'Colouring our voices: an exploration of ethnic diversity in genre fiction'

by

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Abstract

Research problem

This study investigated the reading, writing, and publishing experiences of ethnically diverse writers of diverse popular fiction (romance and speculative fiction), and the role libraries played for writers in learning to write and build their career in Western publishing. In exploring the difficulties and supporting factors writers experienced, it sought to understand how libraries could play a part in encouraging more diversity in popular fiction.

Methodology

Research adopted a Critical Race Methodology in conducting problem-centred qualitative interviews with 12 authors via Skype/face-to-face/email. Data was analysed using thematic analysis with an inductive, latent, essentialist/realist approach.

Results

Major themes identified were: *It's more than just a story; What we talk about when we talk about 'diverse' stories; Diverse stories are invisible/'too' visible; The same… but more; Libraries become invisible/opaque; Libraries as gatekeepers*. Diverse writers shared common difficulties and supports as non-diverse writers, but difficulties unique to diverse writers often stemmed from perceptions of diverse stories, which presented barriers to readers and publishers. Promotion by story elements, rather than diversity, could overcome some barriers, and conversations and communities were important for support. A lack of diverse stories and promotion contributed to difficulties. Libraries contributed positively to most writers' development early on, but had less of a role/less effective roles later.

Implications

Libraries need to be more visible overall, play a more proactive role in working with writers, be more aware of diversity issues, and promote diverse stories in a way that appeals to all readers. Being part of open conversation about diversity with readers and writers can assist libraries in meeting their needs, and help push for greater diversity in popular fiction.

Keywords: Diversity, genre fiction, libraries, authorship

Contents

Introduction

The #WeNeedDiverseBooks internet campaign, originating in April 2014, pushed for diversity in children's and young adult fiction and renewed awareness of the need for fiction that featured protagonists of diverse backgrounds (#WeNeedDiverseBooks, 2014), but diversity in adult popular fiction did not have the same prominence. Despite genre fiction making up the largest share of e-books sold on Amazon (Howey, 2014; Sargent, 2014), little investigation existed into the importance of diversity in adult popular fiction, why such a lack existed, and what could be done to increase it. Likewise, the relationship between libraries and writers was also under-researched. With the central aims of libraries, particularly public libraries, in promoting reading and lifelong learning, it is natural intersection of investigation to understand the relationship between libraries and ethnically diverse popular fiction authors and their works.

Topic statement

This study investigated the reading, writing, and publishing experiences of selected published authors who self-identified as being of ethnically diverse backgrounds, and who wrote popular fiction primarily in the English language for adults, featuring ethnically diverse protagonists, in Western publishing. Within this, the role of libraries was explored to better understand how they assisted in the development and careers of ethnically diverse authors, and helped make ethnically diverse stories accessible and visible to readers.

While stories featuring ethnically diverse protagonists have been written by people who would not self-identify as being of ethnically diverse background themselves, these authors were not included in this study because of time and resource constraints. This study focused exclusively on ethnically diverse authors to understand how their experiences shaped them into becoming writers in order to explore how it might be possible to encourage the emergence of new writers of ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Diverse stories cannot be classified by the ethnicity of their authors and protagonists alone. The readers, publishing markets, and thus experiences of writers likely differ from genre to

genre. For the purposes of this research topic, it was useful to narrow the focus to diversity in adult popular fiction, specifically romance and speculative fiction.

Definitions

diversity: "including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, people of colour, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities" (#WeNeedDiverseBooks, 2014). In the context of this study, this is narrowed to ethnic and cultural minorities in Western(ised) countries.

English language fiction: fiction written primarily in the English language, as opposed to fiction written in other languages and translated into English.

ethnic: "associated with or belonging to a particular race or group of people who have a culture that is different from the main culture of a country" (Ethnic, n.d.).

literary fiction: "fiction in which literary style and artistic intent are more important than plot and narrative interest" (Literary fiction, 2007).

popular fiction: "fiction that appeals to large readerships", typically including fiction from genres such as romance, fantasy, science-fiction, mystery, etc. (Kelly, 2010).

protagonist: "the central or leading character in a story or drama, usually although not necessarily the hero or heroine of the piece." (Protagonist, 2014).

romance fiction: a genre of fiction that consist of "a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending" (Romance Writers of America, n.d.)

speculative fiction: "a genre of fiction, including science-fiction, fantasy and horror, which deals with imagined worlds and their inhabitants, or with imagined characters set in the real world" (Speculative fiction, 2013).

Literature review

Little formal investigation into diversity of adult popular fiction and the role libraries had in supporting diverse writers and diverse stories exists. As a result, much of the scholarly literature that informed this project came from tangentially related areas. Most of the discussion on diversity in popular fiction came from informal sources, e.g. social media. Where appropriate, this was included to give a richer and more current view of this under-researched topic.

The importance of popular fiction

Despite popular fiction making up the large proportion of sales in fiction consistently, it (along with much of pop-culture) is often regarded as "inferior" or "hopelessly commercial", and therefore undeserving of scholarly attention (Storey, 2006, cited in Wright & Sandlin, 2009, pp.120). However, popular fiction (as one of the forms of pop-culture) are cultural productions that "[originate] with the people" (Storey, 2006, cited in Wright & Sandlin, pp.120), and are "site[s] of conflict between dominant and resistant forces in society", capable of reflecting majoritarian ideology and subverting such structures (Wright & Sandlin, 2009, pp.120). Furthermore, because the majority of adult learning occurs in "informal" and "incidental" and "experiential" circumstances throughout an adult's life (Wright & Sandlin, 2009, pp.131, 133), popular fiction is a potential site of influence/education that can help shape a person's identity "by identifying with particular characters" and showing them "a variety of ideologies from which they choose elements to incorporate into their lives" (Wright & Sandlin, 2009, pp.131).

Romance and speculative fiction are important in different ways. Often denigrated, romance fiction is a genre some describe as "repressive" and others as "liberating" (Burley, 2003, pp.14) and is important because it is written primarily by, for, and featuring women. Speculative fiction allows exploration of themes of marginalisation and difference through imaginary worlds without the "preconceptions" of specific "social histor[ies]" (Durham, in Jernigan, 2012, May 29). Hubble (2013) suggests "realistic fiction sets out to describe the

world; science-fiction (SF) sets out to change it" (pp.xii). Similarly, fantasy fiction allows for reflection of 'real-life' issues through allegory, where readers can "engage with imagined "others" in ways that just might help them see real world others in a different light as well" (Durham, in Jernigan, 2012, May 29).

Background of diversity in romance fiction

Until the 1970s, mass market romance novels almost exclusively featured white protagonists (Naughton, 2014, November 10). Non-white characters, if they featured at all, were portrayed as background "colour" (Bobo, 1995, cited in Burley, 2003, pp.132). African-American romances started being self-published and produced by small presses in the 1970s and larger publishers began publishing diverse stories in the 1980s (Naughton, 2014, November 10, pp.28; Ramsdell, 2012, pp.441; Burley, 2003, pp.127). They remained scarce until "the success of Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* (Viking, 1992) woke up the publishing world" (Naughton, 2014, November 10, pp.28). Burley (2003) points to the influence of Vivian Stephens, an African-American editor, in both co-founding the Romance Writers of America (RWA), the U.S. professional association for romance writers, and founding the Women Writers of Colour group, where she mentored African-American authors, who were subsequently published by major publishers (Burley, 2003, pp.131, citing Hailstock, 1998).

Uniquely, romance fiction is published under ethnicity specific imprints, such as Arabesque (launched by Kensington in 1994, focusing on African-American stories) and Encanto (Latino focus, launched by Kensington in 1999, but closed in 2002) (Ramsdell, 2012, pp.441-442). No other ethnicities seem to have such specialised imprints dedicated to their stories, and so their stories are rarer and tend to be included in general romance publication lines (Naughton, 2014, November 10, pp.34).

Electronic publishing and self-publishing increased diverse romance fiction. Authors, now able to bypass traditional publishers and sell through online booksellers, met the demand of readers who were "hungry to see themselves portrayed in a positive, loving light" (Naughton, 2014, November 10, pp.28). Diverse stories are increasingly published by mainstream

publishers outside of specialised imprints as well as smaller presses (Naughton, 2014, November 10, pp.32).

Background of diversity in speculative fiction

Less formal critical examination was found on diversity in speculative fiction. The majority of science-fiction historically ignored ethnicity and race, and was "written through a white, patriarchal lens" (Wheeler, 2013, pp.226). The earliest science-fiction written by a diverse author was published in 1931, and the first diverse science-fiction novels to gain awards were published in the mid-1960s (Wheeler, 2013, pp.228). African-American science-fiction has had a relatively larger presence than other ethnicities, which have only emerged more recently (Wheeler, 2013, pp.230-231).

Diverse fantasy writers were also previously scarce, but more emerged in the 1990s (Okorafor, 2012, pp.180). While Herald & Kunzel (2008) noted that some fantasy stories borrowed elements of mythology and other narrative forms from other cultures (pp.83), Durham suggested "a lot of fantasy imagines worlds that largely eliminate non-white cultures" (Durham, in Jernigan, 2012, May 29). Diversity in speculative characters tended to be alien/magical species rather than non-white humans.

Like with romance, diversity in speculative fiction has increased recently with electronic and self-publishing and an increased awareness of the importance of diversity (Obeso, 2014, pp.26), though speculative fiction does not seem to have the same kind of ethnicity-specific publishing imprints.

Lack of diversity in popular fiction

While there has been consistent research noting the lack of diversity in children's and young adult fiction (Cooperative Children's Book Center School of Education, 2014), it is more difficult to find statistics on the number of diverse books being published in adult fiction. An alternative measure is examining the number of reviews of diverse popular fiction. Harrison (2014) conducted a count of books written by ethnically diverse authors submitted for review to the science-fiction magazine *Locus*, and reviews of ethnically diverse speculative fiction

works that appeared in selected US and UK science-fiction and fantasy serials. Of 926 books submitted for review to *Locus*, 24 were identified as being written by "people of colour" (Harrison, 2014, Baselines, para 7). Because of the mix of US and UK sources of publication, it was difficult to establish how accurate the baseline was (Harrison, 2014, Baselines, para 4), but a large disparity between reviews of speculative fiction written by white and that written by people of colour was found (Harrison, 2014, The 2013 SF Count, Figure 7).

Harrison's measure of diversity in speculative fiction reviews has certain limitations. Ethnic diversity was categorised as "white" or "persons of colour", taking no account of ethnic group, and was based on the researcher's perception of the ethnicity of authors' names and Google searches, not what the author self-identified as (Harrison, 2014, Methodology, para 5). The content of works were also not taken into account, so it was unknown whether the fiction itself was diverse in its characters and world-building. Despite the limitations of the study, "it is likely that both the baseline and coverage "should" be higher than their current values" (Harrison, 2014, The 2013 SF Count, para 3), showing that there is a lack of diverse stories being submitted for review to *Locus*, and being reviewed in the major US and UK focused speculative fiction magazines. It is likely that the reason for the lack of submission for review (and subsequent low number of reviews) is that only a small number of speculative fiction works by diverse authors are being published.

Recent data on diverse romance fiction was more difficult to find. Burley's (2003) investigations, counting titles published from specialised imprints, suggested that approximately three percent of titles published in 2001 featured non-white main characters (pp.11). At that time no other publishing lines targeted other minority groups, and she estimated that "over ninety percent of mass-market paperback romances still feature[d] white heroines" (Burley, 2003, pp.11). The ethnicity of the author was not accounted for. While the publishing industry has evolved since then, with some ethnicity-based publishing lines closing (e.g. Encanto) and self-publishing increasing, ongoing discussion in mainstream media (Miller, 2007), on reader and reviewer blogs (Tan, 2005; Handy Hunter, 2009), and the recent #WeNeedDiverseRomance campaign (Faircloth, 2015, May 22) suggests a continued lack of diversity in romance fiction.

Diversity in publishing

While diversity in genre fiction has increased, particular issues in publishing remain. One of the most blatant is the practice of "white-washing", where books featuring main characters of colour are given covers showing white characters, e.g the 2010 US cover for YA novel *Magic Under Glass*, by Jaclyn Dolamore, depicted the dark-skinned heroine as white (James, 2010, February). The practice of white-washing is not new one, as seen in Octavia Butler's science-fiction novel, *Dawn*, where the 1987 cover was only replaced with a more appropriate one showing a Black woman a decade later (James, 2010, Februrary). James (2010, February) suggests that white-washing occurs because of the perception that books with covers depicting people of colour do not sell, and "(white) readers won't be able to relate to books with POC on the covers", and argues that these perceptions show a lack of regard for readers, as well as the diverse writers and stories. A publishing director (of children's books) confirms these sentiments:

> "Publishing houses want to embrace diversity, but they are coming up against the business side that doesn't want to deviate from history without a proven audience… You're constantly having to prove that putting a black or Asian character on the cover of a book is not going to destroy sales." (Seo, interviewed in Obeso, 2014, October 6).

