



Accounting for Diversity: Measuring Change in the Proportion of African American Teen Literature in the Senior High Core Collection

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Abstract

Contemporary political and social activism has drawn an increasing number of youth-serving librarians' and library workers' attention to the need to diversify library collections of material for young people. The purpose of this study is to offer a comparative historical measurement of the diversity of resources included in and recommended by the *Senior High Core Collection (SHCC)*. Subject-heading analysis was used to identify records of titles included in the *SHCC* with publication years between and including 2008 and 2018 that were described by the resource as fiction, distinguished as either "Most Highly Recommended" or "Core Collection" titles, and classified using terminology that suggests their depiction or address of Black African Americans and Black African American experiences. The study found that the number of titles cataloged with descriptors that indicate these titles' centering of Black African American protagonists do not appear to have increased in response to contemporary social justice movements. However, the proportion of these titles assigned the highest recommendation level by the *SHCC* has both historically exceeded the proportion of the same titles not cataloged with Black African American-related descriptors and has seemed to increase over time.

Introduction

Contemporary political and social activism has drawn an increasing number of youth-serving librarians' and library workers' attention to the need to diversify library collections of material

for young people. As a growing body of research attests,¹ ideologies of whiteness—a term Meredith E. Wickham and Miriam E. Sweeney draw from Richard Dyer to define as “racial ideologies that bolster the system of White supremacy by constructing White people and culture as superior, normative, and unmarked”²—have dominated and continue to dominate library collections in general and in library collections of youth literature more specifically.³ Through the exclusion of diverse perspectives and voices or the periodic highlighting of authors of color only during heritage months, library collections advance a dominant white perspective, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) whose identities aren’t represented in the collection often feel excluded and unwelcome.⁴ This lack of diversity does a disservice to all patrons, whose information seeking or reading is limited to titles that offer what Rudine Sims Bishop has called “mirrors” to a dominant culture and thus fail to account for or depict “windows” or “sliding glass doors” into “the realities of the multicultural world in which [all young people] are living.”⁵

According to a recent *School Library Journal* survey, a majority (81%) of youth-serving librarians and library workers consider collection diversity a priority; however, this same survey points out that as many as 15% of this same population find it “very difficult” or “difficult” to locate diverse material for their collections.⁶ Inspired by both a growing recognition of the necessity of diversity in collection development and in acknowledgment of the challenges that continue to plague selection, this project investigates the recent historical and contemporary recommendations of a primary selection resource for youth-serving library staff, H. W. Wilson’s *Senior High Core Collection* (henceforth, *SHCC*), to consider the ways in which collection development resources might both aid and thwart diversity initiatives. More specifically, this study aims to offer a comparative historical measurement of the diversity of resources included in and recommended by the *SHCC* that, based on their cataloging and description in this resource, are presumed to describe Black African Americans and Black African American experiences.

Literature Review

Selecting Diverse Material for Youth Library Collections

Originating in 2014, the We Need Diverse Books movement (henceforth, WNDB), later formalized and represented by the grassroots nonprofit organization of the same name, spotlighted the need for library collections that include titles that reflect and depict LGBTQIA+ people, BIPOC, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and people who identify or are identified as ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities. The nonprofit began as a hashtag and social media campaign (#WeNeedDiverseBooks) developed by teen literature authors Malinda Lo and Ellen Oh in response to the announcement of an all-white, all-male panel of youth authors for New York City's 2014 BookCon, an annual gathering of authors, publishers, commercial book buyers, and readers. The hashtag and related social media posts by Lo, Oh, teen literature author Aisha Saeed, and other figures in the youth literature community gained traction among readers, librarians, and library workers, many of whom had read author Walter Dean Myers's and author/illustrator Christopher Myers's contemporaneous (March 15, 2014) opinion essays in the *New York Times* describing, as C. Myers wrote, "the apartheid of children's literature" and asking, as W. D. Myers wrote, "Where are the people of color in children's books?"⁷ While the social media origins of the movement raised the consciousness of many library staff, WNDB's deliberate outreach to the profession stimulated libraries to expand their collections and encourage the publication of the diverse titles and authors WNDB works to foster.⁸

