwar activity, and an exploration of the relationship between vets and the antiwar movement. Other than Mary Ann in *Lost in the War* and Beck's intentions in *Walking Wounded*, we have no Vietnam veteran becoming involved in antiwar activities in any of these novels. No one is a member of the VVAW or expresses any antiwar attitudes. While it's

true that not all Vietnam vets were antiwar or were involved in antiwar activities, Lembcke explains that “by [the] end of the war, veterans were playing a leading and militant role in opposition to it.”<sup>lxxxix</sup>

## Conclusion

It’s no understatement to claim that the Vietnam antiwar movement is either ignored or negatively misrepresented in the majority of these 53 novels. Only 30 novels acknowledge the existence of an antiwar movement—many of these with only one or two brief passages. Entirely positive representations of antiwar activists and activities exist in only one book, *One Day for Peace*, published in 1971—during the war and in the height of the movement.

The majority of the novels only give their setting dates obliquely and in ways that young readers aren’t likely to decipher (e.g., *Battle Fatigue* mentions the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pearl Harbor, *Too Big a Storm* mentions Woodstock); this lack of specific detail makes close analysis of antiwar activity difficult. Additionally, each of three narrative structure groups is perfectly positioned to explore specific aspects of the antiwar movement. Combat novels might have represented the GI movement—active-duty GIs often risking everything for their antiwar activism. Response to the War novels might have accurately shown young dedicated and organized activists participating in actual historical demonstrations. Returned Vet novels might have given us antiwar vets, who tirelessly worked to bring an end to war. This isn’t what young readers are shown. Antiwar characters do not express their positions in coherent detail, and no anti-antiwar characters ever examine then rebut antiwar positions. Instead, antiwar activists and antiwar ideas are routinely vilified, denigrated, and dismissed.

While the representations of the Vietnam antiwar movement in YA fiction may seem to be just a matter of passing interest, it’s of real importance. When young readers are repeatedly shown protesters as vicious idiots who regularly attacked veterans, they learn that there is no thoughtful or legitimate way to question our country’s war policies. When they’re never shown active-duty GIs and veterans who worked tirelessly as antiwar activists themselves, *this* dishonors veterans. These representations, combined with images of protesters ubiquitously spitting on veterans and shouting “baby killer” at them, have served to almost completely discredit the antiwar movement in YA fiction. These books lead us to equate “antiwar activism with dishonoring the troops,”<sup>xc</sup> despite the fact that the historical record doesn’t bear this out.

Finally, young readers must have access to accurate models and representations of activists, both civilian and military, because the bulk of our current YA Vietnam War novels prepare them to become unquestioning supporters of the next war.

## Appendix A: Novels

### *Combat Novels by Date of Publication*

- Archibald, Joe. 1967. *Special Forces Trooper*. New York: McKay.
- Butterworth, William. 1967. *Air Evac*. New York: Norton.
- . 1968. *Orders to Vietnam*. Boston: Little Brown.
- Dunn, Mary Lois. 1968. *The Man in the Box*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Elliott, Ellen. 1968. *Vietnam Nurse*. New York: Arcadia House.
- Butterworth, William. 1969. *Stop and Search*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Dean, Nell. 1969. *Nurse in Vietnam*. New York: Messner.
- Graham, Gail. 1972. *Cross-Fire*. New York: Pantheon.
- Haldeman, Joe. 1972. *War Year*. New York: Winston.
- Karl, Terry. 1974. *Children of the Dragon*. San Francisco: People's Press.
- Clark, Ann Nolan. 1978. *To Stand against the Wind*. New York: Viking.
- Haldeman, Joe. 1978. *War Year*. 2nd ed. New York: Pocket.
- Myers, Walter Dean. 1988. *Fallen Angels*. New York: Scholastic.
- Emerson, Zack. 1991. *Welcome to Vietnam*. Echo Company Book One. New York: Scholastic.
- . 1991. *Hill 568*. Echo Company Book Two. New York: Scholastic.
- . 1991. *'Tis the Season*. Echo Company Book Three. New York: Scholastic.
- . 1992. *Stand Down*. Echo Company Book Four. New York: Scholastic.
- White, Ellen Emerson. 1995. *The Road Home*. An Echo Company Book. New York: Scholastic.
- Pevsner, Stella, and Fay Tang. 1997. *Sing for Your Father, Su Phan*. New York: Clarion.
- Gifford, Clive. 2001. *Water Puppets*. New York: Barron's.
- White, Ellen Emerson. 2002. *The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty: USMV, Khe Sanh, Vietnam 1968*. New York: Scholastic.
- Hughes, Dean. 2005. *Search and Destroy*. New York: Atheneum.
- Lynch, Chris. 2011. *I Pledge Allegiance*. Vietnam Book One. New York: Scholastic.

- . 2012. *Free Fire Zone*. Vietnam Book Two. New York: Scholastic.
- . 2012. *Sharpshooter*. Vietnam Book Three. New York: Scholastic.
- . 2013. *Casualties of War*. Vietnam Book Four. New York: Scholastic.
- Watkins, Steve. 2018. *On Blood Road*. New York: Scholastic.

### *Response to the War Novels by Date of Publication*

- Crosby, Alexander. 1971. *One Day for Peace*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Wolitzer, Meg. 1985. *Caribou*. New York: Greenwillow.
- Nelson, Theresa. 1989. *And One for All*. New York: Orchard.
- Rostkowski, Margaret. 1989. *The Best of Friends*. New York: Harper.
- Jones, Adrienne. 1990. *Long Time Passing*. New York: Harper.
- Qualey, Marsha. 1994. *Come in from the Cold*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Schraff, Anne. 2000. *The Greatest Heroes*. Logan, IA: Perfection Learning.
- White, Ellen Emerson. 2002. *Where Have All the Flowers Gone? The Diary of Molly Mackenzie Flaherty*. New York: Scholastic.
- Testa, Maria. 2003. *Almost Forever*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.
- Qualey, Marsha. 2004. *Too Big a Storm*. New York: Dial.
- Sherlock, Patti. 2004. *Letters from Wolfie*. New York: Viking.
- Coulombis, Audrey. 2005. *Summer's End*. New York: Putnam.
- Woodworth, Chris. 2006. *Georgie's Moon*. New York: FSG.
- Dowell, Frances. 2008. *Shooting the Moon*. New York: Atheneum.
- Kurlansky, Mark. 2011. *Battle Fatigue*. New York: Walker Books.
- Wallace, Rich. 2011. *War and Watermelon*. New York: Viking.

### *Returned Vet Novels by Date of Publication*

- Wolkoff, Judie. 1980. *Where the Elf King Sings*. New York: Bradbury.
- Bograd, Larry. 1986. *Travelers*. New York: Lippincott.
- Dawson, Candy Boyd. 1987. *Charlie Pippin*. New York: Macmillan.
- Jensen, Kathryn. 1989. *Pocket Change*. New York: Macmillan.
- Antle, Nancy. 1993. *Tough Choices: A Story of the Vietnam War*. New York: Viking.
- White, Ellen Emerson. 1995. *The Road Home*. New York: Scholastic.

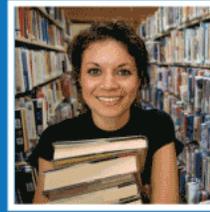
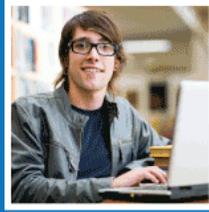
- Antle, Nancy. 1998. *Lost in the War*. New York: Dial.
- Hobbs, Valerie. 2002. *Sonny's War*. New York: FSG.
- Kerley, Barbara. 2007. *Greetings from Planet Earth*. New York: Scholastic.
- Lynch, Chris. 2014. *Walking Wounded*. Vietnam Book Five. New York: Scholastic.
- Watkins, Steve. 2015. *Lost at Khe Sanh*. New York: Scholastic.

## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, "Social Makeup of Forces," <http://www.vvmf.org/education-military-social-makeup-of-forces> (accessed February 9, 2019).
- <sup>ii</sup> James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 240–47.
- <sup>iii</sup> Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 124–27.
- <sup>iv</sup> William Griffen and John Marciano, *Teaching the Vietnam War: A Critical Examination of School Texts and an Interpretive Comparative History Utilizing "The Pentagon Papers" and Other Documents* (Montclair, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun & Co., 1979).
- <sup>v</sup> Bill Bigelow, "Rethinking the Teaching of the Vietnam War," *Rethinking Schools* (Spring 2003), <http://rethinkingschools.aidcvt.com/war/readings/viet173.shtml> (accessed February 3, 2019).
- <sup>vi</sup> Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 251.
- <sup>vii</sup> Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 2.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>ix</sup> Joe Archibald, *Special Forces Trooper* (New York: McKay, 1967), 22.
- <sup>x</sup> Walter Dean Myers, *Fallen Angels* (New York: Scholastic, 1988), 146.
- <sup>xi</sup> Chris Lynch, *Casualties of War*, Vietnam Book Four (New York: Scholastic, 2013), 105.
- <sup>xii</sup> Zack Emerson, *Stand Down*, Echo Company Book Four (New York: Scholastic, 1992), 274.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Dean Hughes, *Search and Destroy* (New York: Atheneum, 2005), 36, 62, 112, 206.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Ellen Emerson White, *The Road Home* (New York: Scholastic, 1995), 154.
- <sup>xv</sup> Ellen Emerson White, *The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty: USMV, Khe Sanh, Vietnam 1968* (New York: Scholastic, 2002), 121, 167.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.
- <sup>xvii</sup> John Kerry and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The New Soldier* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).
- <sup>xviii</sup> David Cortright, "GI Resistance during the Vietnam War," in *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*, ed. Melvin Small and William Hoover (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 116–28.
- <sup>xix</sup> Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*.
- <sup>xx</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 47.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

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- xxii Terry Anderson, “The GI Movement and the Response from the Brass,” in *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*, ed. Melvin Small and William Hoover (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 93–115, 106.
- xxiii Cortright, “GI Resistance during the Vietnam War,” 117.
- xxiv Quoted in *Sir! No Sir!* Directed by David Zeiger (Displaced Films, Pangea Productions Ltd., 2005).
- xxv *Special Forces Trooper* (1967), *Children of the Dragon* (1974), *The Road Home*, Part 1 (1995), *The Journal of Patrick Seamus Flaherty* (2002), *Casualties of War*, Vietnam Book Four (2013), and *On Blood Road* (2018).
- xxvi *Fallen Angels* (1988), *Stand Down*, Echo Company Book Four (1992), and *Search and Destroy* (2005).
- xxvii Alexander Crosby, *One Day for Peace* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 36.
- xxviii Melvin Small, *Antiwarriors: The Vietnam War and the Battle for America’s Hearts and Minds* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 101.
- xxix Crosby, *One Day for Peace*, 63.
- xxx Theresa Nelson, *And One for All* (New York: Orchard Books, 1989), 17, 113.
- xxxi Margaret Rostkowski, *The Best of Friends* (New York: Harper, 1989), 95.
- xxxii Adrienne Jones, *Long Time Passing* (New York: Harper, 1990), 200.
- xxxiii David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: The American Military Today* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 60.
- xxxiv Marsha Qualey, *Come in from the Cold* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 55.
- xxxv *Ibid.*, 70.
- xxxvi *Ibid.*, 94, 99.
- xxxvii *Ibid.*, 143.
- xxxviii Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 75.
- xxxix Marsha Qualey, *Too Big a Storm* (New York: Dial, 2004), 199.
- xl Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 52.
- xli Qualey, *Too Big a Storm*, 62.
- xlii Anne Schraff, *The Greatest Heroes* (Logan, IA: Perfection Learning, 2000), 47, 41.
- xliii *Ibid.*, 47.
- xliv *Ibid.*, 63, 64.
- xlv Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 33.
- xlvi Schraff, *The Greatest Heroes*, 69, 68.
- xlvii *Ibid.*, 72.
- xlviii *Ibid.*, 130.
- xlix *Ibid.*, 141.
- <sup>1</sup> Ellen Emerson White, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone? The Diary of Molly Mackenzie Flaherty* (New York: Scholastic, 2002), 33.
- li *Ibid.*, 35.
- lii *Ibid.*, 108.
- liii *Ibid.*, 165.
- liv Valerie Hobbs, *Sonny’s War* (New York: FSG, 2002), 82.
- lv Patti Sherlock, *Letters from Wolfie* (New York: Viking, 2004), 112.
- lvi *Ibid.*, 144.
- lvii *Ibid.*, 200.

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- lviii Audrey Couloumbis, *Summer's End* (New York: Putnam, 2005), 120, 140.
- lix *Ibid.*, 6.
- lx Chris Woodworth, *Georgie's Moon* (New York: FSG, 2006), 43.
- lxi *Ibid.*, 72.
- lxii Rich Wallace, *War and Watermelon* (New York: Viking, 2011), 33.
- lxiii *Ibid.*
- lxiv *Ibid.*, 158, 183.
- lxv Mark Kurlansky, *Battle Fatigue* (New York: Walker Books, 2011), 151.
- lxvi Michael Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 13.
- lxvii Kurlansky, *Battle Fatigue*, 151.
- lxviii Qualey, *Too Big a Storm*, 9.
- lxix Qualey, *Come in from the Cold*, 161.
- lxx Andrew Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Cortright, "GI Resistance during the Vietnam War"; Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt*; Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*.
- lxxi Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 2.
- lxxii *Tough Choices: A Story of the Vietnam War* (1993), *The Road Home*, Part 2 (1995), and *Walking Wounded*, Vietnam Book Five (2014).
- lxxiii Judie Wolkoff, *Where the Elf King Sings* (New York: Bradbury, 1980), 155.
- lxxiv Candy Boyd Dawson, *Charlie Pippin* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 78.
- lxxv Larry Bograd, *Travelers* (New York: Lippincott, 1986), 100.
- lxxvi Nancy Antle, *Tough Choices: A Story of the Vietnam War* (New York: Viking, 1993), 11.
- lxxvii *Ibid.*, 55.
- lxxviii Ellen Emerson White, *The Road Home*, An Echo Company Book (New York: Scholastic, 1995), 223, 225, 242.
- lxxix *Ibid.*, 223, 225, 230.
- lxxx *Ibid.*, 276.
- lxxxi *Ibid.*, 328.
- lxxxii Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt*, 54.
- lxxxiii Nancy Antle, *Lost in the War* (New York: Dial, 1998), 16.
- lxxxiv Hunt, *The Turning*, 2.
- lxxxv Barbara Kerley, *Greetings from Planet Earth* (New York: Scholastic, 2007), 151.
- lxxxvi Chris Lynch, *Walking Wounded*, Vietnam Book Five (New York: Scholastic, 2014), 149.
- lxxxvii *Ibid.*, 155, 166.
- lxxxviii Lembcke, *The Spitting Image*, 74–75, 81.
- lxxxix *Ibid.*, 139.
- xc David Sirota, "The Legend of the Spat-Upon Veteran," Common Dreams.org, June 1, 2012, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2012/06/01/legend-spat-upon-veteran> (accessed December 17, 2018).