The common perception that diverse books were not sellable implied a belief that the majority of readers were white and unwilling to purchase books that featured non-white characters or were written by non-white people, and/or that non-white people either did not purchase books, and/or did not read (Older, 2014, April 18; James, 2010, February; Burley, 2003, pp.132). However, the flourishing of African-American romance lines from 1994 showed this was not the case (Burley, 2003, pp.132). A recent Pew report on American reading habits also showed that the largest proportion of adults that read at least one book in the past year were actually Black (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2013). In 2004, an investigation into diversity in U.K. publishing noted that there were "strong economic incentives" for diversity in publishing because "Black and Asian communities have an [estimated] annual disposable income of £32bn" (Clee, 2004, March 12, pp.3). Furthermore, the publishing industry in both the U.K. and the U.S. is itself lacking in diversity (Holman, 2004, March 12; Kirch, 2014, October 13; Millot, 2014, September 22; Shaffi, 2014, November 07), something that Older suggests as being a factor in the lack of diversity of the books and authors being published (Older, 2014, April 18).

A 2015 follow-up report on the 2004 investigation into diversity in UK publishing (Kean, 2004) showed that it has actually become "more conservative in their editorial and employment choices", resulting in a continued lack of diverse stories published (Kean, 2015b, pp.2). Less diverse authors in genre fiction were published compared to literary fiction, with diverse authors expressing "they were expected to portray a limited view of their own cultures or risk the accusation of inauthenticity if their characters or settings did not conform to White expectations" (Kean, 2015b, pp.3).

Older (2014, April 18) noted that the responsibility for the lack of diverse fiction is often laid on diverse writers and readers. Members of the publishing industry cited a lack of quality submissions from diverse writers and a lack of (diverse) book buyers/readers, when it was an industry-wide responsibility and "editors and agents have inordinately more power and access in the industry than writers do" (Older, 2014, April 18). Understanding where libraries fit into this could help them take up this shared responsibility.

Diverse adult fiction in libraries

Syed (2008) compared the views of British Indian readers and librarians on British Indian fiction. Some members of the British Indian community thought that some of the most well-known examples of British Indian fiction, e.g. Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (pp.36), presented unbalanced and unfair representations of their community (pp.70). Focus on issues such as "unhappy arranged marriages, culture clashes and identity" did not reflect their perceptions of the main issues facing British Indians today (Syed, 2008, pp.69). Librarians surveyed, however, were not aware of these views of members of the British Indian community, and had no practices in place in dealing with them (Syed, 2008, pp.70).

While the sample populations in Syed's research were small (British Indian community members: *n=28,* librarians: *n=11*) so results cannot be considered generalisable, it brought insight into different cultural perspectives. This disconnect meant libraries might not serve its patrons satisfactorily, even promoting fiction patrons felt discomfort and unfairness about without being aware of it. Syed's (2008) study examined literary fiction, but links to "the danger of a single story" in strengthening negative stereotypes (Adichie, 2009, para 1), and

echoes findings from Kean (2015b, pp.3). Diverse popular fiction may offer alternative stories to mitigate this.

Birdi and Syed (2011) also investigated readers' attitudes towards reading ethnic fiction (Black British and British Asian fiction in English) and how they chose books to read, surveying members of the community served by selected UK libraries (pp.820). Their quantitative survey consisted of five questions and multiple choice answers, resulting in a much larger number of responses *(n=1047)* (Birdi and Syed, 2011, pp.821). While this large sample number suggests a high external validity, problematic survey design meant it did not necessarily measure what was sought. Options given to survey participants classified diverse fiction by the ethnicity of the author alone, i.e. "Black British", and separated it from content/story based classifications, e.g. "romance" genre (Birdi and Syed, 2011, pp.821). This implied the ethnicity of the author took precedence over the content of the actual story: a "Black British" story could not also be a "romance", nor any other genre. There was an assumption, too, of the commonality in the kinds of stories being told by authors of a certain ethnicity, regardless of the actual content or tone of the stories themselves, or the author's own desires.

This connects to Jemisin (2010), an African-American speculative fiction author, who expressed dismay that her fantasy novel was shelved in the African-American Fiction section of a public library:

> Booksellers and librarians: **please don't put anything I write in the AAF section.** Not unless you want to hurt my career. And not unless you want to make it *harder*, not easier, for black readers to find good, diverse, inclusive stuff in the long run, because you're hurting the careers of many black writers who could help make that happen. And not unless you think that nothing written by a black person should ever be read by anyone non-black. (para 31, emphasis in original).

Library practices in shelving, and therefore categorising and providing access to, diverse fiction affects its visibility and has further implications.

Relationships between libraries and writers

While some writers have expressed the view that libraries hurt writers by "damaging the book industry" through the provision of free access to books (Deary, in Flood, 2013, February 13), other writers and members of the publishing industry have refuted this (Naughton, 2013, June 3, pp.21). Borrowers often go on to become buyers of books and there is the potential for libraries to grow sales and readerships of authors (Vinjamuri, 2015, April 6, pp.25, and supported by Fialkoff, 2011, November 15).

Most of the library literature about the relationship between libraries and writers focus on general advice on planning author events (e.g. Campbell & Perez, 2014). Harig (2004) provides an interesting perspective of a librarian who became the library liaison of Sisters in Crime, the writing association for women crime writers, which facilitated mutual learning and benefits. As a result of this close partnership, libraries found ways to support the promotion of authors and their works, improve collection development through facilitating acquisitions of members' works (Harig, 2004, pp.26), co-ordinate writer events through a Speakers Bureau, and even provided publication and circulation statistics (pp.30).

Of the little formal research that has been conducted in the library field on the relationship between writers and libraries, Callaghan (2006) investigated the library information needs of postgraduate creative writing students and whether their small specialist class library was meeting them. The sample size was small (*n=17*), and the writers were located in an academic and literary genre setting and were primarily poets, so results cannot be readily generalised. However, it did present possible areas of investigation into how libraries can support diverse writers. Libraries could provide inspiration and learning through research (Callaghan, 2006, pp.42) and works by other authors. The vital role of reading in learning to become a writer and developing writing skills was emphasised by participants (Callaghan, 2006, pp.34, 49), with libraries providing access to a greater range of works than what writers may personally own (Callaghan, 2006, pp.55). Libraries as quiet workplaces also featured (Callaghan, 2006, pp.56). Participants felt libraries (class, public and National libraries) did not do much to promote authors' works (Callaghan, 2006, pp.41), and when they did, it was "on [the library's] terms with little input from writers" (Callaghan, 2006, pp.42).

Holyoake (2007) provided an insight into the relationship between libraries and writers in the promotion of their works. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with library staff and other people involved in book promotions in selected UK public libraries (*n=15*) (Holyoake, 2007, pp.8-9). Library staff promoted new writers with little funding or perceived power (e.g. ground library staff were not necessarily able to influence acquisitions) (Holyoake, 2007, pp.28). Methods of promoting new authors differed from the promotion of established authors (Holyoake, 2007, pp.28), but matching patron desires to new authors was important (Holyoake, 2007, pp.29). Benefits included pooling resources/expertise to achieve goals that each member of the partnership could not have done alone (Holyoake, 2007, pp.37).

Interview subjects were chosen to triangulate data, lessening potential bias and giving a wider view (Holyoake, 2007, pp.20-21), but since only one publisher and one writer was involved (Holyoake, 2007, pp.26) results cannot be considered representative. This echoes the lack of consultation with writers in library promotions (Callaghan, 2006, pp.42). Interviewing writers exclusively would provide greater understanding of this little researched patron group.

The development of writers

Gouthro investigated how writers become published and built their writing careers (2014c and 2014d). Primarily Canadian authors who wrote literary fiction, crime fiction, and young adult fiction were interviewed using a life history approach to explore their lifelong education paths and the supporting factors and obstacles experienced in building their careers (*n=40*) (Guothro, 2014c, pp.173, 175). Male and female writers were interviewed, but ethnic backgrounds were not identified. From this larger study, a number of angles were taken in analysing the data collected to produce findings on specific areas of interest.

The formation of the writer as a professional identity was investigated, following theory on identity formation in work and learning theory (Gouthro, 2014c). Analysis using grounded theory identified the themes: "(1) envisioning a writing career, (2) compelled to write, (3) learning the craft, (4) getting published, and (5) online identities" (Gouthro, 2014c, pp.176).

Data collected from female crime fiction writers (*n=15*) was isolated and analysed to investigate how women learn to become writers in the male-dominated genre of crime fiction (Gouthro, 2014d, pp.1). A critical feminist approach was used with learning theory. Different themes emerged: "(a) reading as cultural capital, (b) choosing a life of crime (fiction), (c) nemeses and supporting characters, and (d) negotiating a writing life" (Gouthro, 2014d, pp.6).

From this, libraries could support writers by encouraging a lifelong love of reading (Gouthro, 2014c, pp.176), providing access to books from childhood (Gouthro, 2014d, pp.6), and free access to reading, research and writing instructional material, which was especially helpful given the financial uncertainties of a writing career (Gouthro, 2014c, pp.177). Targeted reader development and access to resources for diverse writers and readers could also be explored.

Actually meeting another writer helped form the vision of becoming a writer (Gouthro, 2014c, pp.178). Both formal and informal learning occurred in developing a writing career (Gouthro, 2014c, pp.180), with relationships with other writers contributing to the formation of an identity as a writer when a person involved themselves in a "community" of writers (Gouthro, 2014c, pp.181). It is possible that libraries could provide the meeting place between emerging writers and established authors, fulfilling both reading, supporting, and promotion needs.

Publication was the largest obstacle to developing a career as a writer (Gouthro, 2014c, pp.182). Changes in the publishing sector and technology have opened up opportunities for minority stories to be shared, especially through self-publishing (Gouthro, 2014c, pp.184). It was appropriate, therefore, for any study on diverse authors to include self-published authors amongst selected participants.

Specific to women writers of crime fiction, obstacles encountered included doubt over the worth of their work, both from others and themselves (Gouthro, 2014d, pp.10). Support from other writers could assist in overcoming this (Gouthro, 2014d, pp.11-12). As women, they often needed to work with "social expectations around caregiving responsibilities" (Gouthro, 2014d, pp.12). The pressures of social structures in society shaped women's experiences in becoming writers. Investigation into specific pressures experienced by diverse authors would

be valuable in understanding how to support diverse authors and the creation of more diverse stories.

Experiences of diverse writers

While little formal research had been conducted into the experiences of diverse fiction writers, interviews and autobiographical accounts shed light on specific challenges experienced by minority writers. Díaz (2014) recounted negative experiences he and other diverse writers encountered in MFA writing programmes, including other (white) writers questioning the authenticity of their diverse characters, because they did not meet stereotypical expectations (pp.4). These experiences led writers to be demoralised and consider exiting writing programmes:

> The consequences of my white workshop's whiteness – by which I mean its deeply held assumptions about itself and about the nature of reality (no race) and literature (no race) and me – were devastating for a writer like me. My workshop's whiteness more or less barred my reality, my voice, from its conversations. It ensured that I was not witnessed in class, not by the faculty or by the majority of my peers. It was an act of silencing, of erasure, of negation – of violence. (Díaz, 2014, pp.3)

While the context of Díaz's account was of US university level (literary) writing education, similar attitudes have been expressed in genre fiction. In a 1998 interview with Shirley Hailstock, one of the first published African-American romance writers, similar sentiments on the expectations of what kind of stories writers of colour could write about were evident. The interviewer asked Hailstock about "the purpose of the MC romance, and if it should be color-neutral or include some "culture" in it". As Hailstock replied:

> The purpose of a MC romance is a romance first, last and always. Then it's to have people of color as the major players. What constitutes a person of color seems to be the question? […] What is enough ethnicity to put in a book seems to be in the "eye of the reader"… With a white couple, they decide what should *not* be in the book, things like jail terms, homelessness, welfare, fractured English, black music. Yet if those things are not in a black novel, it's not "black enough." Black enough for whom? (Laurie Likes Books, 1998).

Ethnicity, it seems, must be justified to audiences in order to appear in fictional narratives, and if the depiction of diverse ethnic characters does not fit expectations of what a particular ethnicity/culture should be like, then it does not have enough "culture" and is considered to be "color-neutral".