In 2015, as online and professional conversations inspired by WNDB were taking place, author Corinne Duyvis, a member of the original executive committee of We Need Diverse Books, offered more specific language to frame discussions about diversity in literature for young people. Interested in recommendations of books "about diverse characters written by authors of that same diverse group," Duyvis coined the hashtag #ownvoices to recommend children's literature written by authors who share a marginalized identity with their protagonists.⁹ Considered by some to be a "call to privilege the voices of those who have been traditionally marginalized in publishing,"¹⁰ the hashtag and term "OwnVoices" urges those who select and review literature for young people to consider the ways in which an author's identity and related privileges might affect—for better or for worse—their ability to render the story of one who doesn't share their identity and privilege with accuracy and authenticity.

The twenty-first-century WNDB and #ownvoices movements mark the latest peak in interest in diversity in children’s literature. In 1965 Nancy Larrick bemoaned the “all-white world of children’s books,”¹¹ carefully laying out the statistics which showed that most children’s books featured white children. While Larrick’s essay became and remains influential, it affected only temporary change and, eighteen years later, Sims Bishop (then writing as Rudine Sims) revisited the topic by asking, “What has happened to the ‘all-white’ world of children’s books?”¹² In a 1986 essay for the *New York Times*, Walter Dean Myers seemed to respond to Sims Bishop’s question, observing that, following Larrick’s essay and the interest it generated, “No sooner had all the pieces conducive to the publishing of more books on the black experience come together than they started falling apart”; cuts to library funding and cooling activism resulted in a return to the all-white status quo.¹³ The industry had seemed to be at a revolutionary point before, yet no enduring substantive change emerged.

Such a lack of meaningful change is evidenced by the documented dearth of books by and about BIPOC published annually;¹⁴ inattention to or inconsistent description of diverse literary content in professional reviews;¹⁵ and the incongruous application of often biased descriptors in library and database records describing diverse titles.¹⁶ Since 1985 the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison has been collecting statistics on diversity in youth literature publishing. These statistics have demonstrated little growth in the small proportion (typically fewer than 30%) of titles published each year and received by the CCBC that feature non-white characters and/or are written by non-white authors.¹⁷ Because not all of those titles by and about non-white people and people who identify with or are identified with marginalized groups are described in terms of their representation of diversity in professional reviews, librarians and library workers who rely on review journals to aid their selection activities may inadvertently overlook the diverse material they make it a goal to purchase.¹⁸ Those library staff members who look to print or online databases and bibliographic resources that classify material in terms of Library of Congress or Sears List of Subject Headings—controlled vocabularies that research demonstrates are subject to bias¹⁹—must rely on the cultural competence of those who describe these items and who may or may not identify racialized content in the subject headings or keywords they assign to a title. That these subject headings have been criticized for their biases presents an additional challenge to librarians and library workers searching resources that use this language to describe material.²⁰

The Senior High Core Collection

Library staff members engaged in both ongoing and retrospective collection development often turn to bibliographic resources to inform their selection decisions. One of longest-lived and enduring of such bibliographic resources is H. W. Wilson's *Senior High Core Collection* (*SHCC*), a standard catalog and one of the publisher's "Core Collections" series, first published in 1926 and updated regularly in print and continuously in its online subscription database format. Each print edition of the *SHCC* features a list of fiction and nonfiction titles recommended for young people in grades nine through twelve and labeled with one of two recommendation levels: "Most Highly Recommended" (books recommended as "priority purchase[s]" for high school libraries and public library teen collections) and "Core Collection" (books recommended for "well-rounded" high school and public library teen collections).²¹ In comparison to the most recent (2018) print edition's list of 8,200 titles, the database version of the *SHCC* houses nearly 30,000 records, including those of titles that were recommended in earlier editions of the print resource but have since been removed for reasons related to age and relevance. These "weeded" titles are still presented in the online version of the *SHCC* but designated as "Archival" recommendations.²² The online resource also includes titles it recommends as "Supplementary" purchases for libraries with large collections or that wish to develop a topic in depth.