## **Disability Narrative Theory and Young Adult Fiction of Mental Illness**

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### **Abstract**

Disability narrative theory can shed light on what kinds of young adult novels of mental illness are currently available and suggest directions for authors and library collections to go in the future. As library staff members develop their collections and assist students, patrons, and scholars in navigating the recent publication explosion of YA novels of mental illness, they should be aware that these novels generally fall into one of disability narrative theorist Arthur Frank's three categories: "restitution," "chaos," or "quest" narratives.<sup>i</sup> While Frank's research covers memoirs of physical disability, my study found that his categories can also be helpful in sorting fiction about mental illness. Mental illness in this study refers to biological brain disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. In what Frank calls a "narrative of restitution," the disability is cured. A "narrative of chaos" focuses on a period of time in which the disabled person's symptoms cause significant disruption in his or her life. In a "quest narrative," the disabled person is managing his or her symptoms in a healthy way and living life to his or her fullest potential. Most young adult novels of mental illness in this study fall into the category of the chaos narrative. While this is helpful for adolescents (as well as their friends and families) because they can read these books and know that they are not alone in their struggle with alarming symptoms and erratic behavior, authors should shift the emphasis of their future novels to the third type of story, the quest narrative, in which characters live in recovery, managing their mental illnesses and leading a fulfilling life. Library personnel should watch for such empowering recovery stories and recommend them to teens.

## Introduction

Since 2001, my work as a high school English teacher, a high school librarian, and a community college professor has shown me the significant impact of mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia on young people's lives. Indeed, all educators and library staff working with people in this age group should have some awareness of mental illness. As defined by the most recent edition (the fifth edition) of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, or DSM-5* (2013), "A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning."<sup>ii</sup> While the two terms "mental illness" and "mental disorder" are generally used synonymously in writing on the subject, in this study, the term "mental illness" is preferred because it appears more often in articles on the topic and because it is the preferred term of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI, which is the nation's largest advocacy organization for mental health. Furthermore, while sometimes trauma and mental illness are intertwined, I have avoided including stories of mental illnesses caused primarily by traumas, such as war, rape, or bullying, in this study. Each merits its own consideration as a subgenre. Likewise, eating disorders, which are featured in a host of YA novels, and thus constitute their own subgenre, were also out of the scope of my study.

This study also distinguishes between "mental illness" and "neurodiversity." "Neurodiversity" is a new term and a broader one than mental illness. Neurodiversity can include autism spectrum disorders as well as other conditions that render someone neurologically different but not in a necessarily negative way.<sup>iii</sup> Types of neurodiversity, such as autism spectrum disorders, are outside the scope of this study. This study focuses instead on mental illnesses that impair cognitive or affective function, such as depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. These illnesses contain symptoms that cause suffering and impair the social and intellectual lives of the affected people.

Mental illnesses are prevalent in our society. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), citing the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, explains, "In 2016, there were an estimated 44.7 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States with AMI [any mental illness]. . . . Young adults aged 18–25 years had the highest prevalence of AMI (22.1%) compared to adults aged

26–49 years (21.1%).”<sup>iv</sup> These statistics, which both exceed 20 percent, are the reason why advocates for the mentally ill often point out that one in every five adults has mental illness. NIMH also reports that “half of all lifetime cases [of mental illness] begin by age 14; three-quarters have begun by age 24.”<sup>v</sup> NIMH also cites a study of adolescents during the years 2001–2004 to conclude that nearly half of all adolescents ages 13–18 showed signs of some mental illness (as defined by the earlier fourth edition of the *DSM*), and when the percentage overall of adolescents who had “severe impairment” was considered, the result was 22 percent, or, again, one in five.<sup>vi</sup> Because of the high prevalence of mental illness in teens ages 13–18 and young adults ages 18–25, as well as a strong possibility of onset by as early as age 14, students and patrons in that age range may come to library and education professionals to seek stories that deal with the mental health struggles they are experiencing. Fiction can help build awareness of mental illness in adult professionals, who can then put those books into the hands of teens who may be experiencing mental illness themselves or observing it in a loved one. YA novels of mental illness can show teens struggles that they can relate to and provide hope for the future. Fiction can also help students who aren’t going through mental health struggles to empathize with those who are.

Recent research shows the empathy-building capacity of fiction.<sup>vii</sup> In “Using Literature to Confront the Stigma of Mental Illness, Teach Empathy, and Break Stereotypes,” Kia Jane Richmond cites a study that found that “improved understanding of mental illness helped students increase empathy for those with mental health disorders.”<sup>viii</sup> In Richmond’s 2018 book, she summarizes noted YA literature scholar and former Young Adult Library Services Association president Michael Cart’s argument that “young adult literature helps adolescents become civilized while finding role models, making sense of their world, developing personal philosophies of being, and determining right and wrong.”<sup>ix</sup> Richmond also cites acclaimed YA novelist and former therapist Chris Crutcher, who asserts that YA fiction provides “the opportunity for readers to look at life through different eyes and gain empathy for the plight of others.”<sup>x</sup> Luckily, there has been a proliferation of YA novels of mental illness since the early 2000s, and there is no sign that this trend is slowing. Teachers, professors, and library workers, who often recommend fiction to teens and scholars, should be aware of what kinds of stories are out there about the mental health situations so many of our students face. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to help educators and library personnel understand what types of novels are being

published for young adults about mental illness so that they can recommend the type of story that their patrons most want or need.

## Literature Review

Much of the literary criticism available on mental illness in literature focuses on classical characters who succumbed to madness: Ophelia, King Lear, and, of course, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's prototypical "madwoman in the attic."<sup>xi</sup> Because it is well established in the field of literary criticism that social oppression leads to nonconformists being labeled as mentally ill, this study does not focus on the metaphorical "attic" or on Ken Kesey's "cuckoo's nest."<sup>xii</sup> Instead, this study explores what modern realistic young adult fiction is available about clinically diagnosable mental illnesses.

In recent years, more and more has been written about mental illness, as opposed to "madness," in literature, particularly young adult literature. The *Language Arts Journal of Michigan*, the journal of that state's chapter of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), dedicated a whole issue to mental illness and secondary education in 2014. In this special issue, Richmond's article considers how widespread mental illness is among students and how both adult and young adult fiction on this topic can be relatable to students.<sup>xiii</sup> She argues that an examination of the vocabulary used in novels of mental illness can help students think critically about stigma. I designed my study to likewise focus on modern, realistic stories of medically diagnosed mental illnesses so that librarians can help their patrons build hope and empathy in the face of mental illness.

The *ALAN Review*, the quarterly journal of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the NCTE, dedicated their fall 2018 issue to mental illness in young adult literature. Richmond's 2018 *ALAN Review* article analyzes the language—from medical jargon to slurs and everything in between—that one YA novel and the characters in it use to describe mental illness and to what effects.<sup>xiv</sup> Richmond's recent book, the first book-length study on mental illness in young adult literature "since the publication of Sharon Stringer's *Conflict and Connection: The Psychology of Young Adult Literature* in 1997,"<sup>xv</sup> focuses on how realistically characters' symptoms match the description of illness in the *DSM-5* of the American Psychiatric Association and how well characters' treatment corresponds with professional best practices. In the *ALAN Review* article "Examining Agency in Contemporary Young Adult Illness Narratives," Kathryn Caprino and

Tara Anderson Gold refer to one of the disability narrative theorists, G. Thomas Couser, discussed in my study. The focus of their article is on the power and agency of characters in two novels of mental illness and one novel of physical illness.<sup>xvi</sup> Alyssa Chrisman, in her *ALAN Review* article “Living with It: Disabling Depictions of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in Young Adult Literature,”<sup>xvii</sup> takes an approach akin to mine but on a smaller scale. She analyzes three YA novels of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), which, rather than focusing on a problem-novel-type search for a diagnosis, focus on “liv[ing] with OCD.”<sup>xviii</sup> Chrisman addresses the “Myth of a Cure” versus the idea of living well with illness.<sup>xix</sup> While Richmond’s, Caprino and Gold’s, and Chrisman’s work confirms my contention that the empowerment of young adults with mental illness is and should be encouraged by recent YA novels of mental illness, none has taken an approach exactly like that of this study, which identifies and compares categories created by disability narrative theorists and sorts a large quantity of novels into those categories.

While the body of literary criticism about YA novels of mental illness is emerging, there is an established body of criticism on memoirs of mental illness. Critical analysis articles on disability memoirs often cited Arthur Frank’s *The Wounded Storyteller*, G. Thomas Couser’s *Signifying Bodies*, and David Karp’s *Speaking of Sadness*.<sup>xx</sup> Each theorist provides a helpful set of categories for classifying and evaluating the types of disability memoirs that exist. An examination of the writings of Frank, Couser, and Karp reveals that these disability narrative theorists have established similar sets of categories for classifying a memoir narrator’s attitude toward his or her illness: wishes for wellness, immersion in the uncontrolled symptoms, and pursuit of a good life with a treated (but never cured) illness. While Frank and Couser study memoirs of physical disability and Karp studies the mental disability of depression, there are consistencies in their findings (see table 1), and much of what the three say about narrative trends in disability memoirs can be encapsulated by Frank’s categories, which include three types of narratives: the narratives of “restitution,” “chaos,” and “quest.”<sup>xxi</sup> Frank’s three categories can be described as follows:

1. *Restitution narratives*: These narratives focus on getting back the abilities a person had before the illness struck. They reflect a desire for a cure.
2. *Chaos narratives*: These focus on the unpredictability of life with an illness.

3. *Quest narratives*: These focus on living a meaningful life with the illness and using knowledge of the illness to advocate for others who are similarly suffering. This person lives in a state of what Frank calls “remission,” not cure.<sup>xxii</sup> Instead of “remission,” which is often popularly associated with cancer, the term “recovery” is used in this study because this is the preferred term of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the nationwide advocacy organization for the mentally ill.<sup>xxiii</sup>

**Table 1. Aligning Disability Narrative Theory**

<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>Stage or Story Type 1</b>	<b>Stage or Story Type 2</b>	<b>Stage or Story Type 3</b>
Frank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restitution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chaos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quest</li> </ul>
Couser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Triumph</li> <li>• Nostalgia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horror</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emancipation</li> <li>• Spiritual meaning</li> </ul>
Karp, “Depression Career”	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inchoate feelings</li> <li>• Something really is wrong with me</li> <li>• Crisis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illness identity</li> </ul>
Karp, stages of “Coping and Adapting”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversion</li> <li>• Fix It (on my own)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fix It (with professional help)</li> <li>• Searching for Dr. Right</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporation</li> </ul>

In *Signifying Bodies*, Couser discusses five types of narratives (he calls them “rhetorics”), but they could be simplified to something similar to Frank’s three categories. For example, Couser explains that in many accounts of disability, memoirists focus on the way they were before they got sick. These authors might explain how they have been cured (as in the “rhetoric of triumph”), or they may accept that they will never get well, but they continue to fixate on the well person they once were (as in the “rhetoric of nostalgia”).<sup>xxiv</sup> These two rhetorics, in which wellness is valued above all else, are similar in that respect to Frank’s concept of restitution. In Karp’s *Speaking of Sadness*, in which he specifically focuses on mental illness (rather than

physical disability)—depression, in particular—it becomes apparent that Karp, too, has constructed similar categories to those of Frank and Couser. Karp identifies the first stage of “coping and adapting” as the “Diversion” stage.<sup>xxv</sup> In this stage, the person uses work, hobbies, or destructive habits to escape symptoms of mental illness. In the early part of the following stage, the “Fix It” stage, the ill person may try to cure his or her symptoms on his or her own, that is, without professional help.<sup>xxvi</sup> In these stages, then, wellness (or the illusion thereof) becomes the goal. Thus, all theorists recognize that often a response to mental illness is a desire to hide or deny the illness and to privilege wellness instead.

The second type of narrative or stage of development that the theorists identify deals with the disruptive nature of an unmanaged or unpredictable illness. Couser’s version of this is the “rhetoric of horror,” in which a cured person reflects upon how horrible the most acute phases of the illness or disability were.<sup>xxvii</sup> Frank calls the disruption created by symptoms of illness the “chaos” of illness.<sup>xxviii</sup> Similarly, in Karp’s definition of the depression “career,” the sufferer first experiences “inchoate feelings” that something is wrong but is not sure what it is, then blames it on life circumstances until he or she suffers a “crisis” or breakdown.<sup>xxix</sup> As we can see, then, all three theorists point to a stage of symptom manifestation and resultant confusion.

Finally, Couser’s, Frank’s, and Karp’s sets of categories all conclude with stages in which the ill person finds meaning in the illness. In Couser’s fourth stage, that of “spiritual compensation,” the sufferer finds spiritual meaning in the illness, but the sufferer does not go as far as to critique the society that constructs illness in such a way that it entails a great deal of suffering in the first place.<sup>xxx</sup> Couser calls his fifth story type the “rhetoric of emancipation,” which involves emancipation from the individual or medical model of disability in which the disabled person is seen as the problem.<sup>xxxi</sup> The individual model of disability is opposed to the social model, in which the problem lies not in the bodily impairment of the person labeled disabled but rather with the society’s refusal to integrate that person into society. Couser argues that society must recognize the value of and make a conscious effort to include people with disabilities. So, for Couser, the richest and most desirable state of mind or type of narrative is one in which the sufferer advocates for the rights of the ill so that the disabled can have lives in which they are full participants in society; their full participation is characterized by meaningful relationships and intellectual development.<sup>xxxii</sup> Such full participation in society bears similarities to the fulfilling lives lived by narrators in what Frank calls narratives of “quest.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> Karp’s last

stage in the “depression career” is developing the “illness identity,” and in his stages of “coping and adapting,” the last stage is “incorporation.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> In the last stage, the person with mental illness becomes educated, develops coping strategies, and becomes empowered to deal with the illness. The ultimate goal, then, in Karp’s framework, as in Frank’s and Couser’s, is living well while realistically accepting that symptoms of mental illness never totally go away. When a literary protagonist is living in that third stage of quest, to use Frank’s term, which entails striving for meaning and purpose while serving others, that protagonist can serve as an inspiring role model for the teen reader who suffers from mental illness. The protagonist in these types of stories can also dispel myths about the mentally ill for readers who do not have mental illness.

## Research Questions

1. Are Frank’s three types of illness narratives represented within this sample of YA fiction of mental illness?
2. Is there a predominance of one of Frank’s categories or another in the YA novels of mental illness studied in this sample?