More recently, Older (2014, April 18), an urban fantasy writer, recounted similar experiences he and other writers have had "sparring with the many micro and mega-aggressions of the publishing industry". These shared experiences, persisting across time and literary genres, suggested that minority ethnic writers experience specific challenges in developing as writers and in building their writing careers.

Theoretical considerations

Aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Methodology (CRM) suggested an approach to examining the experiences of diverse writers of adult popular fiction. CRT recognises that racism exists throughout society, both on the individual and institutional level, with the subordination of minority groups bringing advantages to the majoritarian group (Kubota, 2013, pp.1). Its origins are in U.S. legal scholarship, and thus it has been shaped from that specific socio-cultural and historical context (Kuboto, 2013, pp.2). However, CRT has also been applied to other areas, such as educational research and study (Ladson-Billings, 1998, pp.7), as well as in societies and contexts outside of the U.S. (Mutua, 2010, pp.297).

The lack of diversity in adult popular fiction, and fiction overall, and the experiences of diverse writers bears examination and CRT provided a theoretical approach that prioritises minority accounts and takes into account socio-cultural and historical contexts. As the previously discussed experiences of diverse writers showed, race and racism are factors that impact on diverse authors and stories.

CRT can be incorporated into the research process to form a Critical Race Methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp.25), where practice links to the fundamentals of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic (2001), cited in Kubota, 2013, pp.2). CRM has no prescribed practices, but what makes a methodology characteristically of CRT in approach is "its focus on 'race'

and racism and its intersections and a commitment to challenge racialized power relation" (Hylton, 2012, pp.27).

The research process itself must reflect CRT in its "commitment to social justice" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp.26), and one way this could be achieved is in conceptualising it as "research *on* empowerment" and at the same time "research *as* empowerment" (Pizzaro, 1999, pp.58). Methodology that includes participatory elements, such as involving participants in the analysis of their stories, is one way empowerment can be "aided by the research process itself" (Pizarro, 1999, pp.58). Analysis can move "from thick description to critical interpretation" (Hylton, 2012, pp.32), keeping in mind specific socio-cultural, historical contexts and areas of intersectionality and multidimensionality (Mutua, 2010, pp.291-296). In giving voice to experiences not commonly heard, these "stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated" (Delgado, Stefancic, & Liendo, 2012, pp.49), the first step towards putting into practice a "commitment to social justice" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp.26).

While Hylton (2012) suggests that an anti-essentialist approach should be used in order to prevent "homogenisation, over-generalisation and reductionism", with the recognition of "intersectionality" with other aspects of identity (pp.29), there can be practical reasons for using essentialism to find commonalities in the experiences of different minority individuals in order to "strategically, politically and consciously fight oppression" (Mutua, 2010, pp. 294). Research must strike a balance between these two approaches.

Research objective

The goal of this research was to develop a better understanding of the impact and importance of diverse popular fiction stories on writers, and of the factors that have helped and hindered ethnically diverse writers in their journey to becoming published authors. From this, answers were sought as to how more ethnically diverse writers can be encouraged and supported in creating more ethnically diverse popular fiction stories, and how libraries could potentially play a role in this.

Research questions

- How has diverse adult popular fiction impacted diverse authors as writers and readers?
- What kind of importance do they place on diversity in adult popular fiction?
- What helped or hindered the author in their journey to becoming a writer, getting published, and developing their writing career?
- What role do libraries have in contributing to these journeys, and in what ways could/should libraries play a bigger role in supporting diverse writers and works, or contributed differently?

Research design

Research was shaped by an awareness of the core tenets of CRT and CRM, with the research approach and methodology taking them into account as appropriate and as fits within the constraints of a research study of this size and nature.

A qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that hinder and support diverse writers in learning how to write and in building their writing careers. Interviews were undertaken in a "single point in time", following a cross-sectional approach (Bryman, 2012, pp.63). In this, "the centrality of experiential knowledge" of diverse authors was emphasised, with the accounts of diverse authors being core to research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp.26). Research complemented Gouthro's research on the development of writers, but rather than using a "critical feminist theoretical lens", it focussed on ethnic diversity (Gouthro, 2014a, pp.232). A quantitative approach was not suitable as the research objectives were of an exploratory nature and did not seek to match any pre-existing theory.

While the specific topic of ethnic diversity was chosen for investigation, other areas of diversity, such as sexuality and gender, and the intersectionality and multidimensionality of them in informing identity and experiences were not denied, nor ignored. Instead, this research "foreground[ed]" race in its investigations, as appropriate in CRT (Kubota, 2013, pp.1) and in keeping within the constraints of a study of this size, while at the same time

recognised the "intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp.25).

Because a range of diverse authors from different geographical and cultural and other backgrounds were interviewed, it was possible that cross-cultural comparisons could be made. However, findings were not intended to be translatable, but to suggest areas of awareness and possible further study. As discussed previously, an anti-essentialist approach, where the diversity and intersectionality of experiences is recognised, is important in a CRM. At the same time, this does not preclude recognising similarities in experiences, nor analysing those similarities to suggest ways forward.

Methodology

Participant selection

Purposive selection was undertaken, aiming to interview 8-10 diverse writers of adult popular fiction stories featuring main characters of diverse backgrounds. Authors were selected using book recommendation websites, e.g. Dear Author (dearauthor.com), and online presences. They had to be contactable privately, e.g. via email, website contact form, or by Twitter (generic message to request private message). (See Appendix 1: initial contact letters.) Authors were chosen to cover a range of ethnic backgrounds, publication avenues (e.g. self-published/traditional/hybrid publishing; larger/smaller publishers), and various stages in their writing careers. All had at least one work published and available for access to confirm it featured diverse main character(s).

Authors were selected from the romance and speculative genres to prevent gender bias because romance fiction is female-dominated, while the speculative fiction genre has traditionally been male-dominated. This also complemented Gouthro (2014c), which focused on crime fiction writers.

Data collection

Problem-centred interviews were conducted with diverse authors, similar to Gouthro's approach to investigating lifelong learning and writing (Gouthro, 2014b). This involved starting with a life story approach, moving through semi-structured questions, and ending with a brief questionnaire for relevant "socio-statistic data" (Scheibelhofer, 2005, pp.22). (See Appendix 2: Interview Guide.)

The life story aspect focused on a specific topic as related to the research objective and research questions, in this case the author's experiences in writing. This approach fitted the lifelong nature of developing writing skills and building a writing career.

Semi-structured open questions followed an interview guide and were flexible to elaborate on areas not adequately covered by the life story portion of the interview. In more unstructured approaches to interviewing, such as those designed to elicit narratives like a life story approach, participants may not touch upon specific research areas of interest and be led by their own "personal concerns" (Parker & Lynn, 2002, pp.14, referring to Wong, 1998). Semi-structured open questions helped ensure information related directly to the research objective and questions was elicited.

Using both life story and semi-structured questions allowed for weaknesses in either method alone to be mitigated by the other. Asking authors directly how they thought libraries could better support writers could give answers related directly to the research question, but answers would be shaped by authors' impressions on how libraries functioned, which may or may not be accurate. The life story approach investigated the areas of support and obstacles writers experienced, allowing re-envisioning how libraries can provide support in non-traditional ways.

"Socio-statistic data" questions clarified how the author identified themselves and gave contextual information for the rest of the interview (Scheibelhofer, 2005, pp.22). This took a more open approach so authors could identify themselves as they choose, including other areas of diversity. This followed the tenets of CRT, where intersectionality and multidimensionality of experiences and identity have effect. Information on participants' writing careers and publishing avenues were also collected.

Participants were invited to be interviewed over Skype, face-to-face, or via email. Visual interaction was preferred so that visual cues could assist in avoiding misunderstanding. To

guard against interviewer misinterpretation, interview transcripts were returned to the interviewee for review and member checking (Pickard, 2013, p94). Interviewees were able to correct or clarify, but not delete, comments made.

Other considerations

Identities of participants were thought to be useful in tracking experiences against the trajectory their career, of which the quality and depth may not be adequately described in summary. However, research could be hindered if participants were not comfortable having their comments connected back to them. To balance this, identities of participants were confidential unless they gave written/recorded verbal permission to be identified. They could still mark comments as non-attributable during the review of their interview transcripts, i.e. any selected statements will not be attributed to the author if discussed in research findings. Authors who wished to remain confidential also highlighted comments they felt could identify them, and special care was taken so that, if discussed, they were done in such a way that could not be linked back to them.

Ethical considerations

Human ethics approval was required for this proposed study because participants were adult humans (Victoria University of Wellington, n.d. a, pp.7, Section 4.3). Care and sensitivity was taken in conducting, analysing, and presenting research and findings with an awareness of the cultural backgrounds of respondents (Victoria University of Wellington, n.d. a, pp.6, Section 4.2.3; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, pp.154, 156). As this research dealt with potentially sensitive subjects, the researcher was prepared to stop the interview should participants show signs of distress and not wish to continue (Pickard, 2013, pp.93). Participants could withdraw from research until the date when reviewed transcripts were returned and analysis begun in order to prevent withdrawn data from affecting the analysis of other data, since an inductive thematic theory approach was to be taken, with analysis occurring over the entire data set.

Participants were informed of the intention to audio record and transcribe interviews, publish research in various formats, and permission to reveal identities were sought. Consent was given in writing/audio-recorded. (See Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet and Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form.)

Recordings and transcripts of the interviews were held in a secure location and made available only to the supervisor. They will be retained up to a year after project completion and necessary scholarly assessment has been performed, then destroyed (Victoria University of Wellington, n.d. b, pp.8, Section 9e).

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted because it provided a better fit to the research objectives than narrative analysis (which is more usual for life story research (Bryman, 2012, pp.582)). This took an inductive approach to explore the topic, rather than trying to fit data into an established theory, but a consciousness of CRT was maintained (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.12). Analysis took place over an entire data set, rather than within individual interviews, resulting in a "rich thematic description of [the] overall data set" rather that providing a "more detailed account of particular themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.11), which suited the exploratory nature of this research. On balance, this wider view meant "some depth and complexity is necessarily lost" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.11).

Analysis was conducted primarily at a "latent level", moving beyond "surface" description to try to understand influencing factors (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.13), which echoed Hylton's assertion that CRM needs to move "from thick description to critical interpretation" (2012, pp.32). Analysis of data took an essentialist/realist approach in that information related by participants was accepted in a straightforward way (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp.14), but an awareness of socio-cultural contexts and other aspects that may form identities and experiences was taken into account, as appropriate to CRM (Mutua, 2010, pp.291-296; Dixon & Rousseau, 2006, pp.11).

Methods followed recommendations by Braun & Clarke (2006). Familiarisation with data occurred during transcription. Data was coded and collated, with transcripts reviewed multiple times to identify themes.

Initial and final analysis was shared with interested participants and feedback welcomed (but not required) to enable member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp.282). All feedback could be marked as non-attributable. This approach, while not as closely partnered as the analysis suggested by Pizzaro (1999, pp.69-70), followed a participatory-like approach in keeping with the tenets of CRM as far as practical for a study of this size and nature. Confidentiality of participants/comments prevented a more partnered approach.

Position of the researcher

Research cannot be conducted in isolation from the researcher; my perspective, experiences and relative position of power in conducting this research influenced this study. As a New Zealand Chinese woman who is a reader, writer, and librarian, my interest in diversity in fiction came from all fronts. As a member of the writing community, I had pre-existing connections with some participants. This research therefore came from a very specific perspective, but one that, I hope, shaped it in insightful ways.

Assumptions and limitations

This research project was limited in its scope and was not intended to produce generalisable results, but instead explored the perspectives of the individuals interviewed to suggest areas of awareness and further study. Participants were restricted to authors in the romance and speculative fiction.

Results

Twenty-nine authors were approached and fifteen responded expressing interest. Of those, twelve authors were willing to be interviewed. Ten authors were based in the US; two authors were not. (See Appendix 5: Participant breakdown for more on participant response rates and self-identified aspects of identity.) Due to confidentiality reasons and the small number of diverse authors in these genres, some authors cannot be further identified or described.

Of the eight participants who wished to take part in commenting on analysis, none returned any comments.