The *SHCC* is a dynamic resource. The print version is updated every four years and, in the interim, H. W. Wilson releases annual print supplements featuring newly recommended titles. In comparison, the online version is updated weekly. These print supplements and online updates reflect the influence of a team of what the *SHCC*'s preface refers to as "experienced librarians representing public library systems and senior high libraries across the United States who also act as a committee of advisors on library policy and trends." This group of professionals nominates titles for inclusion in the *SHCC* based on their independent assessment of a given title's reception in professional review media, award status, and inclusion on "best of" lists published by professional associations and review journals. These consultants' suggestions are then evaluated for inclusion by the *SHCC* editorial staff, who use "standard library collection review criteria"—including authority, quality, usefulness/purpose, relevance, contribution, and value—to make final recommendation decisions.²³ In the case of those suggestions inspired by the recommendations of review sources, some of these criteria for nomination and selection

emerge from sources that may or may not effectively represent the diversity of each item’s literary content²⁴; and for those suggestions motivated by a work’s status as a literary award winner, the criteria tend to reproduce dominant perspectives on literary excellence.²⁵ This means that the works the *SHCC* does include and recommend may reflect the racial, ethnic, and gender biases that research identifies with other sources of literary recognition and recommendation.

In spite of—or perhaps with awareness of—the potential biases that affect professional recommendation, the “core collection” described in the *SHCC* has clearly attempted to reflect social and cultural changes over time, specifically as regards the call for greater diversity in library collections. For example, as the conversation around diversity in children’s books gained traction in 2014, the “Core Collections” series declared its intent to increase the diversity of material recommended in each of its products and updated its collection development policy to reflect this aim:

The librarians of Core Collections are committed to creating and maintaining collections that reflect the diversity of the human experience. We consider a multitude of factors when choosing a title for the Core Collections, such as the book’s critical consensus and its contribution to the breadth and depth of viewpoints present in the databases. We mitigate biases to the best of our ability by seeking out multiple opinions on books and actively staying educated on issues of diversity and representation in publishing.²⁶

This commitment is reflected in the most recent (2018) print edition of the *SHCC*, in which material described as “Classic literature” has largely been excluded. This revision was motivated in part by high school librarians, who reported that they collected the classics in accordance with local school curricula as well as in “an effort to both save space and to concentrate on recommending titles that are perhaps less well-known.”²⁷ While these “Classic literature” titles were removed from the print version of the *SHCC*, they are still included in the online version as “Supplementary” or “Archival” choices.

Describing Items in the SHCC: Sears Subject Headings

The *SHCC* primarily uses the Sears List of Subject Headings to describe the collection of recommended titles in its online database and relies on the staff of catalogers at EBSCO, its digital publisher, to assign these subject headings to each recommended title. Drawing from the

Sears guidelines, these catalogers assign subject headings to indicate the racialized, gendered, and ethnic identities of the protagonists and human subjects of the books they describe.²⁸ For example, a book set in New York and featuring an African American protagonist might be assigned a subject heading of “African Americans—New York” to indicate its protagonist as the book’s subject as well as to note the book’s setting. Sears also uses terms describing racialized, gendered, and ethnic identities as adjectives, as in the subject term “African American poets.” The terms used by Sears to describe ethnic and racial identity have changed over time and adapted to reflect more current usage. For example (and relevant to this study), in the past Sears has used the term “Negroes” to indicate books with content addressing or describing Black African Americans; this term was replaced by “Blacks” and then later by the term in current use: “African Americans.”²⁹

Research Questions

This study will describe and compare changes in the number and diversity of fiction titles described as representing or addressing Black African Americans and Black African American experiences published between 2008 and 2018 and included in the online version of the *Senior High Core Collection (SHCC)*. This period of time was chosen in an effort to document any initial effects of the We Need Diverse Books and #ownvoices movements as well as the influence of the subsequent increase in focus on diversity in publishing and library collections inspired by related contemporary social justice movements (like Black Lives Matter) on the inclusion and recommendation of material in the *SHCC*. The following questions guide this study:

- How many fiction titles recommended by the *SHCC* and published between 2008 and 2018 are described as addressing or reflecting Black African American lives and experiences?
- What levels of recommendation are assigned to fiction titles published between 2008 and 2018, described as addressing or reflecting Black African American lives and experiences, and included in the *SHCC*?