## Methods

For this study, fifty young adult novels of mental illness published between 1998 and 2017 were chosen. The year 1998 marked the publication of Terry Spencer Hesser’s *Kissing Doorknobs*, the earliest renowned YA novel that depicts mental illness in ways consistent with the neurobiological model<sup>xxxv</sup> that psychiatry has favored in recent decades, as opposed to earlier psychoanalytic or superstitious approaches. Since 1998, young adult novels of mental illness have been published in large numbers. A subject search of the readers’ advisory database NoveList Plus on “mental illness” with the “teen audience” and “fiction” limiters reveals only forty-one results for the years 1969 to 1997, but 394 results for the years 1998 to 2019. NoveList Plus also reveals that more than twice the number of teen mental illness novels appeared between 2010 and the present than between 2000 and 2010. Popular source *Book Riot* declares that “over the last decade, the growth in YA books about mental illness is hard to overlook.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> While the fifty novels in this study constitute a large enough sample within which to see trends emerge, hopefully future researchers can conduct studies on the many YA novels of mental illness that this study was not able to cover.

To generate the list of the fifty YA novels of mental illness that comprise the research sample for this study, various methods were used. Internet searches were conducted for recommended booklists of YA novels of mental illness. Blogs and organizations pertaining to young adult literature and to mental illness were followed on social media. Titles that were available in local (Los Angeles area) popular retail stores where young adult fiction is sold, like Target and Barnes & Noble, were also included. Novels that were mentioned or found in more than one source, books by well-known YA authors, and novels by authors who have written more than one piece of YA fiction on mental illness were prioritized throughout the gathering of books for the sample.

I also conducted a search in the Los Angeles Public Library catalog for “mental illness” and then applied their “young adult fiction” limiter. The Los Angeles Public Library system, aside from being my home system, holds over six million books.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Using “mental illness” as a search term helped narrow this study to novels with a focus on mental illness; books in which a character’s mental illness is a minor background detail are not included in this study. The search term “mental illness” also proved to be an efficient way of finding a large number of results on many kinds of mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and depression) at once. However, one limitation of this study is that using the more general keywords “mental illness” yields slightly fewer results per disorder than a search using the name of each specific disorder, like “schizophrenia” or “bipolar disorder.”

Because a large number of library holdings can indicate high quality and popularity, books with lots of holdings were included in this study. However, YA novels of mental illness that had very few holdings in LAPL were also sometimes included. One reason for this is that some of the older novels (published in the 1990s and early 2000s) on the recommended reading lists played an important role in the history of YA literature of mental illness, even though now they are not very popular and consequently are not held in large numbers currently by LAPL. Other novels that had fewer copies in the system were also included because sometimes a good story does not get the recognition it deserves right away. This study made sure to include not just the most popular or well-renowned YA novels of mental illness but also some lesser-known ones as well.

As I read the novels in the sample, I kept an annotated bibliography with entries on each title regarding major plot points and themes, characters’ mental illness symptoms, characters’

attitudes toward treatment, and characters’ overall outcomes. A character’s attitude toward his or her illness as well as the state of his or her symptoms would help me determine whether the novel overall was what Frank calls a restitution narrative (one in which the character strives to mask the illness and be “normal”), a chaos narrative (one in which the character’s symptoms are out of control), or a quest narrative (one in which the character is living a thoughtful and productive life while managing a mental illness). At the same time, it is imperative to acknowledge that any story of illness may have overlapping emphases on Frank’s concepts of restitution, chaos, and quest. Because of such overlap, no one novel will belong solely in a single category.

### **Findings: Overall**

Frank’s three categories of illness/disability narratives are all represented in the fifty YA novels of mental illness used in this study. Twenty-six of the novels in my study (just over half of the sample) fall into Type 2, that of the chaos narrative. Thirteen novels fit into Type 1, that of the restitution narrative. Eleven novels fall into Type 3, that of the quest narrative. Please see table 2 for a list of which novels fall into each category. The most overlap occurred between Type 1 (Restitution) and Type 2 (Chaos). Because so few novels show characters achieving restitution but rather attempting and failing to achieve it instead, many restitution narratives could also be categorized as chaos narratives. Twelve of the thirteen novels discussed in Type 1 show characters’ symptoms of mental illness spinning out of control while the protagonist or a loved one tries to hide or deny the illness. Overall, then, thirty-eight novels in the sample (a vast majority) showcase characters struggling with uncontrolled mental illnesses. Significantly fewer novels in the sample—only eleven—emphasize recovery and therefore fall into Type 3 (Quest).

**Table 2. Young Adult Novels of Mental Illness: Three Types**

<b>Type 1 Novels: Restitution and Attempted Restitution</b>	<b>Type 2 Novels: Chaos</b>	<b>Type 3 Novels: Quest and Problematic Quest</b>
<i>A Blue So Dark</i> (2010), by Holly Schindler	<i>All the Bright Places</i> (2015), by Jennifer Niven	<i>Every Last Word</i> (2015), by Tamara Ireland Stone
<i>Calvin</i> (2015), by Martine	<i>Ball Don’t Lie</i> (2005), by Matt	<i>Get Well Soon</i> (2007), by Julie

<b>Type 1 Novels: Restitution and Attempted Restitution</b>	<b>Type 2 Novels: Chaos</b>	<b>Type 3 Novels: Quest and Problematic Quest</b>
Leavitt	de la Peña	Halpern
<i>Crazy</i> (2012), by Han Nolan	<i>Cameron and the Girls</i> (2013), by Edward Averett	<i>Have a Nice Day</i> (2012), by Julie Halpern
<i>Dirty Little Secrets</i> (2010), by C. J. Omololu	<i>Challenger Deep</i> (2015), by Neal Shusterman	<i>It's Kind of a Funny Story</i> (2006), by Ned Vizzini
<i>Define "Normal"</i> (2000), by Julie Anne Peters	<i>Crazy</i> (2012), by Amy Reed	<i>Madness</i> (2017), by Zac Brewer
<i>Fangirl</i> (2013), by Rainbow Rowell	<i>Dr. Bird's Advice for Sad Poets</i> (2013), by Evan Roskos	<i>The Memory of Light</i> (2015), by Francisco X. Stork
<i>Little and Lion</i> (2017), by Brandi Colbert	<i>Fans of the Impossible Life</i> (2015), by Kate Scelsa	<i>The Nature of Jade</i> (2007), by Deb Caletti
<i>Made You Up</i> (2015), by Francesca Zappia	<i>Freaks Like Us</i> (2012), by Susan Vaught	<i>Say What You Will</i> (2010), by Cammie McGovern
<i>Mosquitoland</i> (2015), by David Arnold	<i>Highly Illogical Behavior</i> (2016), by John Corey Whaley	<i>The Weight of Zero</i> (2016), by Karen Fortunati
<i>Not as Crazy as I Seem</i> (2003), by George Harrar	<i>I'll Be There</i> (2011), by Holly Goldberg Sloan	<i>Where You'll Find Me</i> (2016), by Natasha Friend
<i>A Scary Scene in a Scary Movie</i> (2011), by Matt Blackstone	<i>Inside Out</i> (2003), by Terry Trueman	<i>Will Grayson, Will Grayson</i> (2010), by John Green and David Levithan
<i>Wild Awake</i> (2013), by Hilary T. Smith	<i>I Will Save You</i> (2010), by Matt de la Peña	
<i>Words on Bathroom Walls</i> (2017), by Julia Walton	<i>Kissing Doorknobs</i> (1998), by Terry Spencer Hesser	
	<i>Lily and Dunkin</i> (2016), by Donna Gephart	

<b>Type 1 Novels: Restitution and Attempted Restitution</b>	<b>Type 2 Novels: Chaos</b>	<b>Type 3 Novels: Quest and Problematic Quest</b>
	<i>OCD Love Story</i> (2013), by Corey Ann Haydu	
	<i>The Museum of Intangible Things</i> (2014), by Wendy Wunder	
	<i>Saving Red</i> (2016), by Sonya Sones	
	<i>Schizo</i> (2014), by Nic Sheff	
	<i>Stop Pretending</i> (1999), by Sonya Sones	
	<i>Ten Miles One Way</i> (2017), by Patrick Downes	
	<i>Turtles All the Way Down</i> (2017), by John Green	
	<i>Under Rose-Tainted Skies</i> (2016), by Louise Gornall	
	<i>The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B</i> (2013), by Teresa Toten	
	<i>When We Collided</i> (2016), by Emery Lord	
	<i>Wild Roses</i> (2005), by Deb Caletti	
	<i>A World without You</i> (2016), by Beth Revis	

### *Findings: YA Novels of Mental Illness, Type 1 (Restitution)*

The YA mental illness novels, overall, have succeeded in being quite realistic, so, in most cases, characters do not feel that they achieve restitution and get back to their well selves. Perhaps the novels in this category should be called novels of *attempted* restitution instead of simply restitution, to modify Frank's term. Since mental illness has no cure, only recovery, most novels reflect this. However, the novel in the sample that most closely resembled a narrative of restitution was *Calvin* (2015), by Martine Leavitt. In this novel the main character, Calvin, believes that only the author of the *Calvin and Hobbes* comics can save him. This motivates him to embark on a dangerous journey across Lake Erie in the winter toward author and artist Bill Watterson's home. During the journey, Calvin's symptoms manifest themselves strongly. But after Calvin's rescue, he unquestioningly accepts his medication and even declares, "It helps a lot, and I don't get any of the side effects."<sup>xxxviii</sup> Side effects of anti-psychotics are widely documented and often inspire medication noncompliance, so this sense that Calvin is, for all intents and purposes, cured is a bit too tidy.

Some characters, however, focus on the idea that instead of being cured, they do not have a problem at all. This is denial. One particularly memorable character living in denial of his mental illness is precocious Devon in George Harrar's *Not as Crazy as I Seem* (2003). Since his symptoms do not bother him, he thinks that people should just leave him alone to engage in his OCD behaviors. Happily, though, Devon gains insight as the novel progresses. Rene, in Matt Blackstone's *A Scary Scene in a Scary Movie* (2011), suffers from OCD but goes around in a superhero cape trying to save the world until he meets a new friend and sets boundaries with his abusive father.

In *Wild Awake* (2013), by Hilary T. Smith, the protagonist wonders about this "Thing," mania: "Are all Things bad? What if I'm having a good Thing?"<sup>xxxix</sup> As the novel begins, Kiri, an accomplished pianist, sets out to solve her sister's murder. Throughout the course of a summer, Kiri becomes more and more manic. She challenges the assumption that her illness is really an illness at all, and her mania propels her to find clues about her late sister. At the end of the novel, Kiri says, "But when I think about everything that's happened this summer, I can't let it end like this, with a pill and eight hours of chemical oblivion."<sup>xl</sup> Kiri seriously considers refusing treatment at the end of the novel. She is poised to accept the harmful stereotype that medication will turn a person into a zombie.

In David Arnold's *Mosquitoland* (2015), we are not sure if the protagonist even has mental illness in the first place. Mim's dad has made her see a new psychiatrist who medicates her. We are not sure if Mim's dad sees enough evidence of mental illness in Mim or if he is overreacting and overmedicating his daughter because his sister was schizophrenic and committed suicide while off medication (a young Mim was the one who found the body). Mim abandons her dad, her doctor, and her medication by running away on a Greyhound bus in search of her mother. While Mim's decision to run away is drastic, it is not necessarily indicative of the schizophrenia that her doctor is treating her for. *Mosquitoland* is the only Type 1 novel that does not focus heavily on the severity of symptoms experienced by the character with mental illness. Therefore, it is the only novel in Type 1 (restitution) in which there is no overlap with the chaos stories of Type 2.

*Fangirl* (2013), by Rainbow Rowell, features a character who does not deny that she has an illness, but rather denies that she might need professional help. On her own, without medication or therapy, Cath does not get rid of all her anxiety symptoms as she might in a narrative of restitution, but she is able to make significant strides. She persists through her difficult first year of college, even breaking out of her comfort zone as a writer. This positive development could place Cath in a Type 3 narrative, since she creates meaningful life experiences while ill, but the story does suggest some denial, as in Karp's fix-it-on-my-own phase. Is seeking professional help necessary for living a meaningful life with mental illness? How this question is answered would determine whether *Fangirl* belongs in Type 1 or 3.

While many novels feature characters in different stages of denial, other stories make a shift from denying the illness (or the need for help) into admitting but hiding the illness. In *Dirty Little Secrets* (2010), by C. J. Omololu, the teen narrator Lucy successfully hides her mother's hoarding by burning down the house after her mother's death. Lucy ends the novel pleased with how she has finally been able to "[take] control."<sup>xli</sup> This was the only novel in the sample in which a character was successful in trying to hide an illness. This character's success in hiding her mother's illness raises a question, though: Must mental illness be hidden and stigmatized in order for a teen to live a good life? If the novel suggests a troubling answer to that question, let us shift gears and look at some stories of characters who fail to hide their illnesses.

In the two novels where the characters attempt to "pass" for well, this does not work out for long. For example, in Julia Walton's *Words on Bathroom Walls* (2017), we meet Adam,

whose doctors have him on a miracle drug that allows him to hide his schizophrenia from everyone at his new school, where his parents have placed him for a fresh start. But side effects of the medication force the doctors to have Adam taper off of it. As his symptoms worsen, his schoolmates find out about his illness. In Francesca Zappia's *Made You Up* (2015), Alexandra also has moved to a new school for a fresh start. Her close friends inevitably find out about her schizophrenia as well. While these endings could seem discouraging, as in *you cannot escape your illness*, I would argue instead that the novels actually have a positive message: There are family and friends who will support you as you live with your illness; it is not necessary to hide who you really are to have meaningful relationships.

Similar situations of hiding or denying an illness are found in many novels where the protagonists are the loved ones of someone suffering from mental illness. Karp has a set of stages for the loved ones of mental illness sufferers. He explains that loved ones usually first feel “bewilder[ed]” by the symptoms they see in their friend or family member.<sup>xliii</sup> Then they seek to learn all they can about the illness. With this comes an urge to make “heroic efforts” to save the ill person.<sup>xliiii</sup> Finally, the well relative or friend realizes that they cannot make recovery happen for someone else. They learn to be supportive while establishing healthy boundaries. For this discussion, Karp's stages for loved ones are pertinent because, like his stages for sufferers themselves, they include a period of chaos as well as a healthy acceptance/recovery phase. Karp's stages for loved ones, therefore, can be aligned with Frank's concepts of chaos and quest and Couser's rhetorics of horror and emancipation.