Analysis

Thematic analysis of the data identified the following main themes in the data (see Appendix 6 for initial analysis map, pp. 76).
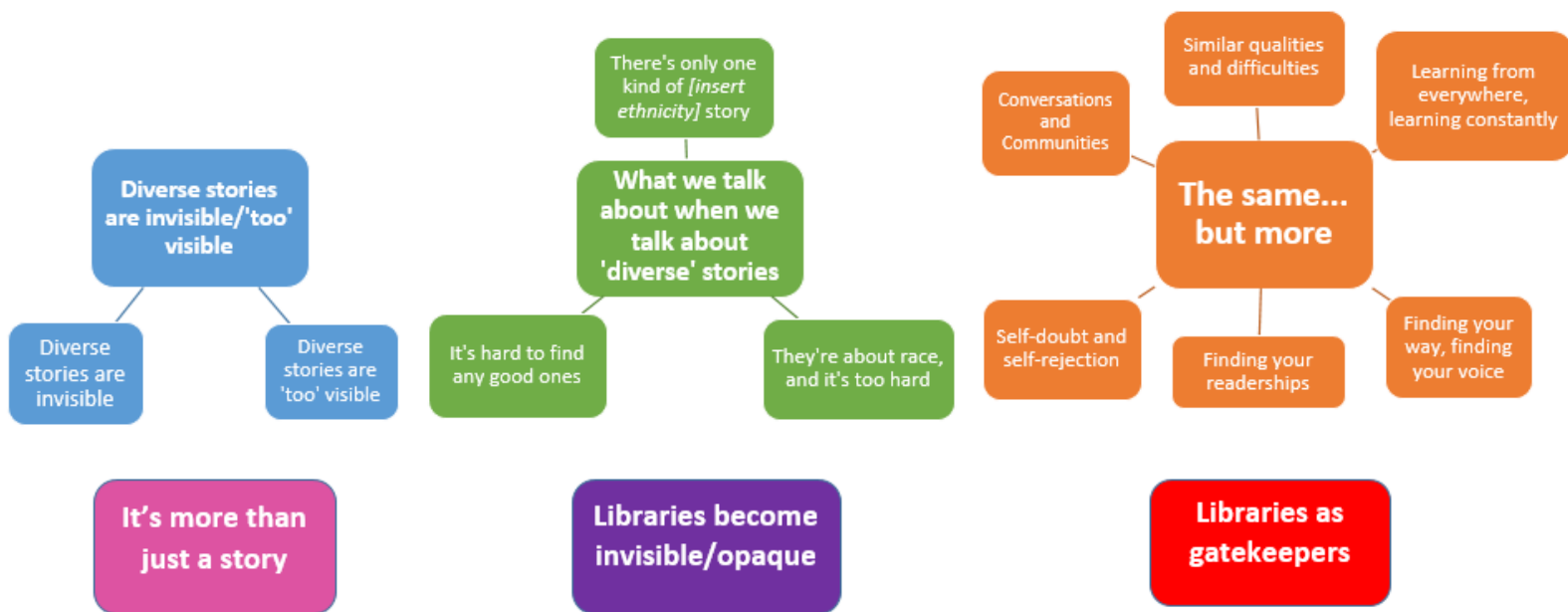

Figure 1. Final analysis map

Note: Extracts from interviews have been lightly edited for brevity. Where participants have mentioned publishers, I have opted to keep all identities confidential to protect against potential harm.

It's more than just a story

Diversity in fiction was important for many writers simply because much of Western(ised) society is ethnically diverse and fiction should reflect this reality. That it did not was telling of larger attitudes. As well as the importance of seeing people like themselves represented in fiction, writers also spoke of the personal impact fiction had in being able to spark imaginations, with flow-on effects for people's lives. Tobias Buckell, a US based Caribbean science-fiction author, described books as a kind of "technology" where readers did not merely observe events in the story, but were "living inside someone else's mind":

> I'm so grateful for literature for expanding my ideas of what is possible, while also entertaining me. And it was in all those different ways that I got to consider so many different viewpoints as a kid. And sort through them and see them all. I mean, when I was first reading science-fiction books, I was a poor kid with limited means living on a creaky, leaking boat, in a poor country. And that was it. Those were my horizons. And by all means I should never… you know, there are so many other people who never escape that. But I escaped it every night when I was reading a book. And I got to see other planets and other possibilities and so many other people who were very different than me when I was reading.

Fiction's ability to enable readers to step into the minds of characters could also help readers develop empathy for others unlike themselves. Genre fiction's role as entertainment could be successful in this because of its accessibility to readers. As Zen Cho, a UK based Chinese-Malaysian speculative fiction writer, suggested:

> I think it's when you're reading something that's just for fun, you just kind of let your guard down, and you're kind of more open, almost, to influences. And it's when you start changing the popular fiction, that's when you can really change people's minds, as it were.

A lack of diverse stories not only limited possible perspectives, but sent implicit messages about whose stories/experiences were valuable and valid, and therefore, the intrinsic worth of people of minority ethnicities themselves. As Courtney Milan, a biracial Chinese-American romance author, explained:

> I think that there are people out there who never see themselves in stories. And that sends a message, right? It says basically, 'your stories aren't interesting. Nobody wants to hear about it. You are not universal. Your experience is not universal. You need to keep it to yourself, because nobody else wants it'. And that's a really damaging message to send to anyone, child, adult, anywhere.

For some US based writers, this could be seen in events occurring in the US at the time of interviews, where racial tensions were high following the police shootings of unarmed Black men. As Alyssa Cole, a Black American romance author, noted:

> I think the thing where it comes down to is that because popular fiction has had such focus on only certain stories that in a way the other stories kind of disappeared from other people's imaginations. […] It makes it easier for them to not have any empathy or sympathy. It makes it easier for a cop to just shoot a kid because he doesn't see him as the same as his own son, who is the same age, for example. In this place over here, because in the way Black peoples and Native Americans or whoever have been presented in popular fiction, whether that be popular fiction books or TV shows or movies, it kind of creates this idea that is superimposed over reality and that has real-life effects beyond just someone reading a book and going 'okay I'm done'.

Diversity in adult popular fiction was seen as being equally important as children's/YA fiction, with it being the next step for readers.

What we talk about when we talk about 'diverse' stories

Difficulties experienced by diverse writers were connected to preconceptions people had about what diverse stories were. These preconceptions produced barriers to readers in trying diverse books, and to publishers in taking the risk of publishing diverse stories.

There's only one kind of [insert ethnicity] story

In some writers' experiences, there was the perception that all stories from a particular ethnicity/culture are similar, or that there could be only one kind of story from a particular ethnic group. Because publisher decisions are informed by previous experiences with 'similar' stories, some writers experienced difficulties when they submitted stories that did not fit into this preconceived idea of what a story relating to a certain ethnicity was. As Tobias Buckell related:

> The idea that I would be a biracial Caribbean author who writes Caribbean inspired science-fiction that is not magical realism, or doesn't read like literary SF really was hard for some people in the beginning. So the idea that I wanted to write action-adventure, but with characters of colour, was just like, 'well, you can do either, or'. And so a lot of people would say things like, 'oh, you write nothing at all like Nalo Hopkinson', or things like that. Or, 'this isn't Caribbean magical realism'. I still actually get that a bit. So it was really tough to get a hearing. A lot of rejections and a lot of people who said like, 'this is a really good book. We really liked it. But we don't even know how to describe it, and therefore we don't know how to sell it'. And so being different in that way made it a hard sell.

In this, certain expectations of what a Caribbean science-fiction story could be, and what was sellable, influenced publisher decisions, and due to the small number of Caribbean science-fiction stories published previously, these expectations were very narrow. Some publishers had difficulty knowing how to market diverse stories outside of these expectations and were therefore reluctant to take the risk.

They're about race, and it's too hard

Diverse stories were often perceived as being about race/culture, rather than simply a book featuring characters of minority ethnic backgrounds, and thus required more effort to read. This was a particularly difficult barrier for readers because genre fiction is often turned to for entertainment and "escape". One US based author spoke about what made her change from writing diverse romances to more 'mainstream' romances:

> [I]f you don't want to think, you just want to relax and fall in love and just not worry about anything, you don't go to something different, you go to the tried and true. And I didn't really process that until… there's an author, and I can't really remember the

name right now, but she made her name on doing a Regency era historical but set in India. And so there you go, I was a proponent of other cultures and multiculturalism. Absolutely. I couldn't… I started reading the book and it was fine. But it was just… You know, I was raising two kids, I was writing all day, my husband had a job, I had things going on, when I sat down to relax I didn't want to learn about Indian culture. Which is a lie, because I do want to learn about it, but you know, I'm talking about 'this is my downtime'. I just want to read something easy and fun and relaxing. So just seeing that… You know, I'm a proponent, why aren't people reading Asian set historicals, or Asian heroines, or Asian anything? And there I'd answered my own question.

Here, diverse books were perceived as educational for readers. While learning may certainly occur implicitly, some authors felt readers were resistant to reading diverse popular fiction stories for self-improvement. Tobias Buckell spoke against what he called the "cod liver oil theory of reading", where people were pushed to read because it was considered to be "good for you":

> You should not read diverse books because they're good for you. You shouldn't read them because, you know, they're going to make you… something, right? You should read them because they're flipping fun! And that ties into the critics' anti-diverse attack. Which is like, they're saying, 'oh, you're forcing us to read these books that aren't as good as other people's because they're supposed to be good for us'. And I think it frames the wrong debate…

In some writers' experiences readers seemed to engage more with genuine enthusiasm for the story, especially particular story elements/tropes they enjoyed. For example, one romance author related that her interest in a multicultural romance was not sparked by the interracial characters, but by her love of a particular romance trope:

> So I clicked on it and I read the excerpt and stuff, and it never occurred to me that it was actually a multicultural romance… it was like a Black heroine and a white hero. What I went for was the chef romance. That was my hook, you know?

The promotion of books by the story rather than the diverse elements was emphasised as being more effective, with diversity simply being "a part of it".

It's hard to find any good ones

Writers found diverse stories hard to find in general, and good quality diverse stories even more difficult. It was suggested that difficulties in finding quality diverse stories could stem from diverse authors tending to be traditionally published through smaller presses, which did not have wide distribution/promotion. Quality in self-published books was varied because quality checks were self-imposed. As one author suggested:

> Any book can be hit-or-miss, but if people have only been self-publishing, they might not have as rigorous an editing process, they might not have people reading or helping them revise the book before they publish it […] Or just like have terrible typos or bad formatting. And those things can happen in books from big publishers too, but it's something you have to look out for more when you're buying self-published books of any kind, but just because of the way the publishing industry is and the number of books that get rejected by publishers, and authors say, 'well, I'll just self-publish it' […] And there are tons of self-published authors who are professional and have their stuff together, but there are also are several who are not just because… and it's not even out of malice or just trying to make a quick buck, it's just, you know, to them publishing is just finishing writing and then hitting publish. Like all the other smaller stuff is not taken into consideration.

Some authors suggested that writers from minority groups may not have the same access to resources and guidance, and therefore did not have enough support in developing as writers, which affected the quality of their work.

Though low quality stories could be found in mainstream, non-diverse and traditionally published sources, not just from diverse or self-published authors, some authors faced the perception that diverse stories were not as good as non-diverse books. Some expressed the belief that diverse writers/stories faced greater scrutiny over quality, with mistakes that may have been overlooked in more mainstream fiction not as easily dismissed, and in some cases considered typical. Some writers spoke about needing to prove oneself more because readers were not used to diverse stories. For example, when asked what advice she would give to unpublished writers, Courtney Milan responded:

> Write really good books. And the more outside the mainstream you go, the better you have to be, unfortunately. Just because if you write something that's familiar to

people already you don't have to win them over. If you're writing something that's a little unfamiliar, you'll have to do that much more.

Here, writers faced additional difficulties connected to the preconception of what diverse books were.

Diverse stories are invisible/'too' visible

Diverse stories are invisible

One of the main problem noted by writers was the lack of visibility of diverse stories in general, including libraries, both online and in physical spaces. Diverse books had less "face-out" time in displays and received less reviews. Due to this invisibility, writers primarily relied on recommendations from sources whose tastes they trusted because they lacked time to search for books. Technology assisted in in this. Goodreads, which had fine grained tagging for books with diverse characters, and other online search methods were mentioned, but were time consuming, so social media and review blogs were preferred. As Courtney Milan pointed out:

> Because a lot of them are not mainstream, there could be an author who is amazing, and if I don't hear about her, I'm never going to find her browsing Amazon. I'm never going to find her any other way. So there's a real dearth of communication about diverse stories. This is one of the reasons why it helps so much to follow people on Twitter, because I found a lot of great books that way.

Recording efforts to raise visibility and awareness of diverse stories were also important as it could enable progress to be tracked. For example, Daniel José Older, a US Latino urban fantasy author, mentioned how tracking and making public reviewing statistics from year to year was a way to introduce transparency and accountability of efforts.

