



What's Going on Down Under?

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

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Abstract

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

Australian Youth Literature Awards

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

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

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

Research Questions

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

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

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

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

Methods

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

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

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

Table 1. Nine Cultural Constructs with Definitions and Examples

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

Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual or Allied Community.

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

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

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

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

Findings

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

Table 2. General Characteristics of the Novels

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Disability

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

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

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

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

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

I might have raised an eyebrow. Possibly two.

"You are autistic, aren't you?"

"No," I said.

It was facsimile Penelope's turn to look puzzled.

"Then what are you?" she asked.

"I'm me," I said.^{xxii}

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

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

Table 4. Critical Incidents of Characters with PTSD

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

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

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

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

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

Gender

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

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

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

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

"Piss off," she said firmly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, it's sexual harassment. And I'm sick of it."^{xxxi}

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LGBTQIA

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

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

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

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

Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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