In Brandy Colbert's *Little and Lion* (2017), Suzette (“Little”) and her stepbrother Lionel (“Lion”) hide the fact that Lionel is off his bipolar medication for almost a whole summer. Suzette has taken Lionel's word that if she tells on him, their relationship is over. When Lionel disappears, though, Suzette must come clean, and ultimately their relationship will recover. In Han Nolan's *Crazy* (2012), Jason, fearing family separation, tries to care for his schizophrenic father on his own before finally seeking intervention by the authorities. In *A Blue So Dark* (2010), by Holly Schindler, the protagonist tries, unsuccessfully, to care for her artist mother, who is medication-noncompliant. Julie Anne Peters's *Define “Normal”* (2000) also features a young girl trying in vain to hold her family together while her mother decompensates. Most YA novels, then, suggest that denial—whether by the sufferer of the illness or his/her loved one—is not a good solution when dealing with mental illness. Thus, while restitution may be attempted,

it usually does not work out, producing some overlap between Type 1 and Type 2 stories; after all, the denial of mental illness usually leads to medication noncompliance and ultimately to the chaos of uncontrolled symptoms.

### *Findings: YA Novels of Mental Illness, Type 2 (Chaos)*

I have placed into Type 2 the novels that emphasize the chaotic stage of mental illness. The finding that many YA novels of mental illness fall into Type 2 and focus on uncontrolled symptoms makes sense; after all, a novel of mental illness should show us the illness. However, in the YA novel he coauthored with John Green, *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, David Levithan complains that too many books start with the first onset of symptoms and end with diagnosis.<sup>xliv</sup> The character begins treatment and will presumably live happily ever after. For example, the earliest YA novel of mental illness in this sample, Terry Spencer Hesser's *Kissing Doorknobs* (1998), follows a predictable problem-novel pattern. The protagonist and her family struggle with her OCD symptoms throughout the book but finally get an accurate diagnosis at the end. Thus, the first type of chaos story that I found is the story that focuses on the time when symptoms first emerge and characters in the novel are not sure what is happening, and the resolution of the novel is diagnosis and treatment.

As another example of such a problem novel, the bulk of *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy* (1999), by Sonya Sones, illustrates what Karp would call the “bewilderment”<sup>xlv</sup> of the family when the narrator's sister begins displaying symptoms of her bipolar disorder. In a brief note at the end of this short but groundbreaking work—*Stop Pretending* was both one of the first YA novels of mental illness and one of the first YA novels in verse—Sones reveals to us that her own sister, upon whom the sister character in the novel is based, has managed her symptoms with medication and has gone on to live a productive and happy life (as a librarian, no less).

*Challenger Deep* (2015), by Neal Shusterman, is similarly based upon the author's family's experience, and while in the end the protagonist chooses treatment over his delusions, the majority of the novel is the exploration of the struggle that led to that decision. The battle between reality and hallucination is played out on the high seas because Shusterman's son Brendan, whose artwork is featured in the novel, had, at the onset of his disease, told his father that he felt like he was trapped at the bottom of the ocean. In Amy Reed's *Crazy* (2012), Connor

and Isabel exchange letters pondering the symptoms that are slowly taking over Isabel's life. The climactic event is a suicide attempt that convinces Isabel to accept the help offered to her.

Another character debating what to do about the symptoms of mental illness is the narrator of *Dr. Bird's Advice for Sad Poets* (2013), by Evan Roskos. Narrator James Whitman, who loves the poet whose name he shares, suffers from both anxiety and depression. The novel traces both James's contemplation of suicide and his enthusiasm for life, which he expresses in a Whitmanesque style of both poetry and prose. James has a very enlightened conversation with his imaginary therapist, Dr. Bird, about his concerns about his creativity being stunted by medication. Dr. Bird (and hence James) wonders if the usual dilemma of being sedated by medication or living unhappily but authentically is a false dilemma. Dr. Bird asks James if his unhappy self must necessarily be his more "real" self: "What if your real mind is already gone behind a curtain [of depression]? What if the drugs will remove the curtain?"<sup>xlvi</sup>

While books about the onset and diagnosis of a mental illness are important, in reality life with mental illness plays out in a more complicated way than it would in a simple problem novel. In the problem novel, there is an obvious solution. Have symptoms? Get a diagnosis and treatment! But not everyone has access to diagnoses and treatments. In Matt de la Peña's *Ball Don't Lie* (2005), the character neither knows why he engages in strange behaviors nor has any access to treatment. Because Sticky, a foster child, lives a very socioeconomically disadvantaged life, he never gets a diagnosis or treatment for the obsessive-compulsive disorder that he has been suffering with for years. In fact, Sticky never even refers to his illness by name because, in a situation like his, in which a sufferer lacks education and support, the sufferer would not even know the name of the disorder. Sticky is stuck in Karp's "inchoate feelings" stage.<sup>xlvii</sup> He is aware that something is wrong, but he does not know what it is or what to do about it.

Similarly, there is the case of Patrick Downes's *Ten Miles One Way* (2017). Nest and her dad deal with their mania by taking long walks. While Nest's dad is an educated professional, and you would think he would know that there are treatment options, there is no mention of medication or therapy either for him or his daughter. Alternated narration by Nest and her boyfriend Q (Isaac Kew) takes us through the stream-of-consciousness journey of Nest's last walk before she crashes her car and lands in the hospital. At the end of the story, we do not know if she is going to be okay or get any treatment.

While the books above vary in the sense that some deal with emerging illnesses but others with long-standing troubles, what they all have in common is a focus on a time in a character's life that precedes formal medical treatment. However, another type of chaos story is the one in which characters have been diagnosed and treated before the start of the novel but are now having a relapse. In these stories, characters have a variety of reasons for relapse. Often that reason is medication noncompliance, and the characters have a variety of reasons for going off their medications.

Negative side effects are one reason for characters to stop taking medication. In Kate Scelsa's *Fans of the Impossible Life* (2015), Mira's halfhearted attempt at dietary changes in order to avoid taking and experiencing the side effects of medication for her depression results in her needing hospitalization again by the end of the novel. In Susan Vaught's *Freaks Like Us* (2012), Jason refuses his medicine when the sleepiness it causes would interfere with solving the mystery of his best friend's disappearance. He searches for her with an awareness that his symptoms are getting worse, and once he finds her, he goes back to his regular medication routine.

In other cases, the characters go off medication because they want to get back some special ability that their illness gave them, usually energy or creativity. In Donna Gephart's *Lily and Dunkin* (2016), Dunkin goes off his medication so that his manic energy will help him on the basketball court, but this results in him being hospitalized. Similarly, in Deb Caletti's *Wild Roses* (2005), the protagonist's stepfather, Dino, a famous violinist, stops his medication in order to be more creative as he writes his comeback music. His condition deteriorates throughout the novel until he attacks a fan at his big performance. In Emery Lord's *When We Collided* (2016), the focus is also on a character's escalation into mania, which eventually results in a traffic accident that convinces the afflicted character, Vivi, to go back on her medication. In *Cameron and the Girls* (2013), by Edward Averett, the main character refuses treatment because he likes his symptoms: his schizophreniform disorder gives him the confidence to do daring things, and his voices admire him. Until the very end, Cameron wants his off-medication life (his "good life"<sup>xlviii</sup>) more than his on-medication life. At the end of the novel, when the doctor suggests that taking medication would be better than living in fear of the newly hostile voices, Cameron responds, "Dr. Simons knows absolutely nothing about living with fear and how much better it is than living with nothing."<sup>xlix</sup>

However, in some novels of mental illness, the characters refuse treatment not because they fear losing their adventurousness but simply because they have accepted the limitations that their illnesses place on their lives. They have given up. These characters do not see their symptoms as adding beneficial qualities to their personalities, but, at the same time, these characters are not willing to make changes that would reduce the symptoms of their illnesses. For example, in Printz Award–winner John Corey Whaley’s *Highly Illogical Behavior* (2016), Solomon is resigned to the idea that he must never leave his house because, if he does, his acute panic attacks will return. Solomon mentions that one of his past doctors “kept putting me on medicine that made me sick,”<sup>1</sup> so part of his reasoning involves avoidance of side effects, but Solomon is also stubborn; Whaley writes, “Therapy didn’t really work on Solomon because he didn’t want it to.”<sup>li</sup> In the related example of Louise Gornall’s *Under Rose-Tainted Skies* (2016), Norah suffers from severe anxiety, panic, and OCD. Agoraphobic, she rarely leaves her house; she wishes she could smell the flowers in her backyard someday. Sometimes the only way she can stop her terrible panic attacks is by cutting herself. When Norah’s mom is injured in a car accident, Norah must stay home alone, with her psychiatrist making house calls. While Norah admits her mental illness, she refuses medication until a home-invasion robbery challenges her conviction that ensconcing herself at home is the best way to feel safe.

In some cases, we don’t know why characters go off their medication; we just know that they do. The character may be living in a state of denial, as mentioned in the “Type 1 (Restitution)” section of this paper. In *I Will Save You* (2010), by Matt de la Peña, protagonist Kidd runs away from a group home. Without treatment, Kidd hallucinates that it is not he but rather another person, Devon, who engages in dangerous and erratic behavior. Luckily, after a failed suicide attempt, Kidd is hospitalized. In Holly Goldberg Sloan’s *I’ll Be There* (2011), drifter and criminal Clarence suffers from schizophrenia, but he has refused the medication offered while he was in prison. In *Saving Red* (2016), by Sonya Sones, a teen with bipolar disorder has gone off her medication and become homeless. In John Green’s *Turtles All the Way Down* (2017), Aza, who suffers from OCD, has been only haphazardly taking her medication, and ultimately the stresses of a potential new romance, a conflict with a best friend, and a car accident culminate in Aza drinking hand sanitizer in the hospital.

In some cases, going off medication results in a character’s suicide. In *All the Bright Places* (2015), by Jennifer Niven, and *The Museum of Intangible Things* (2014), by Wendy

Wunder, help is available but is refused, and the mentally ill characters commit suicide. I have included in the chaos category any novels that end in suicide since suicide clearly precludes living a meaningful life with one's illness, and, therefore, any suicide story cannot be considered a Type 3 story.

While many chaos stories show the characters refusing treatment for various reasons, there are also novels in which treatment is received but bad things happen anyway. The treatment administered may be the wrong one. In addition, we must remember that adverse outcomes can occur simply because no medication can completely cure any mental illness. This is a frightening scenario because humans like to feel in control of their lives; they do not like to see bad things happen when people are doing the right things. As one example, the two protagonists in Corey Ann Haydu's *OCD Love Story* (2013) spend most of their time in that novel fighting symptoms even though they are already in treatment. As another example, in Nic Sheff's *Schizo* (2014), protagonist Miles is a high school student trying to survive socially at a party while managing the side effects of medication (he has to eat at the right times and he cannot drink much alcohol, for instance). But even though Miles is playing by the rules, his particular medication has not gotten rid of one critical delusion that drives the plot: Miles believes that he has a younger brother who has been abducted, but this person is in fact a hallucination. In Beth Revis's *A World without You* (2016), protagonist Bo is receiving treatment at a residential school but still hallucinates that he is traveling through time to save a classmate who committed suicide.

Another novel in which bad things happen to someone already in treatment for mental illness is Terry Trueman's *Inside Out* (2003). Zach, who has medication and a great support system, finds himself stuck in a coffee shop that is being held up by two teens around his age. Zach has lots of insight about his illness, but we can see his symptoms start to return as the hours go on and the holdup continues, preventing Zach from taking his next scheduled doses of medication. Even so, Zach maintains enough insight to solve the situation by convincing the robbers to allow him to call his therapist. The novel seems to be poised for a happily ever after, but after the holdup situation is resolved, Trueman leaves us with a stand-alone chapter featuring a newspaper article from a later date that indicates that Zach has committed suicide. We were told earlier in the novel that there were guns in Zach's house, but other than that, we are given no other information leading up to the suicide. Presumably, after the robbery, Zach had his good

support system to go back to, so it is unclear what made him ultimately commit suicide. The uncertainty seems to indicate that this is a narrative of chaos.

In Teresa Toten's *The Unlikely Hero of Room 13B* (2013), the main character is taking medication for OCD and anxiety, but it is not working well, so he begins abusing it. If not for this factor, I would be tempted to put this novel into Type 3, as Adam is developing good relationships and habits with his support group. But while Adam ultimately gets help for his mother, whose hoarding has been a problem throughout the story, the novel never tells us what happens to Adam and his medication situation or whether he ever gets his symptoms under control.

### *Findings: YA Novels of Mental Illness, Type 3 (Quest)*

Levithan stresses that mental illness novels should begin, rather than end, with diagnosis and treatment. He wonders about “the rest of [the character’s] life”<sup>lii</sup> after the character sees the psychiatrist. The predominance of Type 2 stories suggests that, for many, the “rest of [a mentally ill person’s] life”<sup>liii</sup> can be a life of relapse; just because a character has a diagnosis or has been prescribed medication in the beginning of the book does not mean that the rest of the story will necessarily focus on recovery. Indeed, we have seen many characters struggle to accept their diagnoses/medications or overtly reject them. Therefore, for Type 3 stories, then, I have included novels that not only begin with diagnosis/treatment but also focus on recovery rather than relapse. A true Type 3 story will be a narrative of quest,<sup>liv</sup> emancipation,<sup>lv</sup> or incorporation.<sup>lvi</sup> This means that the focus of the narrative is on building a fulfilling life.

*Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010), coauthored by John Green and David Levithan, is such a Type 3 quest story. One of the two characters who are both named Will Grayson (the one who is designated as “will grayson”) begins the novel faithfully taking his medication and accepting his depression. Though medicated, will grayson definitely still struggles with depressive moods, but eventually he learns to not let those moods take charge and hurt people, including himself and his friends. He is truly “coping and adapting,” as Karp might say, and he is developing an “illness identity.”<sup>lvii</sup> At the same time, the fact that will grayson’s depression is somewhat controlled and that the novel deals simultaneously with friendship- and sexuality-related conflicts, raises the question as to whether the focus on recovery relegates the mental illness to a background detail rather than keeping it a key component of the story. In the case of

will grayson, his depression is intertwined with the relationship issues in the novel; the interpersonal conflicts are not completely separate from the depression.

To ask the question more broadly, when a character's illness is under control, does that mean you no longer have a novel of mental illness? There are a few ways to address this. As we know, some symptoms of mental illness never go away, despite treatment. Does the character still struggle with some symptoms? To what degree are the character's past struggles with mental illness covered? Does the character reflect extensively upon how his or her illness experience has changed him or her? Has the experience of having suffered had a big impact on the character's personality?

When addressing these questions, Tamara Ireland Stone's *Every Last Word* (2012) is problematic. The novel opens with a scene from the midst of one of narrator Sam's episodes of "Pure O," or pure obsession. Sam has gone from having violent and disturbing obsessions (without the accompanying compulsions that would characterize obsessive-compulsive disorder) to getting her illness under control with medication and therapy. From that perspective, this seems to be a novel of recovery, or quest. However, aside from an intense opening flashback of Sam's intrusive thoughts about stabbing people with scissors, no other "Pure O" episodes pop up again in the novel. It was odd to have just one flashback of such a traumatic condition. Sam *tells* us that things used to be bad before she was medicated, but the novel does not really *show* us. Sam's symptoms that have remained despite medication are fairly innocuous ones: driving until her car's odometer reading ends with the number three, pinching herself three times, or staying up late researching her love interest's ex-girlfriend. For someone purportedly concerned with how the disease impacts her sense of self, Sam does not reflect much on her experiences before medication. Most of the book is about her making choices about friends and love, and her OCD seems to play a pretty low-key role in the story. Since she is functioning so well, perhaps this novel really is a Type 1 story, a narrative of restitution.