Diverse stories are 'too' visible

Contrasting with the invisibility of diverse stories was the issue of 'too much' visibility. Things that marked stories as being distinctly ethnic, e.g. "ethnic" author names and book covers depicting ethnic characters, were sometimes seen in publishing as being barriers towards readers. Some authors experienced pressure to remove these perceived barriers in

order to appeal to a wider audience, such as a publisher's request to whitewash not just a book cover, but the ethnicity of the Black hero. Another romance author related that her publisher's marketing department believed her pseudonym was "tainted ethnic", and was advised by her editor to "take a girl next-door name". After taking on a 'neutral', non-ethnic sounding name, her sales changed, "with no promotion, no publicity, my sales… a massive difference. I leaped to become second slot in the line for that month." Since this increase in sales after removing the visible marker of her ethnicity, the author does not tend to write diverse characters in her stories except as secondary characters. She also would need to hear her readers calling for a story for those diverse secondary characters before she wrote them as main characters in their own books because it was "too big a risk". While this switch in pseudonyms accompanied a switch in sub-genres, the marked increase in sales suggests that changing to a more 'neutral' name had an impact. In any case, engaging readers with the characters was seen as being able to overcome their barriers about diverse stories. Likewise, how the content of stories was shaped could do the same. For Courtney Milan, this happened organically with one of her stories, but may have enabled some readers to overcome resistance to reading the book:

> [W]hen I did my first historical novella with a Black heroine, I actually didn't mention that she was Black until the end of the first chapter. Because we're in her point of view and who wanders around thinking all the time, 'I'm Black, I'm Black, I'm Black'. Nobody. That's not how it works, right? And so, you know, by that time, then people had already decided that she was somebody that they could empathise with.

Marketing diverse stories solely on their diversity was not advised as it put off some readers. For some writers, the way around this tension of 'too much visibility' was to focus on selling the story, rather than the diversity of the characters or the author. As one author stressed:

> I think the problem I see sometimes is that people push the diversity of the story as opposed to the story. Because it's always the story that matters, and the diversity is just something that should just be a normal part of the story.

Connected to this, some writers suggested that having a separate 'ethnic' section in libraries, while being helpful to readers looking specifically for books centred around that ethnicity, could be intimidating to some readers, causing them to dismiss the entire section as 'not

applying to them'. Consistent display and inclusion amongst other books of the same genre in shelving was preferred by some authors.

The same… but more

Common qualities and practices were necessary in becoming a published author, and there were similar sources of learning. Diverse writers had the 'regular' difficulties of becoming a published author, as well as additional ones related to being of minority ethnicities.

Shared qualities and difficulties

For all writers, the impulse to write was an internal/personal calling. Common comments were that storytelling was "natural" for them and that they had "always wanted to be a writer". Camy Tang, an Asian-American writer of inspirational romances and chick-lit, also spoke of the guidance of God in becoming a writer. Writers also linked their drive to write with their love of stories and reading, such as Marjorie M. Liu:

> I think the first thing is I really loved to read. If someone is going to ask me about the actual, you know, the deep rooted origins of me becoming a writer, that's where I would start, which is that I just loved books. From a very, very young age.

Common inner qualities were required to become published authors, including persistence, self-discipline, self-belief/confidence, being able to envision writing as a career, and a willingness to 'put yourself out there' and be rejected. Skills and practices, such as time management skills, being consistent in writing, finishing and submitting/self-publishing work, and reading widely, were also highlighted.

Common difficulties were the unpredictable nature of the publishing industry, including the uncertainty of what would sell and what would not; the financial uncertainties of being a career writer; and life events. Most writers experienced some difficulty in juggling writing with other commitments, particularly other careers. Finding the time to write was a common need, as was having the private/safe space to do so.

Sources writers used for learning were both formal and informal, including:

- Writing instructional material, e.g. writing craft books, publishing information
- Non-fiction
- Fiction
- Educational classes, e.g. writing workshops
- Writing groups/organisations/peers
- Readers

Sometimes these were from libraries, especially written sources, but often online sources, e.g. blogs, were used due to their convenience and currency, which was important with the changing publishing industry. Research was often conducted online because of convenience and the information needed was not so specialist. Libraries, especially academic libraries, would be considered for more intensive research. Writers associated libraries more with print books than online resources.

Reading widely was instrumental in learning how to write. Writers read more analytically to understand how stories were crafted. Most of their reading was connected to professional pursuits, including being aware of what else was being published in their field and reading award-winning writers in their genre to "frontload" their mind with good writing. Reading widely, including other genres and non-fiction, was important because inspiration and learning came from everywhere. Writers often had less time to read purely for pleasure

Another area of learning was in connecting with other writers and industry professionals, whether this was through attending formal classes, mentorships, joining writing groups/organisations, or attending genre specific conventions, or online, e.g. social media. These connections presented opportunities for learning through critique, as well as providing support. Actually meeting other writers could help in envisioning a writing career. L. Penelope, a Black American fantasy romance author, explained the impact of joining RWA:

> [B]eing surrounded by professional working writers and, you know, they're just
> normal people who look like you, they've got jobs and kids some of them. […]That
> was really the biggest inspiring factor towards me publishing. And I remember sitting
> next to a woman who was like, 'I'm on deadline, and I have to write, 40,000 words in

two weeks', or something crazy like that. And I was like, 'woah!'. She was totally self-motivated. She had this deadline, she had to meet it. […] And so that's what I decided to do. I decided to treat myself like a professional writer.

Some writers who previously had negative experiences in being the only non-white writer in writing workshops found workshops exclusively for diverse writers to be a powerful experience in finding their voices and kinship with other diverse writers in a safe environment.

Above all, the greatest source of learning for writing was the practice of writing itself. Writers spoke about the need to write constantly and consistently, with all forms of writing and storytelling contributing to development. Courtney Milan spoke about learning to write by practicing in other formats, e.g. blog posts and letters, before beginning to write fiction seriously:

> [T]hat sounds like it doesn't really mean anything, but it is, because again, you're writing. I think pretty much all of these things, at any point, if you are practicing writing, however you're practicing it, even if you're not writing fiction, it all goes in the hopper and it all becomes part of your toolkit.

The necessity of time for the development of a writer to 'play' and experiment in order to learn was a shared need amongst writers. New technology and the changing publishing industry, as well as the desire to continue developing into a better writer, meant that there was no endpoint to learning in this profession.

Finding your way, finding your voice
The path to envisioning a career as a writer for oneself could sometimes be complicated by cultural and familial pressures for ethnically diverse writers. Writing as a career was sometimes viewed as not being a respectable or acceptable career path, particularly for some writers of Chinese backgrounds who had to push against pressures to conform to more traditional professions. Marjorie M. Liu, a mixed-race Chinese-American speculative, romance and comic writer, spoke of the difficulties in seeing writing as a career:

> I didn't consider this to be a career, really. I think, partly because… I mean, you know how it is. Partly as someone who comes from a Chinese family, who is Chinese, you

know the pressures to just sort of conform to the immigrant dream are very, very strong. And so… I mean, I can say quite honestly that had I not fulfilled the familial obligations of becoming either a doctor or a lawyer, I don't know if I would necessarily be a novelist right now.

Cultural and familial expectations made the pursuit of a writing as a profession more complex. Connected to this was perceptions of genre fiction. As one American Born Chinese romance writer related, her mother considered romance fiction to be "trash", and did not value the work her daughter produced. While this perception of genre fiction, particularly romance fiction, is not necessarily unique to certain ethnic groups, the combination of these forces can produce complex pressures for writers of diverse ethnic backgrounds and, for one writer, caused "inter-family angst".

Another difficulty was finding their voice as diverse writers and telling the kinds of stories they wanted to tell in an industry where the majority of fiction is white. For many writers, it took time to develop into their voice and become comfortable following their own path. As Courtney Milan related, it took her four to five years to go from writing exclusively white characters to writing diverse characters:

> [I]t took me a while to figure out that I actually could write diverse characters. […] One of the things I said is that you learn the most by reading. And if all you're reading is constantly white characters, white characters… And I read a lot of historical romance, and I read a lot of science-fiction, and I read a lot of fantasy, and it's so predominantly white, that it just took me a while to figure out that not everybody had to be white.

The lack of diverse stories in learning to be a writer by reading had the implicit effect of suggesting what stories were publishable and therefore had value. For Maurice Broaddus, a Black US based speculative fiction writer, encountering stories about ethnically diverse characters written by ethnically diverse writers proved to be a turning point in finding his own voice as a writer:

> I'm a Christian, and I'm Black, and that informs a lot of my stories. But I wasn't real confident in writing about spiritual things and Black things, especially starting off. […] It wasn't until when I was reading Octavia Butler when it was like, wait a

second! ((Laughs.)) I can be me and write me and bring my voice to the page. And be okay with that, and have confidence in that.

Finding the internal 'permission' to write diverse stories with their own voice could also be achieved through experiencing dissatisfaction how diversity is portrayed in other stories, and actually hearing that readers wanted diverse stories. However, this 'permission' could require "relearning" because implicit, and sometimes explicit, pressures about the "commercial viability" of diverse stories sometimes led writers to feel there was no market for their stories. There was hope, however, that their visibility as diverse writers could pave the way for more stories from diverse authors, as other diverse authors and stories did for them.

Finding your readerships

Some writers reported experiences where publishers thought people of certain ethnicities do not read, or do not read certain genre stories, which could make it more difficult for diverse stories to be published. On the contrary, diverse writers wrote in the hope of appealing specifically to people of certain ethnicities, as well as for the wider audience. In Tobias Buckell's case, he wrote stories to appeal to a wider market, as well as to a specifically Caribbean audience. Different audiences could take different things from their works:

> Because when Caribbean readers do find me, if they're interested in science-fiction and are from the Caribbean, they really engage with my work on a level that is very different than my American reader. And it makes a very profound, for me, experience because they get so much more of what I'm trying to do. They catch a lot of the jokes or nods or hints that I'm laying down that go over most of my American readers heads. […] So that reminds me that I'm actually trying to do two things at the same time, and serve two audiences at the same time.

When diverse stories were published, connecting to those specific readerships could be difficult, with publishers often relying on authors for promotion because of a lack of knowledge of these audiences. Some authors mentioned that there were some channels that targeted readerships of specific ethnicities, e.g. Romance Novels in Colour, which could be helpful.

Connecting to specific readerships while appealing to a wider audience could sometimes be complicated, as there was the potential to present barriers to other readers who might be put

off by visible markers of diversity. L. Penelope, a self-published Black American, author said:

> I do have an African-American woman on the cover and someone… it was my thought as well, and somebody actually asked me, 'oh, do you think that is a barrier to people picking up the book and feeling like it can relate to them'. And this was a Black woman who asked me this. And it's kind of odd because we don't think twice about reading books with white people on the cover. We don't say, 'oh, you know, how can we relate to that'. Because that's just the way it is. So on the one hand, yes, of course I understand the question, because I do believe that it is a barrier to some people. Like there are people who would not pick it up because, 'oh, it must be a Black book. It doesn't apply to me'. But, it was important to me to show people of colour on book covers because I know how I react when I see one. It automatically makes me take notice and stop and go, 'oh, what's that', because it's someone who looks like me.

This was a difficulty diverse writers uniquely had to navigate. Some writers also reported negative reactions to their books because their stories were too 'overtly diverse' for some readers, or readers could not related to ethnically diverse characters. One romance author said:

> You get these really weird reviews that are like, 'well, the author clearly was more interested in diversity than story'. […] Or I think I had one that mentioned something like 'really off-putting diversity'. And I was like, okay then. I'm just going to take that as, 'I don't like reading about non-white people'. […] And they'll also say things like, 'I never really understood her. She didn't seem like a real character'. And it's like, hmm… okay, sure. I don't know. And it's hard to tell what it is, but there's definitely some people who don't, you know, it's just that they're not on board for it. And I don't even know if they know why they're not on board for it, but they're not.

While all writers received negative reviews, criticism centred on the diversity in the stories itself was a difficulty uniquely faced by diverse writers, and is connected to the value and validity of diverse stories. As another romance writer noted:

> …[W]hen you can feel the reviewer trying so hard… like, why is it so hard for you when everyone else has to read books featuring white characters and that's just what

we do, and it's not hard for us to understand what the character is going through just because they're not the same as us. But I think the reverse is a problem for some people. […] [M]ost of the time I don't think that people saying it even realise what they're saying, but they never ask themselves 'why is this not believable to me?'. And the reason why it's not believable is that some part of them can't reconcile the fact that other people are doing, you know, leading lives and doing their own thing, and there don't really have to be any white people around.

