

Diversity of Authors in Fantasy Fiction

By Zara Palevani

Introduction

Books are purchased by a diverse group of readers, regardless of the fact that the author or the characters in the story are diverse or not. But what is the definition of diversity? A quick search on Google would return various results. Diversity can have a broad meaning and one can spend an endless amount of time trying to define it, similar to the writing style in fantasy fiction. Fantasy authors can create personas of their characters and develop their stories around each persona. In this article, I will look at the level of diversity amongst YA authors in the fantasy fiction genre. According to the University of Oregon, diversity “means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies” (Oregon University, 2018). What I like about this definition is that it has listed 9 dimensions but also states that other ideologies that are not listed could also fall under the definition of diversity. This indicates how broad a definition diversity can have. The research and data on the number of fantasy fiction authors who belong with either of these group is limited. This paper studies the diversity levels of the authors of fantasy fiction, and whether there is enough industry support to encourage diversity among the authors community.

Diversity Levels of the Authors of Fantasy Fiction

Studies demonstrate that the number of titles by white authors versus non-white authors is significantly higher. Roxane Gay counted the number of book reviews with white authors versus non-white authors by The New York Times in 2012. The results indicated that almost 90% of the

reviews were for books by white authors. She argues that is not even a true reflection of the population of the United States (Gay, 2012).

On the other hand, Bold's findings in her paper *The Eight Percent Problem: Authors of Colour in the British Young Adult Marketing (2006-2016)*

is somewhat concerning. While the titles

by the authors of colour are significantly higher in America compared to the UK, there is a

noticeable drop in the numbers which started in 2014. According to the data found by Bold's study, America and the UK are experiencing a decreasing trend in this area, see illustration 1.

(Bold, 2018)

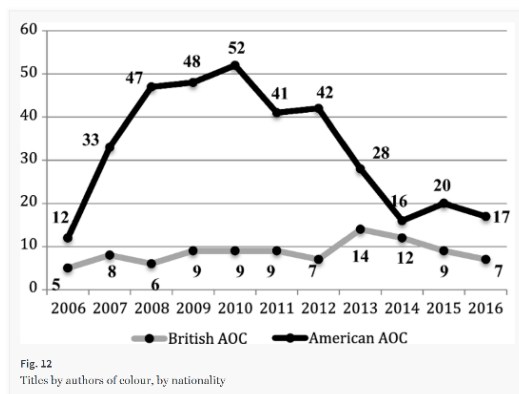


Illustration 1: Titles by authors of colour, by nationality

What could be the reason behind the drop in the number of non-white YA authors? Although it is difficult to conclude an answer, Malinad Lo's analysis, which was published in 2014, could be thought provoking. Lo's analysis of banned and challenged books from 2010-2013 shows that 21% of the authors were non-white (Oregon University, 2018). Per illustration 2, these authors include Afghani, American Indian, Korean, Latino, Black, and Biracial ethnicity groups.

Authors of Banned/Challenged Books by Race/
Ethnicity, 2010-2013

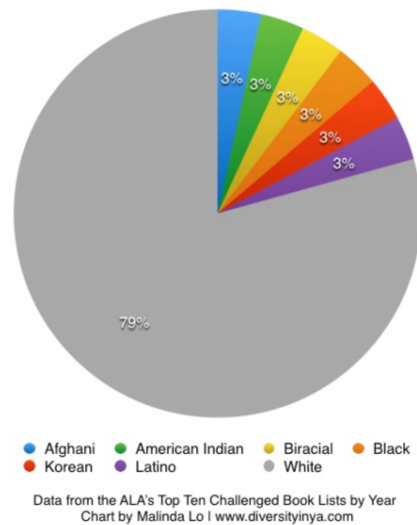


Illustration 2: White versus Non-White Authors of Banned/Challenged Books

This could raise the question whether non-white authors are being discouraged from writing books. While the number of non-white authors is lower in general, the statistics are discouraging when 21% of banned and challenged books are from non-white authors (Lo, 2014).

What can we do to support diverse authors in fantasy fiction YA?

Access to Information:

Edith Campbell has developed a comprehensive list of resources (scholarly publications, journals, conferences and other related events to diversity). Campbell's list includes fiction and non-fiction resources for young adults (Campbell, 2017). If the document is broken down into fiction and non-fiction, one has better access to fiction resources as they relate to diversity. One can also identify gaps between the fiction and non-fiction resources and assess how these gaps can be filled. For instance, are there missing resources that can be added to Campbell's document? Are characteristics of non-fiction works being ignored in fiction works?

Awards and Recognition

While this paper provided data to represent the minority group of non-white authors, diversity has other dimensions as defined by the University of Oregon, i.e: age, gender, and physical abilities (Oregon University, 2018). The ALA, book publishers, libraries and other organizations should recognize the work of the minority groups who write fantasy fiction. This can inspire hope among these groups to do more work in this area, and also promote their works. For instance, The Carter G. Woodson Book Award recognizes authors whose stories showcase ethnicity in YA and children's books on an annual basis. This award is meant for authors who write about racial and ethnic minority groups. Dr Woodson is an African American writer and educator with publications for both adults and young adults (Socialstudies.org, 2019).

Conclusion

Young Adults can look up to the authors of fantasy fiction as role models. It is important for librarians and publishers to pay close attention to supporting and recognizing authors who not only write about diversity in their stories, but also identify as members of diverse groups. Also, more studies, research and up-to-date data on the breakdown of diversity among fantasy fiction authors beyond white versus non-white studies is crucial to support all groups who are marginalized or discriminated against in the YA fantasy fiction genre.

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