Another problematic novel is *Say What You Will*, by Cammie McGovern (2014). In this novel, Amy, a high school senior with physical disabilities from cerebral palsy, befriends Matthew, her peer aide at school who has OCD. He counts and checks that faucets are turned off. He also worries excessively about harming others. Amy challenges Matthew to stop giving in to his compulsions, and while he has some success with this, Matthew eventually seeks out therapy and medication several weeks later. He plans to continue his relationship with Amy and take her

to the prom. Because Matthew gets treatment and proceeds with the rest of his life, this novel belongs in Type 3. But Amy's parents are not convinced that Matthew is well enough for their daughter. When Matthew finds out what Amy's parents think, he begins to doubt his own recovery, leading him to abandon Amy. So, while Matthew accepted treatment and medication, he was still letting stigma dictate his actions. In that sense, the story seems more like a Type 2 chaos story; even though the chaos of symptoms is not back—Matthew does not go off his medication—he still believes he is unworthy of “normal” relationships while ill. This belief precludes living a full life for Matthew. Thus, *Say What You Will* could be considered a problematic quest narrative.

In addition to *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, this study found some other novels that were true Type 3 narratives. Novels that fall into this category will emphasize how characters rebuild their lives after the chaos and crisis stage. One such novel is Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2006). The protagonist gets treatment early in the story, and then much of the rest of the novel describes how main character Craig learns to understand his illness and use art to cope with it. Craig rebuilds his life with medication and art. (One wonders, though, if this conclusion will seem facile to readers who know that the author, Vizzini, succumbed to suicide despite his own artistic pursuits.)

Similarly set in a psychiatric ward is Julie Halpern's *Get Well Soon* (2007). Anna Bloom's recovery is aided by the friends she makes in the ward as opposed to the inept hospital staff. The sequel to *Get Well Soon*, *Have a Nice Day* (2012), gives us a very full picture of Anna rebuilding her multifaceted personal life after her release from the hospital. In one of the most thoroughly Type 3 stories found in the course of this study, Anna uses music, art, fashion, and literature to reintegrate herself into society outside the hospital. She continues with group therapy and medication upon her return home. Anna reflects upon her experiences in the hospital and uses the good techniques to her advantage while disregarding the bad. She takes on greater responsibilities within her family as her parents split up, and a younger sister looks to her for guidance. While Anna initially feels like she does not belong back in the real world, she reconnects with her friends and details the complications that arise during that process. Perhaps most notably, as Anna reconnects to her old friends, they express interest in her life in the hospital and one goes so far as to help Anna search for a hospital friend with whom Anna has lost touch. One of Couser's conditions for a true narrative of emancipation is one in which the

mentally ill are not othered and ostracized by society. The fact that Anna is able to bring her psychiatric ward life to her at-home life and vice versa makes *Have a Nice Day* a true Type 3 narrative.

Francisco X. Stork's *The Memory of Light* (2015) is also a significant story because it is primarily one of recovery rather than of symptom manifestation and crisis. The novel opens with Vicky Cruz's stay in the psychiatric ward of the hospital after a suicide attempt. In the hospital, Vicky is diagnosed with depression. In addition to having a chemical imbalance, she's been grieving her mother's death from cancer for many years while her father, Miguel, has thrown himself into his work and remarried someone who is equally a workaholic. Vicky doesn't fit into the ambitious crowd at the preparatory school her father makes her attend because he came from humble beginnings and has transformed himself into a wealthy developer of property. Vicky's father has also arranged to send her longtime nanny, Juanita, back to Mexico in her old age, and Vicky deeply resents this plan. In the psychiatry ward, Vicky meets Mona, Gabriel, and Emilio. They, along with Vicky's psychiatrist, help Vicky as she rebuilds her life. While Vicky communicates her disappointment with her father for the first time, reconciles with her Harvard-attending sister, and returns to private school, she acknowledges that she may not be able to catch up. Since she loves to write, she thinks that perhaps the school literary magazine could be a refuge for her. She considers transferring to public school and leaves the possibility open at the end of the novel. She is able to help get Juanita a job so she doesn't have to return to Mexico and can stay near Vicky. Vicky is also able to help Gabriel and Mona make good choices about their treatment options. Thus, Vicky is an active agent of change as she recovers from her depression.

Without a stay in the psychiatric ward but already in therapy and on medication is Jade DeLuna, in Deb Caletti's *The Nature of Jade* (2007), one of two novels collected in *Love Is All You Need*. Jade, a high school senior, is outgrowing her friends and watching her parents grow apart. While her anxiety is well controlled, she still worries that the panic attacks she once suffered from are coming back. She maintains a few rituals to assuage her anxiety, such as knocking and counting. When a new romance reduces her anxiety, she recognizes that, nevertheless, she is still not cured. She does grow a lot through volunteer work with animals and standing up to her parents to create a more fulfilling life for herself. Jade reflects thoughtfully on what is normal anxiety versus what is pathological, and her recovery status is embedded everywhere in the novel in an organic way.

Two novels in the Type 3 quest narratives started out seeming like chaos stories, but then turn to focus primarily on the relationships and activities that help the characters rebuild their lives. Karen Fortunati's *The Weight of Zero* (2016) and Zac Brewer's *Madness* (2017) feature characters who initially wanted to surrender to their illnesses but then ultimately built meaningful lives. In both, the narrators had been released from psychiatric facilities but were still initially intent upon committing suicide. In *Madness*, although Brooke wants to die, she begrudgingly takes her medication, gets into a relationship where she learns she is not alone with her depression, and reestablishes her involvement in her school's drama productions. When the relationship turns toxic, Brooke realizes she no longer wants to die and fights to live. In *The Weight of Zero*, Catherine is inconsistently taking medication and creating a stockpile for another suicide attempt. She grapples with the idea that people with bipolar disorder may have relapses even when they are taking medication, sleeping well, and eating right. She wonders what's the point of living if she is just going to keep relapsing. But Catherine ultimately accepts the uncertainty and decides to keep going anyway. New friendships with a classmate and someone from group therapy, as well as the inspiration drawn from her research into an inspiring historical figure, help Catherine conclude that life is worth living. The focus of the novel overwhelmingly seems to be on how Catherine rebuilds her life rather than the initial suicide plan, which recedes further and further into the back of her mind. The characters in *The Weight of Zero* and *Madness*, then, do what Karp describes when he says that people in the incorporation stage "fight against [mental illness] as best they can while constructing a life premised on its continuing presence."<sup>lviii</sup>

Another character who accepts the unpredictability of illness and finds ways to live well anyway is Anna in Natasha Friend's *Where You'll Find Me* (2016). In this case, the ill person is the protagonist's loved one rather than the protagonist herself. Anna's mother is getting treatment for bipolar disorder but says that she cannot promise her thirteen-year-old daughter that she won't ever attempt suicide again. Despite the uncertainty, Anna learns to cope by bonding with her father and his young second wife, something that she resisted initially. While Karp's discussion of the incorporation stage refers to the sufferer of the illness, in *Where You'll Find Me* family members are also able to build a good life "premiered on [depression's] continuing presence."<sup>lix</sup>

One final important aspect of the Type 3 quest narrative, rhetoric of emancipation, or incorporation story is advocacy for others with disabilities. This study did not find any characters formally advocating for others with mental illness in the sample. For an example of what organization-level advocacy looks like in a novel, there is Bebe Moore Campbell's *72 Hour Hold*.<sup>lx</sup> Although it features a mentally ill teen character, Trina, this novel was not marketed as a YA novel, probably because it is narrated by the middle-aged mother, Keri. Campbell herself was very active in the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)—so much so that July is designated by this group as Bebe Moore Minority Mental Health Month—and presumably her experiences inspired her to include organizational advocacy in this novel. Campbell, who is African American, as are her characters, makes interesting analogies between mental illness and slavery throughout the story. While most of this novel focuses on a chaotic time in Keri's life as her daughter Trina's bipolar disorder worsens, the story finally ventures into Type 3 territory at the end when Keri helps found a support group in her African American neighborhood to address the lack of attention to mental illness in the community.

## Discussion

While readers should be encouraged by the hopeful futures presented by the eleven Type 3 quest narratives, problematic though a couple of them are, I ask why there are so few Type 3 novels, especially considering that this study found twenty-six Type 2 novels. Furthermore, the number of chaos-focused novels could be considered as great as thirty-eight when we recognize that most of the Type 1 novels, consisting of *attempted* instead of *actual* restitution, could alternatively have been categorized as Type 2 chaos stories. The reason for the overlap is that while characters tried to deny or hide the illness, their symptoms worsened. While the denying and hiding seemed to suggest restitution, the actual result was chaos, and these novels read like many in Type 2 (Chaos). Overall, the findings of this study suggest that while teen readers can easily find stories of characters struggling with the acute symptoms of mental illness, there are fewer stories of hope that show teens that they can lead fulfilling lives while controlling their illness. If so many novels show the chaotic phase of mental illness, teen readers may be left wondering if and how recovery can be achieved.

To truly empower adolescents who suffer from mental illness, we should give them characters living in recovery, that is, building fulfilling lives as they manage their illnesses. In

Levithan's words, there should be more YA mental illness novels that show teens not a quick resolution following a first diagnosis but instead a complex and multifaceted recovery process "when [they] have to live the rest of [their] li[ves]." <sup>lxix</sup> Overall, as we consider the three types of stories, we can see that even the novels that deal with relapses rather than first diagnoses of mental illnesses tend to focus on the reemergence of symptoms, that is, the descent back into madness, rather than the process of coming out of it. We should ask why there are not more stories of YA characters living in recovery—that is, rebuilding their lives while getting treatment. Why have novelists focused so heavily on the crisis phase and not as much on the recovery phase? I argue that while we have an excellent selection of YA novels of mental illness that focus on the chaos phase (Type 2 narratives), authors should create more stories of acceptance and recovery (Type 3 narratives).

## **Conclusion**

While relapse and chaos stories abound, it is more difficult to find stories in which adolescents are recovering and building full lives while managing their illnesses. This is troubling, as library staff members and educators should show students not only the suffering that mental illness entails but also the process of recovery and the wondrous, meaningful lives that are possible for people with mental illness. More YA novels of mental illness should not just suggest at the end that recovery can happen but instead portray in depth, throughout the novel, how recovery is achieved by the characters. Therefore, I recommend that authors write more Type 3 stories and that, when library workers see Type 3 novels, they add those novels to their collections and eagerly recommend them to readers. While this study focused on fifty important novels of YA fiction, hopefully future researchers can examine more of the nearly four hundred YA novels of mental illness that have been published since 1998, determine whether Type 2 chaos stories predominate, and discover additional Type 3 quest and recovery stories.

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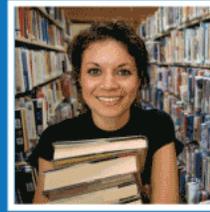
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## **What's Going on Down Under?**

### **Part 1: Portrayals of Culture in Award-Winning Australian Young Adult Literature**

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#### **Abstract**

This article examines a facet of the English-language publishing industry that may be evading your collections: Australian young adult literature. This first article of a two-part series analyzes the portrayals of culture in the winning books of two popular Australian YA Awards from 2007 to 2018: the Children's Book Council of Australia's Book of the Year for Older Readers chosen by a panel of adults and the Centre for Youth Literature's Gold Inky Award selected by teen readers. Using a wide definition of culture to encompass nine constructs (class, disability, gender, immigration, Indigenous Australians, language, the LGBTQIA community, race/ethnicity/nationality, and religion), the researcher read the twenty-four titles and used critical content analysis to identify critical incidents of these constructs. The most commonly coded theme was gender focused on issues like body image and sexual harassment, especially interesting to consider in light of the #MeToo movement. Mental health was another strong theme and distinctly present in the Inky Awards. The LGBTQIA community was also represented, but on a smaller scale and often in a tokenistic manner. The second article in this series delves deeper into the other constructs and considers the implications of Indigenous Australians being the least common construct in the sample.

## Introduction

Recent statistics from the Pew Research Center note that the current generation of American youth, labeled as “Post-Millennials,” are not only the most racially and ethnically diverse generation yet, but they are more likely to go to college than previous generations.<sup>i</sup> This diverse and educated group of young people are living in a time of social justice movements, not dissimilar to the civil rights era, where people using hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo strive to unite in the midst of division. Such conflict is evident in schools; the Documenting Hate database—which records racist, xenophobic, and homophobic acts in the news—reports that hundreds of such acts have occurred in K–12 schools since 2015.<sup>ii</sup> These bullying incidents targeted religious and racial groups, mirroring violence in national news such as the white supremacist rally and resulting riots in Charlottesville in 2017, and multiple shootings at churches, synagogues, mosques, clubs, and even schools themselves. In a time of ever-increasing cultural diversity, people working with youth need to provide them with the tools to understand and become informed, engaged, and fair citizens supporting social justice issues resulting from this diversity, including those of immigration, gender identification, and race. The importance of having a diverse youth library collection representing a variety of perspectives cannot be overstressed.

This paper explores international young adult literature from an area of the world that may be underrepresented in your collection, if represented at all. Goldsmith and Diamant-Cohen note the potential for international literature (i.e., titles published outside of the US) to give readers “an opportunity to see what the rest of the world thinks, broaden our perspectives and validate international voices.”<sup>iii</sup> With cultural similarities in its colonial and immigration history and dominance of the English language, Australian young adult literature is a solid option for diversifying your collection. The Australian publishing industry is a strong market with high-quality books and does reach the United States with titles by famous Australian youth and adult authors like Markus Zusak (*The Book Thief*), Mem Fox (*Possum Magic*), and Liane Moriarty (*Big Little Lies*) making their mark. Further, Andronik found that books originally published in Australia received the Michael L. Printz Award eight times (14% of the total 57 titles) from 2000 to 2011.<sup>iv</sup>

Andronik also noted some of the major differences between the Australian and American publishing industries.<sup>v</sup> The first is sheer size. With a total population less than 10% of the United

States, Australia has a publishing industry that is much smaller than that of the US, and Australian print runs reflect that. Also, despite both countries predominantly speaking the same language, dialect and vocabulary differences deter American publishers from picking up Australian books that have not been translated into “American English,” while Australian authors are hesitant to make those changes to their books for the American market.<sup>vi</sup> American media through television, movies, and books are commonplace in Australia and not changed for Australians or the rest of the world, and thus those readers become much more savvy on these differences in dialect and vocabulary and are better at navigating such issues than Americans. These differences create physical and intellectual access issues for American adolescent readers, who deserve the opportunity to engage with another culture outside of the US through the pages of a book and figure out for themselves that “arvo” means afternoon and “sunnies” are sunglasses. This article, the first in a two-part series, posits that award-winning Australian young adult literature supports this engagement and facilitates American librarians with selection ideas.