In contrast, some writers also spoke of being inspired to write more diverse stories by hearing from readers about how much they wanted to read those kinds of stories and the impact they had had on them.

Self-doubt and self-rejection

While all writers experienced setbacks and self-doubt, writers of diverse ethnic backgrounds often expressed an additional uncertainty of whether negative experiences were due to being a new writer, or connected to their ethnicity. As Tobias Buckell related:

It's so hard to figure out what is just the fact that becoming a writer is tough, no matter who you are. Versus, you know, doing this diverse thing. So sometimes you can see that there are things where I'm kind of looking at them and going, 'Is that?... Is that? Because of the diversity of my fiction, or just because it's hard to be a new writer?' It's hard to tell sometimes.

This uncertainty was not unwarranted, given some challenges experienced were connected to their ethnicity. For example, because one author's story did not fit into an easily marketable concept of what an *[insert ethnicity]* story was, in order to even sell their novel to a publisher, they were "required to get blurbs for the book ahead of time", a situation that was described as "unheard of". Non-diverse writers did not have to face this kind of second-guessing of themselves. As one author related:

I think basically it comes down to a white author can get a bad review, and she'll never have to wonder 'did I get this bad review because I'm white, or because the reviewer…'

As well as being unsettling and demoralising, this can be connected to self-rejection, where writers do not submit their work or publish it because of the belief that it will not be accepted or wanted. Authors cautioned about anticipating obstacles due to one's ethnicity, because it could be the cause of obstacles itself:

> I'm not saying there aren't obstacles for people, but I think sometimes people put obstacles in their own path. They think there will be obstacles, and so they go into it with that mind set. […] Don't assume people that won't like it, or that you have to promote it in a different way because it's a diverse book.

Self-doubt and self-rejection could be overcome by having support from others, particularly from fellow diverse authors. Being able to recognise the behaviour as self-rejection helped one author to "force" themselves "past it" to continue to write and submit. Positive feedback and external validation for work could also help writers combat self-doubt, as Tobias Buckell related:

> You know, getting an audience for it and building a readership and having the second book be nominated for the Nebula, all of that was very pleasing to me because it kind of demonstrated that there were people who wanted to read what I was doing. And to be honest, for me it proved to myself that there were people who wanted to read what I was doing. You know, because when you're creating something that you've never read yourself, you don't know if anyone even cares about what you're trying to do.

Conversations and communities

Connecting with other writers was a source of learning and support. For diverse writers, connecting with other diverse writers was especially important for getting support for difficulties unique to being a diverse writer. Participants often spoke of the loneliness of being one of the few non-white writers in their genre, especially in the past and early in their careers, and sometimes felt they had to forge their own way on their own. Having a community of diverse writers gave them a sense of solidarity, safe space to vent, and assisted them in overcoming difficulties. Tobias Buckell spoke about turning to other diverse speculative fiction writers:

We talk less about craft and more about… you know, sometimes the nature of what we're trying to do and the roadblocks we encounter with our publishing. And kind of share those battles, and that's been really, really helpful.

Conversations and connections with readers were also a helpful source of encouragement for diverse writers. Writers spoke of hearing, often for the first time, that readers wanted to read the diverse stories they wanted to write. Online spaces for interactions and social media, especially Twitter, facilitated these connections in a way that had not been possible in the past. One Black US romance author began her writing career after finding a huge source of interracial romance stories, the genre she wished to write in, online at Literotica.com. As well as ready access to these hard to find stories, the community aspect of the website encouraged her:

[…]I would see that the stories have like tens of thousands of hits and, you know, hundreds of comments of people saying, you know, 'thank you for writing this, I love reading about characters like me'. And I was like, 'oh, well, these are the kind of characters I write too, maybe I can start'.

Social media allowed public and free conversation about diversity in fiction that people could contribute to from all areas of publishing, including readers. While these conversations could sometimes be difficult, they were important in increasing awareness and learning about a topic that, for some, had not been spoken about openly in the past. Some writers saw slow change in the publishing industry as a result, particularly as public pressure influenced greater diversity in publishing. The flow-on effects of open dialogue was that writers who had not been conscious of diversity issues were now learning and taking part in these conversations too. Tobias Buckell spoke of this change:

They have begun to raise questions and have these conversations, and so I've started to feel a lot less lonely, in that now it's not me raising these questions or some of my diverse friends. I now have friends of this community that are saying like, you know, let's talk about these things as well. So that's also made me feel less lonely, because it can't be just the diverse writers asking for diversity. It's got to be non-diverse writers asking for diversity as well, and non-diverse readers. […] It's hard to describe, but I feel like there's a wider space for me to inhabit, than when there was when I started out when everything felt like a fight. A fight just to be there. A fight just to have the right to be there. And now I don't feel like I have to have that fight all the time.

Communities and conversations amongst readers were also important in building readerships and spreading word-of-mouth about books. Increasingly these communities were developing online, e.g. romance genre reading communities on FreshFiction.com. One author pointed out that the more readers engaged with one another, the stronger and more dynamic the community, and therefore more enthusiasm and word-of-mouth for books could be generated, which ultimately benefited authors.

Libraries become invisible/opaque

The relationship between libraries and writers often evolved over the course of writers' lives, with libraries playing a less visible role as they got older. Most writers spoke about the importance of libraries in feeding their love of reading when they were younger and, in doing so, helping them become a writer. As Courtney Milan related:

> When I was a child almost everything I read came from the library. I would not have been able to read as much as I did without them. […] I love them, and I would not be a reader, and I would not be a writer without libraries.

Without libraries, many writers would not have been able to afford access to as much reading material. The role of librarians in ensuring a wide range of children's and YA fiction and other reading material was important. One author described libraries as being a 'safe space' for them because, as a child, it offered a non-judgemental place where they could explore their interests in reading without judgement or people intruding upon/bullying them.

However, for most writers, libraries tended to play a less visible role for them as adults. Participants tended not to use libraries for borrowing material if they could afford to purchase books due to convenience (especially e-books) and out of a desire to support other authors, but turned to libraries if they could not get access to certain titles (e.g. due to books being out of print, geographical restrictions, etc.). Some writers used libraries as work spaces because they were quiet and private, but many worked from home. Writers also noted that they did not engage with libraries as much as adults because of a lack of time. Some writers suggested that library events and the use of the library as a community meeting space/hub for writers might be a way they would become more engaged with libraries.

Libraries tended to play a more visible role for traditionally published authors. Self-published authors in particular lacked working relationships with libraries, with many expressing they did not know how to submit their books to libraries to be considered for acquisition.

The visibility of librarians' efforts were primarily in the form of reviews of their books, e.g. in Library Journal, and compiling 'best of' book lists, which brought books to the attention of libraries for acquisition. Sales to libraries supported writers in their careers, especially US based authors because of the large US library system, and provided opportunities for publicity and reader engagement through library events, which could also be a source of income. Beginner and intermediate authors did not have as much success with library events as more well-established authors. As Tobias Buckell explained:

> In my instance, as a midlist writer, I need help in getting the word out because I'm just one guy at home who spends most of his time writing and if I had a smoother PR background and a lot of spare time on my hands, I could probably get out the word and do some stuff in the community and raise awareness and get a larger crowd out. My problem is that really takes away from the time I need to write in order to produce the next book. […] And so… it's the sort of odd dilemma where I can't throw that much time into trying to get more people to show up, and the library knows that I'm not Neil Gaiman, so they probably don't throw a lot of time into planning the event and putting time into it. So usually what happens is we're both a little bit disappointed by the numbers that show up.

This lack of time and resources to promote author events on both the writer's and libraries' parts was detrimental to the success of the collaboration between the writer and the library. However, authors still did library events because they saw it as a chance to give back to libraries, as well as being able to engage with readers. Long-term benefits, such as building a reputation as an engaging speaker and seeding word-of-mouth for their books, were the focus, while benefiting libraries at the same time.

Many writers spoke of the need for libraries to promote themselves more in general, and more widely beyond the library's own channels. Authors rarely heard about efforts of librarians unless they were told. As Courtney Milan pointed out:

The thing is most of what librarians do is invisible to me, right? If somebody is telling everyone who comes to the library to read my books, I will never know that unless they tell me. Right? Because I don't go to her library and I don't know.

Writers spoke about libraries with a lot of goodwill and appreciation for the role libraries played for them in the past in supporting their reading. However, the movement from this to creating partnerships with libraries was not always a natural connection. As Maurice Broaddus explained when discussing speaking with other writers about working with libraries:

The number one reaction has been, 'I never thought about that!' […] Being a professional writer is all about income streams. And you have to have diverse income streams. Yeah, you get the advance. Yeah, you may get royalties. A lot of us enhance our budgets by, hey, we need speaking engagements. We need to be teaching on the side. So I do teaching at the writers centre. I'll do teaching through the library. I'll do speaking through the library. The library has huge opportunities for teaching and speaking. So you have those discussions with writers, and it's, 'I never thought about that!'

Many writers also expressed a lack of time to conceive of, organise, and approach libraries for ways they could work together, but would be very willing to work with libraries should they "even did half a reach out". Writers also were hesitant to tell librarians "how to do their job" or suggest ways libraries could do better in assisting writers because of a lack of knowledge about libraries and an awareness that they were under-resourced. The operations of libraries, such as how libraries added self-published books into their collections and why some libraries could not take donations, were also opaque to them.

Libraries as gatekeepers

Libraries (and librarians) were viewed as gatekeepers between stories and readers, just as publishers, editors, and booksellers are gatekeepers in deciding what will be published, sold, and read widely. They therefore had a responsibility to be mindful of what stories they held and promoted to readers, and how they did this. Authors stressed the importance of actively

acquiring a wide range of diverse books and curating collections, and consistently promoting them in diversity themed displays as well including them in displays/shelving alongside non-diverse books of the same genre. Librarians could help in their role as gatekeepers to make diverse books more accessible to readers by being aware of diversity issues in fiction. It was important for librarians to read diverse genre fiction, as well as have an appreciation and knowledge of genre fiction in general, so that librarians were able to recommend diverse books to readers with genuine enthusiasm. While there was a general recognition that libraries were under-resourced, libraries were seen as not having the strict profit-making objectives of bookstores and publishers, and so had more scope to promote diverse fiction.

On the whole, writers thought libraries were important, especially because of the educational aspect and access to resources they provided. Libraries were also seen as one of the few physical places left for readers because of brick-and-mortar bookstore closures, so this gatekeeping extended to how libraries welcomed patrons into their spaces, how they promoted/shelved diverse books, etc. In this, the atmosphere of the library played a huge part in the way people engaged with libraries. The level of effort put into the physical surroundings/displays was seen as a reflection of the attitude of librarians towards their books, with more welcoming efforts evidence of caring and a love of reading, rather than libraries being "a place that they just go to reshelve books".

The welcoming of readers into the spaces and resources of the library also extended to how libraries provided and promoted access to diverse books. Authors mentioned the need for better discovery methods for diverse books, with greater prominence in both physical displays and online library sites and catalogues. One author suggested that a finer grained taxonomy that allowed for finding stories about characters of diverse ethnic backgrounds would be helpful. Inclusion of diverse books in genre recommendation lists with non-diverse books, as well as separate diverse genre lists were also important. Connected to this, the shelving of diverse popular fiction books in their appropriate genre sections rather than ethnic specific shelves was generally preferred. As one author said:

> [M]y point of view is the ethnicity of the author should never matter. It should just never matter in shelving or anything like that. What matters is the kind of story. […] For example, if you put books in the African-American section, maybe people won't think to go there. Not because they're racist or anything, but because as a romance

reader, you would just go to the romance reader section, right? […] So they're missing this big chunk of the market.

Ethnic diversity in librarianship was highlighted by one author as an area that should also be considered because diversity amongst librarians (as gatekeepers) fell in line with a lack of diversity in the publishing industry as a whole. This connects to how librarians' awareness of issues of diversity can impact interactions with patrons, collection management and promotional decisions. However, some authors noted the efforts of librarians, including "older white librarians", in connecting to the communities they served, with attention paid to the diversity of their patrons (especially children/YA) in what and how they provided resources.

Discussion

Experiences of writers in learning to write and building their careers aligned with previous studies (Gouthro, 2014c and 2014d), and shared similar sources of support and difficulties. Diverse writers, however, had additional challenges specific to their ethnic identities, just as women crime writers had specific challenges related to societal expectations of their gender (Gouthro, 2014d). Many of these difficulties, such as the pressure to change ethnic names, diverse content/covers, or negativity expressed by readers about stories containing "really off-putting diversity", echoed experiences mentioned by Díaz (2014), Older (2014, April 18), James (2010, February), and Hailstock (in Laurie Likes Books, 1998).