### *Australian Youth Literature Awards*

As in the United States and other countries, Australia has a few key youth literature awards that librarians turn to for collection development each year. One of the major awards is given by the Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA). The CBCA has awards at varying levels including Picture Books, Early Childhood Readers, Younger Readers, Information Readers, and Older Readers. These awards are comparable to those given by divisions in the American Library Association (ALA) such as the Randolph Caldecott, Theodor Seuss Geisel, John Newbery, and Robert F. Sibert Awards from the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), and the Printz Award from the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). The CBCA was established in 1945 to promote Australian children’s literature, authors, and illustrators. The vision of the CBCA “is to be the premier voice on literature for young Australians and to inform, promote critical debate, foster creative responses, and engage with and encourage Australian authors and illustrators to produce quality literature.”<sup>vii</sup> The awards began in 1946 and were an important part of the founding of this organization. The CBCA announces the Notable Lists of approximately eighteen titles for each award early in the year followed by the Short Lists of six books announced a few months later. Then two honor titles and the winners are revealed in August during the CBCA’s Book Week with much celebration

and participation from schools and libraries across Australia. Each award is chosen by a panel of three adult judges; these awards are also similar to the ALA youth awards in their focus on literary merit.

The Inky Awards are another important literature award for teens in Australia. The Inkys are managed by the Centre for Youth Literature (CYL) at the State Library Victoria and are featured on the CYL's Inside a Dog website. Named after Groucho Marx's famous quote ("Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read."), this website is described as "a community hub for bookish teens where they can share their love of reading and books."<sup>viii</sup> Youth can create accounts to post reviews, share their own creative works, get book recommendations, and engage with other teen readers. Since their start in 2007, the Inky Awards have been another important part of the Inside a Dog website, with a year-long process to choose the winners. Like the CBCA awards, a Long List of ten titles is released for each award early in the year, followed by a Short List of five titles a bit later, and then the Gold and Silver Inky Award winners are announced at a special event in October. There are two Inky Awards: the Gold Inky goes to an Australian book and the Silver Inky goes to an international book published outside of Australia. A glance at the lists of Silver Inkys reveals many familiar American titles, such as the 2018 winner *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. The selection process for the Inkys is what makes this award so unique in that teens do the choosing with some mentoring provided by CYL staff. The Short List is compiled by a small panel of teens who have applied and been chosen for the role; this is a competitive process and an exciting honor for these youth. The panel must read the twenty books from the Long List in just two months to create the Short List. The Long List is chosen by former panel members. Then, the winner and honor books are selected in an online vote in which any Australian teen can participate. This makes the Inky winners much more representative of the voice of the intended audience, and Australian adolescents can feel ownership for this award. YALSA's Teens' Top Ten book list is similar to the Inky Awards with this focus on the teens themselves being part of the selection process.

## Research Questions

Given the main difference in who is judging the CBCAs and the Inkys, I was interested in seeing the cultural differences between the books chosen since the inception of the Inkys in 2007 to the latest winners in 2018. Which perspectives would be included? Which would be absent? What

do these depictions reveal about different aspects of culture and the different cultural groups represented (or not)? This article is the first in a two-part series reporting on findings from a study analyzing the representations of culture within these two popular Australian young adult literature awards. Replicating methods from similar studies, this study used a broad definition of culture encompassing nine constructs including class, disability, gender, immigration, Indigenous Australians, language, LGBTQIA, race/ethnicity/nationality, and religion.<sup>ix</sup> The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the general characteristics of the Gold Inky Awards and the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers from the last twelve years?
2. How does this sample of the Inkys and CBCAs depict these nine cultural constructs?
3. What are the differences between these depictions within these awards chosen by teens (Inkys) and adults (CBCAs)?

This first article will deal explicitly with the first research question about general characteristics of the sample and the second research question, concentrating on the three constructs of disability, gender, and the LGBTQIA community.

## Methods

Critical content analysis is a method commonly used to analyze youth literature. A collaborative study from Beach et al. noted the flexibility of this method in addressing a wide range of studies and areas of interest surrounding culture in children's literature as scholars used a critical content analysis approach to examine one picture book in terms of post-colonialism, neoliberalism, and inquiry-based interpretive reading.<sup>x</sup> The present study replicates the content analysis method used by Forest, Garrison and Kimmel to examine culture within Mildred L. Batchelder Award-winning books.<sup>xi</sup> The method is described in detail below and modeled after Berg's work.<sup>xii</sup>

First, I collected winning titles for the CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers and the Gold Inky Award from 2007 (when the Inkys started) to the 2018 winners. While there is some overlap between the awards in terms of their Long and Short Lists, there has been no overlap with the winning titles during these twelve years. There is some overlap on winning authors, however, with three authors (Sonya Hartnett, Claire Zorn, and Fiona Wood) having won the CBCA award twice since 2007 for their novels. In 2018 Wood won again for *Take Three Girls*, which she coauthored with 2017 CBCA winner Cath Crowley and 2007 Inky winner Simmone

Howell. After compiling the list of the books, I began reading the twenty-four winners, collecting them from my local public library. (See Appendix A for the full list of books with descriptions and Appendix B for bibliographical information.) I maintained a database recording basic bibliographical information about the books and some characteristics like genre, setting, format, and protagonists' ages and genders. While reading, I looked for critical incidents of eight cultural constructs. These constructs mirror those noted in the diverse experiences described by the We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) website and shown in table 1.<sup>xiii</sup> I later made "Indigenous Australians" a separate category from race/ethnicity/nationality because issues affecting Indigenous Australians and the experiences of Indigenous Australians are very important in the Australian context, and I wanted to make a point to see how (and if) they were represented in this set of books.

**Table 1. Nine Cultural Constructs with Definitions and Examples**

Cultural Constructs	Definitions and Examples
Class	Referring to socioeconomic class, often used to describe characters' housing, neighborhoods, hobbies, education and schools, food, belongings, and clothing.
Disability	Referring to the broad description from WNDB, "includes but is not limited to physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, chronic conditions, and mental illnesses (this may also include addiction)."
Gender	Referring to traditional definitions of gender as a female or male. (Please note that there were no incidents in this set of books where characters identified with definitions of gender other than female or male.)
Immigration	Referring to the migration from one nation or border to another, forced or voluntary, including people seeking asylum and refugees.
Indigenous Australians	Referring to the native peoples of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who are the traditional owners of the land.
Language	Referring to the use of languages other than and including English, specifically as a form of social capital, power, and privilege.
LGBTQIA	Referring to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,

Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual or Allied Community.

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Race/Ethnicity/Nationality	Referring to peoples of the same ancestry with common physical characteristics and/or citizenship; however, as political boundaries and societies change through events like natural disasters and war, nationality can be fluid.
Religion	Referring to specific spiritual beliefs or systems including but not limited to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

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I recorded the page numbers for the pertinent passages so I could go back later and document the exact quotes for the critical incidents identified for each of the books. A critical incident is defined as a situation, reference, or instance where the cultural construct plays an important role in the interpretation of the scene.<sup>xiv</sup> For example, in 2008 Inky winner *Town* by James Roy, a student recalls his science teacher talking about the elements: “He called Carbon a slut. ‘She’ll go with anyone,’ he said. Which is how Veronica ‘Carbo’ Bennet got her nickname.”<sup>xv</sup> The negative connotation associated with “slut,” which refers to a female, is a critical incident of gender in the text and one that could be used to engage young readers in a discussion about timely issues of gender such as sexism and misogyny. In addition to obvious references like this, critical incidents can also be disguised against a description of normalcy. An example is the description of the roles of Rose’s parents in 2007 CBCA winner *Rose by Any Other Name* by Maureen McCarthy with Rose’s mother managing the household and children and doing volunteer work while her father practices as a successful lawyer.<sup>xvi</sup> A description of such a traditional stereotype is a critical incident to be noted and again questioned by young readers in terms of the context of gender.

An important aspect of studying culture is recognizing the perspective and frame one brings based on their own history and experiences. A researcher must always negotiate and remain cognizant of this throughout their investigation; however, it may also be used as a benefit to understand certain relatable aspects of the texts. Constant awareness is essential in maintaining objectivity; however, as Patton notes, “complete objectivity being impossible . . . , the researcher’s focus becomes balance—understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflective in consciousness.”<sup>xvii</sup> At the same time, an important limitation to note here is my status as the sole investigator of this study.

After I finished reading all of the books and doing data entry, I compiled the quotes relating to each construct and made frequency and book counts to see how the awards and constructs compared. While noting these frequencies does not provide the content or context of the quotes and the connotation associated with the cultural construct, these numbers give an idea of the presence (or not) of the constructs individually and as a whole across the awards. This method was also used by Taylor in his study of gender stereotypes in picture books.<sup>xviii</sup> After compiling these numbers, I searched for themes in the constructs among the books and between the awards, looking for repeating patterns and connections.<sup>xix</sup>

## Findings

This study analyzed the general characteristics and depictions of culture and diversity within a set of twenty-four award-winning Australian young adult titles published from 2006 to 2017. Findings about the general characteristics of the books—including format, genre, setting, and teen protagonists’ gender—are featured in table 2.

**Table 2. General Characteristics of the Novels**

Characteristics	Books ( <i>n</i> = 24)
<b>Formats</b>	
Novel	20
Short stories	1
Other	3
<b>Fiction Genres</b>	
Contemporary realism	18
Fantasy	1
Magical realism	3
Historical fiction	1
Science fiction	1
<b>Main Settings</b>	
Contemporary urban/suburban Australia	16
Fantasy	3
Contemporary regional Australia	2
International (Palestine, Czechoslovakia)	2

Space (year 2575)	1
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Gender of Teen Protagonists	
Female	22
Male	18

As shown in table 2, the most common type of book in this sample is a contemporary realism novel set in urban/suburban Australia with a female protagonist. Notable exceptions to the majority novel format include a collection of short stories in 2009 CBCA winner *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, and three uniquely compiled titles representing the last three years of Inky and CBCA winners, including the dossier of files, emails, messages, doctors' notes, interviews, video transcripts, and more in *Illuminae*; the combination of narrative and love letters written in the pages of books from a secondhand book shop in *Words in Deep Blue*; and social media posts, emails, Wellness class journal entries and worksheets, and narrative in *Take Three Girls*. Inky's 2016 winner *Illuminae*, included on YALSA's 2016 Teens' Top Ten, was also the only science fiction title in this set of books along with one true fantasy title, 2011 Inky winner *Silvermay*, and three magic realism titles, all CBCA winners and all written by highly acclaimed Australian authors: Shaun Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, Margo Lanagan's *Sea Hearts*, and Sonya Hartnett's *The Ghost's Child*. *The Midnight Zoo*, also by Hartnett and a CBCA winner in 2011, was the only book labeled as historical fiction because it is set during World War II but also has elements of magic realism, as is consistent with Hartnett's writing style.

An examination of the books' settings reveals that two-thirds are set in an urban or suburban area of contemporary Australia with only two Inky titles, *Town* and *Stolen*, set in regional Australia (defined as those areas outside the major cities) and two titles with international settings, 2009 Inky winner *Where the Streets Had a Name*, set in 2004 Palestine, and *The Midnight Zoo*, set in World War II Czechoslovakia. *Illuminae* again stands out as unique in this group of titles, being set in space in the year 2575.

Finally, the gender of the protagonists, which often include more than one for each title, appear well-balanced when examining the figures in table 2. However, half of the male protagonists were from one novel, *Town*, with four females in that novel as well, each narrating one of the thirteen chapters. In extracting this outlier, females are protagonists in twice (18) as many novels in this set as males (9), which also mirrors the authors' genders exactly.

The findings for the second research question are presented in table 3, with the frequency counts of critical incidents across the cultural constructs for each individual award (twelve books possible for each award across the twelve years) and then both awards together (twenty-four books total). The highest and lowest frequencies for each column are in boldface.

**Table 3. Frequency of Critical Incidents and Number of Books with Critical Incidents**

Cultural Construct	CBCAs ( <i>n</i> = 12)	Inkys ( <i>n</i> = 12)	Total ( <i>n</i> = 24)
Class	113/12	58/9	171/21
Disability	40/10	100/10	140/20
Gender	<b>134/9</b>	<b>105/11</b>	<b>239/20</b>
Immigration	25/4	26/5	51/9
Indigenous Australians	<b>9/2</b>	<b>10/3</b>	<b>19/5</b>
Language	21/7	22/9	43/15
LGBTQIA	33/6	17/6	50/12
Race/Ethnicity/Nationality	46/10	57/10	103/20
Religion	11/8	35/8	46/16
Overall Total	432	430	862

As shown, gender was the most frequently coded construct, and Indigenous Australians was the least frequently coded construct for each award and overall. Again, while noting the mere presence of these constructs is not a valid analysis of the authenticity and quality of the portrayals, it is still notable to see these figures and consider their prevalence (or not). The remaining findings discussion focuses on disability, gender, and LGBTQIA constructs and the context of their depictions in this set of books. (Please note the remaining six constructs—class, Indigenous Australians, immigration, language, race/ethnicity/nationality, and religion—are explored in the second article of this two-part series.)

### *Disability*

Visible and invisible disabilities marked the third highest construct recorded in the sample across the awards. Though the awards were evenly represented in terms of books mentioning or addressing disability in some way, the Inkys had more references. The most recent Inky Winner from 2018, *Paper Cranes Don't Fly* by Peter Vu, was very focused on main character Adam's health. Adam has had a brain tumor for some time, but the tumor begins to grow fast and

becomes cancerous, giving him just months to live. This story is the epitome of an #ownvoices book as the author Peter Vu is a teen who has been dealing with a similar health issue since he was six years old.<sup>xx</sup> Vu's intimate knowledge and understanding of what it means to be terminally ill, how to navigate the hospital system, and the importance of friendship is a poignant representation of disability in this novel.

There were a few other characters or references to characters with physical disabilities in this sample. In 2014 Inky winner *The First Third*, main character Billy's best friend Lucas has cerebral palsy and nicknames himself "Sticks" because of the crutches he uses to walk. While his is a secondary story in the book, Lucas's character is written in an authentic, empathetic way for the reader as we see how he pokes fun at his disability, even as he is obviously struggling. He has his first sexual experience via an app where he can arrange the meeting at his home, so he does not have to show up on crutches. He tells Billy, "The difference between someone finding you attractive and someone pitying you and never wanting to touch you is the difference between sitting down and standing up."<sup>xxi</sup> Other characters with physical disabilities include injured soldiers cared for by the protagonist in *The Ghost's Child*; Rose's best friend Zoe's continuing battle with leukemia in *Rose by Any Other Name*; and two characters in *Town*: Nick's mom, who has multiple sclerosis, and classmate Robbie Blair, who has an undisclosed but crudely described physical and mental disability.

Autism is alluded to in two books of the sample, 2014 CBCA winner *Wildlife* and the 2013 Inky winner *My Life as an Alphabet*. In the latter, it is never confirmed if the protagonist Candice and her best friend, "Douglas Benson from Another Universe," are autistic or on the spectrum. They both exhibit some social and communication difficulties and are called "retards" by bullies at school. When Candice visits Douglas's house for dinner, she feels anxious and uncomfortable; she has an awkward exchange with his mother about dinner:

"So I wondered whether you were okay about having different colours of food on the same plate."

I might have raised an eyebrow. Possibly two.

"You are autistic, aren't you?"

"No," I said.

It was facsimile Penelope's turn to look puzzled.

"Then what are you?" she asked.

"I'm me," I said.<sup>xxii</sup>

In *Wildlife*, Michael is also portrayed as socially awkward and inept. It is noted throughout the book that he is “different” and that he “does take medication from time to time,” but why he takes medication and is so different is never explored.<sup>xxiii</sup> The reader is left wondering about Michael’s story.

The most prevalent disability featured in the books is invisible and deals with mental health. Mental health issues are experienced in two specific ways: teen protagonists in the stories suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mothers suffering from depression. As detailed in table 4, the protagonists with PTSD are noted in ten books, almost half of the sample, with four Inkys and six CBCAs. These characters are almost exclusively dealing with the death of a loved one and/or the eminent separation of their parents, who are dealing in part from the same death.

**Table 4. Critical Incidents of Characters with PTSD**

Award	Book	Main Character(s)	Situation	Treatment
Inky	<i>Illuminae</i>	Ezra and Kady	Dealing with the attack on their planet that killed their parents and separated them.	None
	<i>Shift</i>	Olive	Tries to commit suicide because she blames herself for her parents’ separation.	Hospitalization, therapy, and pills
	<i>Stolen</i>	Gem	Dealing with being kidnapped from the Bangkok airport and living in the middle of the Australian desert; possibly suffering from Stockholm syndrome after her captor frees her.	Therapy
	<i>Where the Streets Had a Name</i>	Hayaat	Still having flashbacks from the bombing that scarred her face and took the life of her best friend.	None
	<i>Words in Deep Blue</i>	Rachel	Dealing with the drowning death of her brother.	Therapy
CBCA	<i>The Dead I Know</i>	Aaron	Dealing with the murder-suicide of his parents he witnessed as a child; has	None

			nightmares and sleepwalks.	
<i>The Midnight Zoo</i>	Andrej		Dealing with the destruction of his family and gypsy caravan; wandering the Czech countryside with his siblings during WWII.	None
<i>One Would Think the Deep</i>	Sam		Dealing with the death of his mother in his arms from a brain aneurysm.	None
<i>The Protected</i>	Hannah		Dealing with the car accident caused by her father that killed her sister, being a witness to the accident, and the resulting fallout of her parents' marriage.	Therapy
<i>Rose by Any Other Name</i>	Rose		Dealing with almost drowning, lost love, and the pending divorce of her parents.	None
<i>Wildlife</i>	Lou		Dealing with the death of her boyfriend in a bicycle accident.	Therapy

The other common theme in regard to mental health was mothers (or female caretakers) suffering from depression, found in a quarter (6) of the books across the awards. In *My Life as an Alphabet*, *Cloudwish*, *The Protected*, and *The Dead I Know*, the mothers are barely able to take care of themselves, so the protagonists tend to the household and even help their mothers take their medication. The mothers from the first three novels had suffered serious trauma, including having breast cancer and losing a baby to SIDS, traveling to Australia by boat as a Vietnamese refugee, and experiencing the death of a child in a car accident. Aaron's grandmother in *The Dead I Know* took him in as a young child when his father murdered Aaron's mother and then himself in front of Aaron. Now his grandmother is suffering from dementia and has to be hospitalized. Moms in *The Intern* and *Rose by Any Other Name* are struggling with marital problems and have health issues resulting from this stress, so they start taking medication. While not a strong focus of the books, these subplots play into the stories of the young female protagonists wanting to help their mothers and having issues with their fathers.

While the fathers who lost children are also grieving in these stories, fathers are not depicted as having issues with mental health as often as mothers. In fact, both instances of fathers identified with mental health issues also alludes to their drug use. In 2018 CBCA winner *Take Three Girls*, Ady's father finally decides to seek help for his drug addiction and goes to rehab after squandering most of the family's money. In 2007 Inky winner *Notes from the Teenage Underground*, Gem's father comes to visit from Tasmania to meet his daughter for the first time. Gem is confused why he has never been around. Her mother Bev notes his history, "Schizophrenic, bi-polar, manic-depressive, phobic. . . . At one time or another he's been slapped with all those labels. I think he's got a cocktail mix of anti-social conditions."<sup>xxiv</sup> Her father later also admits to Gem that he has had a drug habit.

Further, five books deal with girls having eating disorders and other mental health issues. Characters from *Shift* and *Town* die from complications due to their anorexia while in the hospital. Characters are taken away by ambulance in *The Intern* and *Wildlife* but eventually recover. Wood again tackles this issue with coauthors Crowley and Howell in *Take Three Girls* when a list of the "Top Ten Hot Girls with Eating Disorders" is posted on PSST, a website that posts gossip about secondary students in local private schools around Melbourne. Protagonist Ady notes how cruel it is to "make a joke about [someone's] sickness."<sup>xxv</sup>

## Gender

Gender was the most noted construct by far across both awards, measuring 239 times total in twenty books. The CBCAs recorded 134 critical incidents from nine titles while the Inkys noted 105 incidents from eleven titles. Four big themes surrounding gender were revealed in these findings: sexual harassment, virginity and sex, female body image, and traditional gender roles.

In consideration of the #MeToo movement, issues of sexual harassment emerged within this set of books. Over one-third of the books contained one or more instances of girls being sexually harassed verbally by one boy or a group of boys and even other girls. The stories are told from different perspectives, usually by the girls suffering the abuse but also sometimes by the boys giving it or witnessing it. For example, in 2017 CBCA winner *One Would Think the Deep*, there is a long scene where Sam's cousins and new mates in his new town are "talk[ing] about every girl that walks past. . . . It was sickening and Sam didn't join in."<sup>xxvi</sup> Sam goes on to

note that this does not make him a better person, but he can't say anything as the new guy. Then, Sam's crush Gretchen walks by.

"Hey baby, come here!" Shane yelled. Gretchen stopped walking and Sam could see her shoulders and back move as she took a deep breath. She turned and faced the group, he could see fear hidden in her scowl.

"Piss off," she said firmly.

There were hoots and jeers. "I think she likes you, Shane!" someone laughed.

She raised her middle finger at them and as she did her eyes found Sam. He felt his whole face colour and burn, his pulse thudding in his temples. The seconds that he had to establish himself as the person he wanted her to see were over.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Later that day, Sam runs into Gretchen at a music gig, and she introduces him to her cousin. "This is Sam. He hangs out with stupid misogynistic dickheads who think it's cool to harass women."<sup>xxviii</sup>

Fiona Wood's novels in this sample—*Wildlife*, *Cloudwish*, and *Take Three Girls*, coauthored by previous winners Crowley and Howell—also contain instances of girls being harassed by boys, with the girls quietly taking it or coming back and questioning the harassment. As protagonist Sibylla in *Wildlife* walks past her boyfriend's table at lunch, his friend asks him, "Man yo' ho'—where's she going?"<sup>xxix</sup> Sibylla does not react but "is annoyed because [she hates] that whole pimp/ho' thing. Especially when it comes from the mouths of little middle-class white boys." Her friend Lou notes, "Trouble is, if you say nothing, you're really saying you're okay with it."<sup>xxx</sup> In *Cloudwish*, Vân Uoc has a similar run-in with some boys in her neighborhood.

She heard the cat-calling whistle. "Wouldn't mind a piece of that," said Nick.

She stopped as though she'd been smacked. "I just saw your mum down Albert Street, Nick. And your little sister. . . . How would you like someone telling your mum or your *sisters* they wouldn't mind a *piece of that*?" . . .

"Just saying, you're looking hot, girl," Nick mumbled.

"Well, you don't get to judge me. I'm not here for your assessment."

"It's just a fucken compliment," Nick said.

"No, it's sexual harassment. And I'm sick of it."<sup>xxxi</sup>

These situations make a strong statement that sexual harassment of this “boys will be boys” nature should not be tolerated. The female protagonists give a good model on how to handle such circumstances, but also portray the reality that it can be scary. *Shift* and *Town* contain other examples, with Veronica from *Town* having to live with the unwarranted reputation as a slut at her school and almost forced into having sex with a group of guys.

At the same time, two books in this sample give notable poor examples of similar situations. While never outright confronting girls, male characters Marc and Trav in 2010 CBCA winner *Jarvis 24* are constantly objectifying women with each other.

“Bling.” Trav clicks his fingers. “You’ll need that.” He glances at a girl with messy blond hair who’s wearing a tight red-checked kind of cowboy shirt. “I’m sure *she* could get some catalogue work, if she tried. Bras and undies. Gumboots and gardening equipment. Toys and books.”

“She could do whatever she likes,” I say. “As far as I’m concerned.” Because when it comes to classifying girls for modelling assignments, as Trav and I often do, I tend to think that they’re all pretty nice.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Throughout the story, this behavior is portrayed as cheeky and cute. While it is definitely not as bad as yelling vulgar comments directly at a girl or physical assault, it also sends a poor message that this is acceptable and maybe even flattering attention. The offensive behavior is never addressed in the story, which seems to normalize it.

Situations in *The Intern* are also notable in this regard. In one case, a celebrity forces protagonist Josie to kiss him and it is caught on camera, going viral on the Internet. Josie is ashamed because the singer is having a baby with his partner, and she gets harassed and body-shamed online because of the photo. However, the bigger issue here of someone forcing himself on someone else is never tackled in the story. The blame goes to Josie, and she accepts it as if it is her fault. This is a missed opportunity for her to stand up for her personal rights. In another situation, Josie’s best friend tries to hook her up with her crush at a party who drunkenly demands to see her “Brazilian wax job.” Josie is shocked and runs out of the party, “feeling like a piece of meat.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> Later she feels vindicated as this character’s ex-girlfriend accidentally shares a picture of his penis with all the contacts on her phone. Josie and her sister have a laugh about his “tiny you-know-what,” but this double standard with males and females sends the wrong message that revenge porn is funny and even acceptable in certain situations.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Sex and virginity are also included in the books as a theme separate from the sexual harassment theme. Many characters are virgins and lament this fact, such as Sibylla from *Wildlife*, who muses: “My virginity does not feel like some wondrous thing I will one day bestow on a lucky boy; it’s more in the realm of something I need to get rid of, like braces, before my real life can begin.”<sup>xxxv</sup> Some characters go to great lengths to lose their virginity; Clem in *Take Three Girls* has a quick experience with an older guy at a party, and Lucas in *The First Third* uses an app to meet someone for sex. The novels also address the issue of peer pressure regarding sex. Sibylla’s “best friend” Holly tries to pressure Sibylla into sleeping with her boyfriend Ben, saying, “Can’t you at least give the poor guy a blow job?”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Sibylla ends up “leapfrog[ing] into the sexual bit” and regrets how her first experience played out.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Body image is another common theme woven in the novels, usually in conjunction with eating disorders, which are classified in the mental health section of the disability construct. The differences between male and female body image are made clear by Misskaella in 2013 CBCA winner *Sea Hearts* when she notes that “boys’ bodies and looks mattered less than did girls’.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> Female body image in the media is a discussion in two school classrooms in author Fiona Wood’s novels. In *Take Three Girls*, there is a discussion in a Wellness class about Photoshopping in fashion magazines and the messages that these unrealistic images send youth, and how to combat them. Ady relates this back to sexism:

*If only* we just worried that we’re not pretty enough, or thin enough, or that we’ve got pimples. For us, the message that you fail to attain someone’s idea of perfection is a wash that colours EVERYTHING. It is the air we breathe. Sure, we are getting better at calling it, but that doesn’t make it go away. It’s not just stupid fashion magazines—it’s every dude checking you out and ranking you with a look on the street, every PSST [website] post, every arse-grab. It’s everyday sexism. It’s the fricken patriarchy.<sup>xxxix</sup>

In *Cloudwish*, Dr. Fraser asks her students to “gender-flip” the “most expensive retail real estate . . . in any city” (i.e., replace the females with males in the cosmetics departments at stores); “all the products are dedicated to making men feel less-than” from “age-minimising, pore-minimising, lip maximising . . . why doesn’t the picture look like that?”<sup>xl</sup> The proceeding discussion talks about how the focus on women’s appearances is a “relic” from the past when women were more financially dependent on the men in their families.

This leads to the final theme emerging around gender in this set of books, which has also been found in other research studying gender in youth literature.<sup>xli</sup> Traditional gender roles for men and women are evident in this sample and send messages to impressionable adolescents about who is allowed to do what for work and for recreation, and the roles of males and females in the home. Candice’s quote from *My Life as an Alphabet* highlights her uncertainty at the delineation of roles when she visits her friend Douglas’s home for dinner: “‘Let’s leave it to the women to clear up, son,’ [Douglas’s dad] said. ‘I need help cutting firewood.’ I worried about women cleaning while men played with axes (I am a modern girl).”<sup>xlii</sup>

There is some pushback against these stereotypical roles as well, with undercurrents of feminism throughout some of the books. In *Sea Hearts*, beautiful women are literally bought by the men of the town as wives, created from the body of a seal by the witch Misskaella. Ironically, it is this business of making and selling women that allows her to become financially self-sufficient without the help of a man. Misskaella reflects on this in her first transaction: “The effect within me as he laid out these terms [of payment] was a great relaxing, of a tension I had not even known I was suffering. It was one thing not to want a husband, I realised; it was quite another not to *need* one for the roof over your head, for your meat and bread, for the shoes on your feet and the coat on your back.”<sup>xliii</sup> Her list of necessities including shelter, food, and clothing emphasizes the importance of having a husband in this past time period and how marriage dictated a woman’s class.