It can be complex to parse this out. Some difficulties can be seen as being directly related to ethnicity, but some are less straightforward, particularly when they are presented with the justification of commercial viability and attaining broader appeal, which seem logical because publishing is, after all, a business. Beneath this, however, are beliefs about what diverse stories are (they're not good enough/there's only one kind of *[insert ethnicity]* story/they're about race and cultural issues) and who reads them (*[insert ethnicity]* don't read that genre/don't read), which connect to those found in the literature (e.g. Burley 2010; Kean, 2015b), and are themselves born out of implicit/unexamined beliefs about minority ethnicities.

Authors' uncertainties about whether their difficulties are connected to their ethnicity relate to this. Some authors stressed that they did not believe difficulties were a result of overt racism, but more a kind of ignorance, thoughtlessness, or inadequacies of institutional structures. This demonstrates that it is not so easy or clear cut to "name" instances and origins of difficulties in order to combat discrimination, as proposed by Delgado, Stefancic, & Liendo (2012, pp.49) for a CRT approach. Without being able to identify and explain a problem as being connected to race, it can be more difficult to articulate why such change is necessary and gain wider support for it. This notion of wider support is key. As some authors mentioned, for change to occur, the push must come from all realms in the creation and commerce of stories, from the creators to the gatekeepers (including libraries) to the readers, white and diverse alike. Open conversation and greater awareness about these issues from all directions can assist in breaking these barriers down, but as many authors mentioned, these conversations are not always easy, and change can be slow. It is vital that libraries take part in these discussions, which are increasingly occurring online, if they are to understand how they can play a role in supporting diverse authors and their works.

Libraries overall need to be better at connecting with writers (and readers), and finding ways to work with them and promote their resources/services widely. They have the potential to provide support for writers, particularly in providing free access to resources, as a community space where writers can meet other writers, and in author events. Connecting with professional writing organisations and developing 'embedded' relationships, such as that discussed in Harig (2004), could also be a mutually beneficial step towards this and assist in libraries' collection development and developing more author-focussed library programming. As writing organisations also include self-published authors as members, they could be a key connector between libraries and this under-served group of authors. Writers are very willing to partner with libraries, but often do not have the time to conceive of ways to work together or promote their presence, so the impetus is on libraries to begin these conversations and promote collaborations.

A concerted effort to be aware of and include diverse authors and stories, and the issues surrounding diversity, is also necessary for librarians if they want to serve their communities better. This also has implications for diversity within librarianship, just as diversity within the publishing industry plays a part in affecting awareness and practices (Kean, 2015a, pp.23). Greater visibility and access to diverse stories can help encourage more diverse writers to create diverse stories and build readerships, and libraries are in a prime position to provide

this. It is also important for librarians to be aware of how the perceptions of diverse stories can be barriers to some readers. These barriers can be overcome by concentrating on the elements of the story that would appeal to readers, rather than solely on the diversity of its characters. Library shelving and promotional/operational decisions should include diverse stories with other books of the same genre, as suggested by Jemisin (2010), as well as making space for them in specific ethnic displays/sections. Likewise, the perception of diverse popular fiction as being educational, which echoed Wright & Sandlin's (2009) views of pop-culture as a site of implicit learning, could present barriers to readers who turned to genre fiction for entertainment. Genuine enthusiasm and knowledge of the genre and diverse stories can assist in overcoming this, as can matching patrons to suitable books (Holyoake, 2007, pp.29) and refraining from solely promoting diverse books as "good for you". Building relationships with readers is vital. Libraries have the potential to become a trusted source of recommendations for all readers. Developing these conversations with readers can assist in connecting readers to writers and their works and ensuring greater success in author events.

The exploratory nature of this investigation did not specifically seek writers' experiences specific to their ethnicities. Patterns of writers' experiences tended to be shared across ethnicities than not. While the issue of cultural and familial pressures in envisioning a writing career and the value of genre fiction was raised by some Chinese participants as being specific to their culture, not all participants of Chinese backgrounds mentioned this, and a Black participant spoke about his mother's view of studying writing in college as not being "respectable". It may have been that, being Chinese myself or having existing relationships with some participants, some people felt more comfortable sharing these issues. Other participants could also have experienced similar issues, but were less comfortable sharing them with me, or it did not occur to them to speak about it given they were not asked about pressures specific to their culture. This is a topic that bears further investigation.

What was more notable was the difference between writers based in the US and those not. For two authors who grew up outside of the US, the public libraries they had (in Malaysia and Grenada) were not well resourced, so they turned to other sources to obtain reading material, such as a paid membership to a British-founded library and 'take-one, leave-one' libraries (ad-hoc bookstands where people exchanged books freely). Cultural differences in the ways libraries were run and issues faced by libraries specific to their countries/cultures/communities did not come up explicitly in interviews, so while results

from this research could be helpful for libraries in Western(ised) countries, they may not be transferable elsewhere. This is an area worth further investigation.

One author based outside of the US felt they had not experienced any negative experiences due to their (visible) ethnicity, but wrote diverse stories as a reflection of their society and had not thought about diversity in genre fiction until witnessing conversations about it. (They noted, however, some US publishers previously focused only on US characters/locales, but did not specifically link this to ethnicity.) This could be a reflection of being from somewhere that had a different socio-political and race relations environment than the US. Being physically distant from the largely US-based publishing industry of genre fiction may have also muted pressures. Further study into the experiences of non-US based diverse popular fiction writers could shed further light on this.

Speculative fiction authors of all genders expressed an awareness of the lack of gender diversity in their genre, with some female authors mentioned experiencing difficulties related to it. This suggests that a consciousness of diversity issues in one area is likely to spark consciousness of issues in other areas. In contrast, most romance writers did not mention the role of gender in their writing experiences, which may be because it is female-dominated industry. However, for one romance author, the path to writing more ethnically diverse stories began with subverting romance gender roles.

Romance writers experienced difficulties attached to stigmatisation of their genre, which speculative fiction writers did not mention. Also, negative reviews of stories specifically related to the 'overt' diversity of content were expressed by romance writers, but not speculative fiction writers, so romance writers may face additional challenges related to reader barriers. One explanation for this could be historical socio-cultural taboos on interracial relationships and miscegenation, or different ethnic stereotypes about gender and sexuality. In addition, speculative fiction often features characters that are fantastical/alien, which might make some readers more amenable to reading about characters of different (ethnic) backgrounds, or takes place in 'post-racial' futures/fantastical lands where current racial politics do not exist (Durham, in Jernigan, 2012, May 29). One romance author thought that diverse paranormal romance stories were far more accepted by readers than diverse historical romance, or diverse contemporary romance, theorising that if people were accepting of fantastical creatures in their stories, they might not be as resistant to characters of diverse ethnic backgrounds. The more allegorical nature of some speculative fiction may

diffuse the 'visibility' of ethnicity enough to help readers overcome perceptions of diverse books. Investigation into the differences between experiences of writers of different genres and sub-genres, and whether any genres faced specific challenges in increasing diversity, would be another avenue worth exploring.

This study could have been improved by greater uniformity in data collection and a longer time frame. Data collected through verbal interactions was generally richer, though email interviewees were very generous with time in being willing to answer subsequent questions. While participants were given the opportunity to verify transcripts and comment on analysis, some writers could not contribute additional time to do this. Despite this, no participants withdrew from the study and all gave permission for transcripts to be analysed. The short time frame of this study could have contributed to the lack of feedback on analysis, which meant that member checking could not take place. If this study were to be replicated, time frames should be scaled to allow participants more time to contribute (i.e. more than 7-10 days). In addition, one participant who wrote inspirational romance considered herself to be a Christian fiction writer, rather than a romance writer. There were broad similarities in her experiences as a writer and in dealing with libraries, so her answers were included in analysis. However, because the Christian Fiction market is vastly different, with potential differences in libraries' decisions on collection development and promotion, it would be worth exploring the experiences of Christian fiction writers and libraries in a separate study.

Conclusion

Further investigation is needed to explore experiences unique to writers of particular ethnicities, non-US based writers, and different genres/sub-genres, including the Christian fiction market, and potential barriers to readers, to give greater insights into how libraries can further support diverse fiction and authors. The diversity of fiction in non-Western(ised) countries and challenges specific to those cultures and communities would also be an interesting counterpoint to explore to understand the unique challenges for their libraries.

Libraries occupy a unique place in the publishing industry in being able to provide free/low cost access to books and resources without being beholden to the purely commercial needs other industry players need to follow, and so have a unique opportunity to support greater

diversity in fiction. To do so libraries need to be more aware of issues of diversity, more vocal about what they can do, and more proactive in engaging with the variety of diverse stories, their writers, and all readers. There is huge potential for libraries to work with writers for mutual benefits and learning. Ultimately, what's good for writers is also what's good for readers, both diverse and non-diverse, and what's good for libraries.

What came through the discussions with authors was the hope that their stories, both written as fiction and shared with me, could be the helping hand to emerging diverse writers in finding their voices and sharing their stories, so that diversity in fiction was no longer the exception, but part of the 'mainstream'. Change would also come with greater awareness of these issues brought about by open, though sometimes difficult, conversations about diversity amongst writers, readers, and industry professionals. Studies like this one, I hope, will be part of the process of discovering and contributing knowledge to these conversations and making that change.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Initial contact letters

Initial email to an interview candidate whom I have not had previous contact with (i.e. no pre-existing connection).

To: [Participant's email address]

Subject: Invitation to participate in MIS research study on ethnically diverse popular fiction authors and their works and libraries

Dear _____

My name is Lynette Leong and I am a Master of Information Studies (MIS) student at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. I am conducting research into the reading, writing and publishing experiences of ethnically diverse authors of ethnically diverse popular fiction stories and the role libraries play in supporting these authors and their works.

Would you be interested in taking part in an interview (approximately 1-2 hours long) to assist in this research? Participants may choose to have their identity kept confidential. Please find attached an information sheet and consent form which gives more detail about the study.

Interviews will take place during April to May, over Skype or face-to-face at an agreed time and audio-recorded. Alternatively, an email interview can be conducted if these two methods are not suitable, but Skype/face-to-face interviews are preferable.

Please let me know if you are willing to take part in this research by April 30th, 2015.

If you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to get in touch with me or my supervisor, Dr Brenda Chawner (brenda.chawner@vuw.ac.nz).

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Lynette Leong

Initial email to an interview candidate whom I have had previous contact with (i.e. a pre-existing relationship/connection)

To: [Participant's email address]

Subject: Invitation to participate in MIS research study on ethnically diverse popular fiction authors and their works and libraries

Hi _____

As part of my studies for the Master of Information studies (MIS) at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, I'm conducting research into the reading, writing and publishing experiences of ethnically diverse authors of ethnically diverse popular fiction stories and the role libraries play in supporting these authors and their works.

Would you be interested in taking part in an interview (approximately 1-2 hours long) to assist in this research? Participants may choose to have their identity kept confidential. Please find attached an information sheet and consent form which gives more detail about the study.

Interviews will take place during April to May, over Skype or face-to-face at an agreed time and audio-recorded. Alternatively, an email interview can be conducted if these two methods are not suitable, but Skype/face-to-face interviews are preferable.

Please let me know if you are willing to take part in this research by April 30th, 2015.

If you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to get in touch with me or my supervisor, Dr Brenda Chawner (brenda.chawner@vuw.ac.nz).

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Lynette Leong

Initial letter to an interview candidate whom I have not had previous contact with (i.e. no pre-existing connection) via website contact form (i.e. unable to supply attachments).

Via: [Participant's website form]

Subject: Invitation to participate in MIS research study on ethnically diverse popular fiction authors and their works and libraries

Dear _____

My name is Lynette Leong and I am a Master of Information Studies (MIS) student at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. I am conducting research into the reading, writing and publishing experiences of ethnically diverse authors of ethnically diverse popular fiction stories and the role libraries play in supporting these authors and their works.

Would you be interested in taking part in an interview (approximately 1-2 hours long) to assist in this research? Participants may choose to have their identity kept confidential.

Interviews will take place during April to May, over Skype or face-to-face at an agreed time and audio-recorded. Alternatively, an email interview can be conducted if these two methods are not suitable, but Skype/face-to-face interviews are preferable.

If you are interested, please get in touch with me on leonglyne@myvuw.ac.nz by April 30th 2015, and I can give you more information on the research project. My supervisor, Dr Brenda Chawner, can also be contacted on brenda.chawner@vuw.ac.nz for additional information.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards,

Lynette Leong

Initial message to interview candidate via Twitter

@[*author Twitter handle*] would you be interested in taking part in a research study on

libraries and diverse popular fiction? If so, pls DM me. Thanks!