## *LGBTQIA*

References to the LGBTQIA community were noted fifty times within twelve books, six CBCAs and six Inkys. These references were exclusively about being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The CBCAs measured almost twice as many critical incidents (33) as the Inkys (17), although they were found in the same number of books (6). Ady, in the 2018 CBCA winner *Take Three Girls*, is the only protagonist in this set who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. While she starts off the story having a boyfriend, she breaks up with him and finds herself attracted to a girl for the first time. Her discovery of her sexuality is not a main part of this novel and not really explored. Seven books, again split between the awards, contained gay or lesbian supporting characters. Four of the books—CBCA winner *Wildlife* and Inkys *The First Third*, *Illuminae*, and *Words in Deep Blue*—present them in authentic, genuine ways, so their inclusion does not feel like tokenism. In

*The First Third*, the main character Billy's best friend Lucas is gay, which is very openly accepted by his friends and family, and he is physically disabled. This latter fact is addressed much more in the story as having an effect on his life, including his love life. In one scene, Lucas describes to Billy how he recently lost his virginity by meeting up with a guy through an app with "the expectation you're on it to do stuff." Billy tells him, "You know you don't have to do that, right?" "Says the able-bodied hetero kid," Lucas replies.<sup>xliv</sup> In another example, *Wildlife* and *Words in Deep Blue* refer in passing to characters with two mothers. Lou and her mums show up again in *Cloudwish*, Fiona Wood's third installment in the Six Impossible Things series, along with another lesbian character, Jess, who is Vân Uoc's best friend but has not yet come out. Jess believes her parents "would get the locks changed rather than accept her sexuality."<sup>xlv</sup>

Coming out is a theme in *Jarvis 24* as well, when main character Marc meets Mikey at his new internship. Mikey is gay and recently moved to Melbourne from Queensland after coming out to his family. Mikey and his friends are the first people Marc has met who are not heterosexual. His reaction at times makes the inclusion of Mikey's story feel contrived. After they first meet, Marc notes, "Mikey's a cool guy. And I don't fancy him a bit! Even if he does have big arms and blond hair. Which is a *great* relief"; "it appears that I've settled the gay thing with myself."<sup>xlvi</sup> In *Town*, there is allusion to a character, Nick, who could possibly be gay, but he never comes out even when his friend Angela asks him point-blank after deliberating over the question with her family at New Year's Eve dinner.

There are a few scenes in these books where being gay or lesbian is met with confrontation and indignation. In *Wildlife*, when Lou notes that her parents are "both women," the "evil girl bully" of this story, Holly, says, "That is gross. Do you even know who your father is?" When Lou responds that it is her uncle, Holly idiotically gasps, "That's freaking incest!"<sup>xlvii</sup> In *Jarvis 24*, Marc and his friends get into a fistfight with a group of guys calling them "dykes" and "homos." And in *The Protected*, protagonist Hannah is brutally bullied at school as a "little lezzo perve" for years after she accidentally fell into a girl at a party;<sup>xlviii</sup> the bullies create Facebook pages defaming Hannah and calling her a "lesbian sexual predator."<sup>xlix</sup>

## Discussion

This article, the first of a two-part series, investigates the general characteristics of two popular Australian young adult literature awards: the CBCA's Book of the Year for Older Readers

(chosen by adults) and the Gold Inky Awards (chosen by teens) as well as the titles' cultural depictions of disability, gender, and the LGBTQIA community. First, a notable general characteristic from these awards is the lack of rural settings, which comprises most of the land of Australia. However, this is not surprising given that about two-thirds of Australians live in five cities,<sup>i</sup> and there is a stigma often given to regional areas (those towns outside the major cities) in the Australian context.<sup>ii</sup> Moeller and Becnel studied the reading experiences of rural US teens and found that they often chose books that had a rural connection.<sup>iii</sup> If rural youth in Australia or the United States cannot find themselves and their communities represented positively in award-winning books, they have one less tool to help combat their own and others' regional stereotypes. In terms of genre and format, the books are almost exclusively contemporary realism novels with almost no historical fiction. The only historical fiction title, *The Midnight Zoo*, includes magic realism elements with talking animals. It is also possible that the honor titles, Short Lists, and Long Lists hold more diversity of genre and settings. While most of the books are in a traditional novel format, the Inkys account for a winner with the most unique format: *Illuminae*, a 600-page dossier of photos, doctors' notes, emails, instant messages, video narrations, and even the thoughts of a computer program with artificial intelligence. This uniqueness is more reflective of the alternative goal that the Printz Award set out to achieve in 2000, asking authors to go beyond the stereotypical image of a young adult novel.<sup>iiii</sup>

Another interesting finding in this group of books is the overwhelming presence of female protagonists, outnumbering males almost two to one. This is the exact opposite of research across the decades that has shown an imbalance in the gender of protagonists in youth novels, with females being at the bottom of those studies. While equal representation is always the end goal, it is positive to see the upturn of female characters, which may also be related to the flood of female authors in this sample.

Perhaps also related to the excess of female characters is the focus on gender issues in this set of novels. It is especially interesting to study these books in light of the #MeToo movement, where I find myself questioning situations a lot more. While these novels include some empowering instances of girls sticking up for themselves and their bodies, there are also some points where the reader is left wondering where was the character's response and what should that response be? Other instances, specifically in the novels by Fiona Wood, feel a bit didactic, but nonetheless present important opportunities for teens to discuss these issues.

Adolescence is a time of sexual exploration, and it is a challenge to sort out the balance between what is okay and what is not. But that is really what the #MeToo movement is about, asking questions and deciding what feels right for each individual person.

A big difference between the adult-chosen CBCAs and the teen-selected Inky Awards is the books' coverage and treatment of mental health issues; this was one of the most frequently coded areas under the disability category and affected a lot of characters in the stories, including adults and teens. While ten books from both awards were noted as having critical incidents of disability, the Inky winners had sixty more critical incidents than the CBCA winners. This may be due in part to the 2018 Inky winner, *Paper Cranes Don't Fly* by Peter Vu, which deals explicitly with a terminal illness. While the award winners often overlap in the longer lists, this book did not appear on the CBCA Notables List. Movements like R U OK? Day and groups like OneWave, who had their weekly Fluro Friday surf visited recently by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex during their trip to Sydney, are working to battle the stigmas that Australians have with mental health issues and seeking treatment.<sup>liv</sup> While the legacy of that stigma may be holding in adults, it may also be diminishing with adolescents.

While both awards included representations of the LGBTQIA community, some problems identified in young adult literature by a study from Colborne and Howard persist in this set, such as relying on coming out and homophobia as plot devices.<sup>lv</sup> Nonetheless, a positive finding is that gay, lesbian, and bisexual characters are included in these books as well as a diversity of families as represented by LGBTQIA parents. Colborne and Howard also note a finding from their study of LGBTQ+ YA novels in the past decade of a lack of intersectionality of identities in their sample.<sup>lvi</sup> The character Lucas from *The First Third* is a clear answer to their call, as Lucas struggles with living with his disability and how it impacts his love life as a gay young man. That being said, none of the books included or even mentioned characters or discussions about people who identify as transgendered or intersex, which is a clear deficiency given the increasing recognition that these groups suffer from poor mental health much more than the general population in Australia and the world.<sup>lvii</sup>

## Conclusion

With some of the books in this sample having clear paths to progress in terms of coverage and content, the findings from this study show that this set of novels provide opportunities for young

adults to discuss important social justice issues and movements like #MeToo. Because of the massive publishing industry in the United States, American youth are often pigeonholed into learning only about their own country and context. Even in Australia, the #LoveOzYA movement was started to combat the onslaught of American YA books on Australian YA shelves and to promote some of our talented homegrown authors.<sup>lviii</sup> Awards like the Silver Inkys, given to titles published outside of Australia, show that Australian youth are engaging with international youth literature and thus likely have a stronger understanding of issues in the global context than American youth. Considering the findings presented here and movements like #WNDB, I posit that Australian young adult literature is a strong option for your collection development to promote accessible global perspectives. As Australian Aboriginal author (Palyku people) Ambellin Kwaymullina notes, “A country with as many voices as Australia has much to offer the children and teens of the globalised and pluralist 21st Century.”<sup>lix</sup>

**Appendix A. CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers and Gold Inky Award Winners, 2007–2018**

Year	Award	Title	Author(s)	Genre	Setting	Plot	Top Cultural Connections
2018	CBCA	<i>Take Three Girls</i>	Cath Crowley,* Simone Howell,* and Fiona Wood*	Contemporary realism	Melbourne, Australia	Three different girls at the same private boarding school become unlikely friends and help each other through serious issues with family, love, and bullying.	Gender, Class
	Inky	<i>Paper Cranes Don't Fly</i>	Peter Vu	Contemporary realism	Melbourne, Australia	This memoir is the story of Adam's life, mostly his final days as he goes between the hospital and his home, always surrounded by people he loves and who love him.	Disability
2017	CBCA	<i>One Would Think the Deep</i>	Claire Zorn*	Contemporary realism	Sydney coastal suburbs, Australia	After the sudden death of his mother, Sam uses surfing as an outlet to find his way and mend past pains with his estranged family.	Gender, Indigenous Australians
	Inky	<i>Words in Deep Blue</i>	Cath Crowley*	Contemporary realism	Melbourne, Australia	The death of a sibling and closure of a family business throw old friends Rachel and Henry together.	Class, LGBTQIA
2016	CBCA	<i>Cloudwish</i>	Fiona Wood*	Contemporary realism	Melbourne, Australia	The daughter of Vietnamese immigrants, first-generation Australian Vân Uoc feels	Class, Immigration

						the pressure of school and home as she tries to fit into the rich private school she attends on scholarship.	
	Inky	<i>Illuminae</i>	Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff	Science fiction	Space, the year 2575	After an evil corporation attacks a mining planet, the perils continue as Kady and Ezra deal with an enemy ship chasing them and a deadly virus killing everyone. (First installment of a trilogy.)	Religion, Gender
2015	CBCA	<i>The Protected</i>	Claire Zorn*	Contemporary realism	Sydney suburbs, Australia	Hannah finally opens up to a psychologist about the incessant bullying she endured at school until the death of her sister in a car accident caused by their father.	Disability, Class, Gender, LGBTQIA
	Inky	<i>The Intern</i>	Gabrielle Tozer	Contemporary realism	Urban Australia	New university student Josie dreams of becoming a journalist and lands an intern job with a high-profile fashion magazine, but struggles with city life and leaving her mother and sister.	Gender, Class
2014	CBCA	<i>Wildlife</i>	Fiona Wood*	Contemporary realism	Melbourne, Australia	The lives of Lou and Sibylla intertwine during outdoor education camp, where students board for a school term.	Gender, Disability, Class

	Inky	<i>The First Third</i>	Will Kostakis	Contemporary realism	Sydney suburbs, Australia	After the death of his YiaYia, Bill tries to pull his family together like she always did.	Race/Ethnicity/ Nationality, Disability, Gender
2013	CBCA	<i>Sea Hearts</i>	Margo Lanagan	Magical realism	Place uncertain, in the past	Seals are transformed into beautiful women by the town witch, enchanting the men and haunting Rollrock Island.	Gender, Class
	Inky	<i>My Life as an Alphabet</i>	Barry Jonsberg	Contemporary realism	Brisbane suburbs, Australia	After the death of her baby sister to SIDS, her mother's fight with breast cancer, and her father's business failure, Candice struggles to help her family heal.	Disability, Class
2012	CBCA	<i>The Dead I Know</i>	Scot Gardner	Contemporary realism	Coastal suburbs, Australia	Aaron tries to find peace working in a funeral home while dealing with his grandmother's dementia and the murder-suicide of his parents from his childhood.	Disability, Class
	Inky	<i>Shift</i>	Em Bailey	Contemporary realism	Coastal suburbs, Australia	When new girl Miranda moves to town and begins taking over the identity of her friends, Olive must fight for herself and overcome her own mental demons.	Disability, Gender
2011	CBCA	<i>The Midnight Zoo</i>	Sonya Hartnett*	Historical fiction (magical realism)	Czech Republic, WWII	After their Romanian gypsy clan is violently massacred by Nazi soldiers, two boys and their baby sister stumble upon a forgotten	Race/Ethnicity/ Nationality, Class

						zoo, where they befriend the talking animals and try to figure out how to free them.	
	Inky	<i>Silvermay</i>	James Moloney	Fantasy	Medieval kingdom Athlane	In this medieval fantasy, Silvermay tries to help Tamlyn hide his baby brother, Lucien, from their evil wizard father and the prophecy that Lucien will end humanity. (First book in a series.)	Gender, Class
2010	CBCA	<i>Jarvis 24</i>	David Metzthen	Contemporary realism	Melbourne, Australia	Marc Jarvis is obsessed with girls and rugby, but learns a whole lot more about life during his first work experience, where he loses his boss and becomes close with a coworker who is gay.	LGBTQIA, Gender
	Inky	<i>Stolen: A Letter to My Captor</i>	Lucy Christopher	Contemporary realism	Great Sandy Desert, Australia	Gemma is kidnapped from the Bangkok airport and taken to a remote area of the Australian outback by Ty, who has been planning the kidnapping for six years, when he first met Gemma in a London park.	Indigenous Australians, Race/Ethnicity/ Nationality

2009	CBCA	<i>Where the Streets Had a Name</i>	Randa Abdel-Fattah	Contemporary realism	West Bank and Jerusalem	Set against the violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hayaat and her best friend Samy sneak into Jerusalem from the West Bank to bring back some soil from her grandmother's village before she dies.	Race/Ethnicity/ Nationality, Religion
	Inky	<i>Tales from Outer Suburbia</i>	Shaun Tan	Magical realism	Australia suburbs (likely)	This collection of short stories uses imagination and creativity to bring mystery and intrigue to some of the daily routines at home and in these diverse suburbs.	Language, Immigration, Race/Ethnicity/ Nationality
2008	CBCA	<i>The Ghost's Child</i>	Sonya Hartnett*	Magical realism	Place uncertain, in the past	An older woman reflects on her life, love, traveling, and the small magical things one catches when they look for it while her would-be child patiently listens and waits to take her to death.	Class, Gender
	Inky	<i>Town</i>	James Roy	Contemporary realism	Regional Australia	Thirteen short stories are told over one year in the same small town by thirteen young adults experiencing life's ups and downs in different ways depending on their backgrounds.	Class, Gender
2007	CBCA	<i>Rose by Any</i>	Maureen	Contemporary	Melbourne,	Rose deals with the	Class, Gender

		<i>Other Name</i>	McCarthy	realism	Australia	traumatic events of the year after she finishes high school, which saw her “perfect” family separate due to her father’s infidelity, a near-death surfing accident, and her first serious relationship with the father of her best friend.	
	Inky	<i>Notes from the Teenage Underground</i>	Simonne Howell*	Contemporary realism	Melbourne, Australia	As self-proclaimed feminist Gem finishes Year 11, she is dealing with typical teen issues like her virginity, fitting into her social circle, and what she will do after high school, when she unexpectedly meets her estranged father for the first time.	Gender, Class

\*Authors who have won more than one year or award.

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## Notes

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