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Life story approach

Could you please tell me everything that was involved in you becoming interested in writing, becoming a writer and honing your skills, and building your writing career? I will listen and make some notes and I will not interrupt you until you have finished. Please take as much time as you feel necessary and tell me all the details you remember that, in your opinion, are connected to you becoming a writer. (Based upon example question in Scheibelhofer, 2008, pp.407)

Semi-structured questions

(Note: These semi-structured questions act as guides –they will not necessarily all be asked, or asked in this order/with this wording. Other questions may also be asked to probe for further information if necessary.)

Topic: Development and experiences of diverse writers

What do you think helped you most in learning to be a writer and building your writing career? Anything in particular as a diverse writer?

Did you ever, or do you currently, experience any particular difficulties as a diverse writer? If so, could you please share them with me?

What influences, if any, have diverse stories and other diverse writers played in your journey in reading and becoming a writer?

Topic: Importance of diversity in popular fiction

What do you think is important about diverse stories? And diversity in popular fiction for adults (or genre fiction) in particular? How have they played a part in your life?

Topic: Experiences of the writer as a diverse reader

Did you ever, or do you currently, experience any particular difficulties as a diverse reader? If so, could you please share them with me?

Topic: Experiences of libraries and the writer as a diverse reader

What role, if any, has libraries played in your reading experiences? (If they have already touched upon experiences with libraries, frame it as: Could you please expand upon your experiences with libraries as a reader and writer?)

What about libraries has helped and hindered you as a diverse reader?

Is there anything that you feel libraries could do better, or do differently, that would assist diverse popular fiction readers, or readers of diverse popular fiction?

Topic: Experiences of libraries and the writer as a diverse writer

What role, if any, has libraries played in your writing experiences?

What about libraries has helped and hindered you as a diverse writer?

Is there anything that you feel libraries could do better, or do differently, that would assist you in your writing and writing career?

Is there anything you can think of that libraries could do that would be helpful for other diverse writers?

How do you currently use or work with libraries? And what kinds of libraries?

If you don't currently use or work with libraries, could you please tell me why? Is there something that could be changed about libraries that would help you engage with them?

What role do you think libraries play, or should play, in society? For readers? For writers? For readers and writers of diverse backgrounds in particular?

Is there anything else you would like to share about the subject of diversity in popular fiction, diverse authors, diverse popular fiction readers, readers of diverse popular fiction and libraries?

Socio-statistical/identity data open questions

How would you choose to describe yourself? Please describe yourself according to any that you feel applies to your identity: ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, age, physical/mental abilities/disabilities, religion, any other identities/roles you may feel applies. This socio-statistical information helps give context and assists me in understanding your stories and answers, so please share as much as possible that you feel comfortable sharing with me.

How would you describe the kind of stories you write? What genres and sub-genres would you place them in?

How many works have you published so far? Please indicate what kind of works they are, e.g. novels/novellas/short stories, etc.

Are you traditionally published, self-published, or hybrid-published? Please feel free to give more details on this, including whether any publishers that publish your work are larger or smaller presses.

Where do you feel you are in your writing career? At the beginning stages, intermediate, well established? Please expand on why you consider your career to be at this level.

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title: **Colouring our voices: an exploration of ethnic diversity in genre fiction**

Researcher: **Lynette Leong, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

I am a Master of Information Studies (MIS) student at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree, I am undertaking an INFO 580 research project to complete my studies. The project investigates the reading, writing, and publishing experiences of selected published authors who self-identify as being of ethnically diverse backgrounds, and who write adult popular fiction (primarily in the English language) which features ethnically diverse protagonists. Within this, the role of libraries will also be explored to better understand how libraries assist in the development and careers of ethnically diverse authors, support the creation of their works, and help make ethnically diverse stories accessible and visible to readers.

The goal of this research is to develop a better understanding of the impact and importance of diverse popular fiction stories on writers, and of the factors that have helped and hindered ethnically diverse writers in their journey to becoming published authors. This may lead to answers as to how more ethnically diverse writers can be encouraged and supported in creating more ethnically diverse popular fiction stories, and how libraries can potentially play a role in this. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School's Human Ethics Committee.

I am inviting ethnically diverse authors of adult popular fiction (written primarily in the English language), featuring main characters of ethnically diverse backgrounds, to participate in this research. Participants will be asked to take part in an interview face-to-face, or over Skype, which is expected to take from one to two hours long. Permission will be asked to record the audio of the interview. A transcript of the interview will be sent to participants for checking and verification, and participants may correct or clarify, but not delete, their interview comments. Alternatively, if face-to-face/Skype interview is not possible, interviews can be conducted over email.

Initial analysis and final analysis will be shared with participants, with feedback very welcome (but not required). Interview transcripts/emailed interview answers and analysis feedback will not be included whole in the final research report, but sections may be quoted in the analysis and discussion if appropriate.

Participation is voluntary. You will not be identified personally in any written/verbal report produced as a result of this research (including possible publication in academic/professional conferences and journals), unless you grant written permission for me to do so.

Participants who have chosen to reveal their identity in the study may still choose to render any of their interview comments as 'non-attributable'. Feedback from participants on initial and final analysis will also be able to be marked as non-attributable by participants. Any quotation and discussion of comments marked as non-attributable will be done with care so that they are not connected back to the participant.

All material collected will be kept confidential, and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor, Dr Brenda Chawner. The research report will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management, and subsequently deposited in the University Library. Research results may also subsequently be reported and/or published in a variety of avenues, including academic or professional journals, conferences, and more informal publication and discussion venues.

Should any participant wish to withdraw from the project, they may do so until the day their interview transcript, verified by the participant, or emailed interview answers have been returned to the researcher. If a participant should withdraw from the study, the data collected up to that point will be destroyed. All data collected from participants will be destroyed within 2 years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me at:

Email:

Telephone (if within New Zealand):

Telephone (if outside of New Zealand): *{Exit country code +}*

Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Dr Brenda Chawner at:

Email:

Telephone (if within New Zealand):

Telephone (if outside of New Zealand): *{Exit country code +}*

Lynette Leong

Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: **Colouring our voices: an exploration of ethnic diversity in genre fiction**

Researcher: **Lynette Leong, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may withdraw myself (and any information I have provided) from this project, without having to give reasons, by e-mailing leonglyne@myvuw.ac.nz up until the day I return my verified interview transcript to the researcher; or until the day I return written answers to emailed research questions to the researcher.

I understand that face-to-face interviews and Skype interviews will be audio recorded and the recording and transcripts of the interviews will be erased within 2 years after the conclusion of the project. I understand that written interviews (conducted via email) will also be erased within 2 years after the conclusion of the project.

Furthermore, I understand I will have an opportunity to check the transcripts of my audio interview in order to correct or clarify, but not delete, my statements. I will also have the opportunity to provide feedback on the initial and final analysis of the research should I so wish.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisor, the published results will not use my name, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me, unless I grant written permission for my identity to be revealed. I understand that even if I agree to be identified in this research, I may still mark any comments I make in the interview upon review, and any feedback I choose to give on the initial and final analysis, as being 'non-attributable'. 'Non-attributable' comments may be quoted and discussed in the research project, but will be done in such a way as to keep the identity of the participant who made the comment confidential.

I understand that the research report will be deposited in the University Library, and that research results may also subsequently be reported and/or published in a variety of avenues, including academic or professional journals, conferences, and more informal publication and discussion venues. I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose nor released to others.

Please indicate (by ticking the boxes below) which of the following apply:

☐   I agree to take part in this research and to be interviewed face-to-face/over Skype, and for this interview to be audio recorded.

☐   I agree to take part in this research and to be interviewed over email.

☐   I agree to be identified in this research study. (Note: you may still choose to mark any comments as 'non-attributable' upon review of the interview transcript.)

☐   I understand that results of this research will be published and disseminated through various avenues and agree to this.

☐   I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

Signed:

Name of participant:

Date:

Appendix 5: Participant breakdown

Note: Where participants have requested confidentiality and there is potential that description could identify them, their specific information have not been included.

Writers approached for interview and return rate by method of approach, genre, and location

	All queried	Responded	Interviewed
US based	25	13	10
Non-US based	4	2	2
Speculative fiction only	13	4	4
Romance fiction only	14	9	6
Both genres	2	2	2
Email	14	4	4
Website form	14	10	8
Twitter*	1	0	0

* Note: One author was approached by Twitter after an email approach received a bounce back. A generic Twitter account was set up and one generic Twitter message was sent requesting a private reply for more information if the participant was interested. No information that could be connected back to this specific study was mentioned in order to protect the participant's choice for confidentiality should they wish to take part. There was no response.

Writers approached and return rates by genre and gender*

**Note:* Genders assumed to be cis-gender where participants have not identified otherwise.

		Gender	
Genre		Male	Female
Speculative fiction only	Queried	6	7
	Responded	3	1
	Interviewed	3	1
Romance fiction only	Queried	0	14
	Responded	0	9
	Interviewed	0	6
Both genres	Queried	0	2
	Responded	0	2
	Interviewed	0	2
TOTAL	Queried	6	23
	Responded	3	12
	Interviewed	3	9

Methods of interviews

Face-to-face	Skype (video)	Skype (voice)	Skype (text chat)	Email*
1	10	1	1	4

**Note:* Only 2 interviews were conducted solely by email. Due to technical difficulties, one interview began as a Skype video chat, moved to Skype voice only, then to Skype text chat, then to email. Another interview was conducted over Skype video chat, but due to time constraints, the socio-statistical questions were completed by email.

Self-identified ethnicities/nationalities of participants

Black American with Afro Caribbean heritage
Mixed-race Caribbean
Black (with dual British and American citizenship)
Black, American
Latino
Hapa (half-Chinese, mixed European heritage), US
Chinese-American, mixed-race
Half-white, half-Chinese, American
American-born Chinese
Asian-American
Chinese-Malaysian

Other aspects of identity/descriptors

Note: Participants were able to choose what they wanted to share, and not all participants shared information beyond ethnicity. While in some cases the factors below played a part in participants' writing experiences, they have not been discussed directly in this study if not directly relevant to the specific research questions and objective.

Depression; Several, varied mental abilities/disabilities
Several, varied physical abilities/disabilities; Able-bodied
Urban
Bisexual; Straight
Christian; Raised Christian but non-practicing; Agnostic Buddhist/Taoist; Atheist; Not religious
Middle class; Upper class
Writer; Author; Storyteller
Middle-aged; Thirties

All participants by publication avenues and stages in career

	Traditional	Hybrid	Self-published
Beginner		3	1
Intermediate	2	2	
Well established		4	

Participants writing solely in the Romance genre by publication avenues and stages in career

	Traditional	Hybrid	Self-published
Beginner		1	1
Intermediate		1	
Well established		3	

Participants writing solely in the Speculative fiction genre by publication avenues and stages in career

	Traditional	Hybrid	Self-published
Beginner		1	
Intermediate	2	1	
Well established			

Participants writing in both Romance and Speculative fiction genres by publication avenues and stages in career

	Traditional	Hybrid	Self-published
Beginner		1	
Intermediate			
Well established		1	

Participants by gender, publication avenues, and stages in their career

	Male	Female
Beginner	0	4
Intermediate	3	1
Well established	0	4
Traditional	2	0
Hybrid	1	8
Self-published	0	1

Note: Writers were often hesitant to name themselves as being "well-established" as many felt they had much more to learn and room to grow, but categorised themselves as such when they felt they were no longer "intermediate".

Appendix 6: Initial and final analysis maps

Initial analysis map

Diverse stories
- Preconceptions
- Why they're important
- Invisibility of diverse stories
- Too much visibility

Writers
- Internal qualtities that helped
- Sources of support
- General difficulties experienced
- Sources of learning
- Difficulties related to being of a diverse background

Libraries
- Invisible/lack of knowledge
- Libraries as place
- Goodwill towards libraries
- Gatekeepers
- Writers' changing relationship with libraries
- Connecting with readers
- Source of income for writers

Final analysis map

Diverse stories are invisible/'too' visible
- Diverse stories are invisible
- Diverse stories are 'too' visible

It's more than just a story

What we talk about when we talk about 'diverse' stories
- There's only one kind of *[insert ethnicity]* story
- It's hard to find any good ones
- They're about race, and it's too hard

Libraries become invisible/opaque

The same... but more
- Conversations and Communities
- Similar qualities and difficulties
- Learning from everywhere, learning constantly
- Self-doubt and self-rejection
- Finding your readerships
- Finding your way, finding your voice

Libraries as gatekeepers