- How have the proportions of fiction titles recommended by the *SHCC* and described as addressing or reflecting Black African American lives and experiences changed since the advent of the We Need Diverse Books and #ownvoices movements?
- How many unique authors are represented in the *SHCC*'s list of recommended fiction titles published between 2008 and 2018 and described as addressing or reflecting Black African American lives and experiences?

Methods

The primary data for this project was drawn from the online *SHCC* database. Using the database's search function, one of the researchers first identified all of the records of titles included in the *SHCC* with publication years between and including 2008 and 2018 that were described by the resource as fiction and as either "Most Highly Recommended" or "Core Collection" titles. (Because literary fiction has been the most visible subject of We Need Diverse Books and #ownvoices movements, this study restricted its investigation to fiction titles.) These limiters were meant to capture the titles that had and continue to appear in the print edition of the *SHCC*, which only includes "Most Highly Recommended" and "Core Collection" titles. After scrubbing the initial list of records for duplicate titles, that researcher then identified a list of titles with records that included subject headings that have or continue to be used to describe material featuring Black African American characters and Black African American experiences (in the parlance of Sears, these subject headings are "African American," "African Americans," "Afro-American," "Blacks," or "Negroes"). Searching, identification, and classification resulted in lists of titles that reflected the following categories and that could then be sorted by publication date and author:

- "Most Highly Recommended" titles with Black African American–Related Descriptors
- "Most Highly Recommended" titles without Black African American–Related Descriptors
- "Core Collection" titles with Black African American–Related Descriptors
- "Core Collection" titles without Black African American–Related Descriptors

These lists of titles and their recommendation levels were then compared to uncover trends in inclusion over time and were examined to determine the diversity of authorship represented in each category.

Findings

Inclusion of Titles with Black African American–Related Descriptors

At the time of data collection, the online version of the *SHCC* included a total of 2,261 records of titles classified as fiction, published between 2008 and 2018, and described as either “Most Highly Recommended” or as “Core Collection” titles (table 1). Of these 2,261 records, 75 (3.32%) were cataloged with subject headings that indicated the items’ address of Black African Americans or Black African American subjects (henceforth “Black African American–Related Descriptors,” or “BAARD”) and 2,186 (96.68%) without Black African American Related–Descriptors (“No Black African American–Related Descriptors,” or “Non-BAARD”). On average (mean = 205.54; median = 209), the 2,261-record sample included 205 titles published each year between 2008 and 2018, with the smallest number of titles published in 2008 (118) and the largest number of titles published in 2013 (278). Of this number, an average (mean = 6.82; median = 6) of 6 BAARD and 198 Non-BAARD titles (mean = 198.72; median = 205) published each year were included in the sample. The smallest number of BAARD titles published each year and included in the *SHCC* was 4 (2011), and the largest number was 9 (2009, 2012, 2015, 2017). In comparison, the smallest number of Non-BAARD titles published each year and included in the *SHCC* was 110 (2008), and the largest number of Non-BAARD titles published each year was 272 (2013).

Table 1: Total BAARD and Non-BAARD Titles (2008–2018) in *SHCC* Sample

	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i> as Percentage of Total	Publication Year Minimum	Publication Year Maximum	Mean Across Publication Years	Std. Dev.	% Coefficient of Variation
BAARD	75	3.32%	4	9	6.82	1.991	29.19%
Non-BAARD	2,186	96.68%	110	272	198.72	42.370	21.32%
Total	2,261	100%	118	278	205.54	42.113	20.49%

While the standard deviations associated with the figures in the BAARD, Non-BAARD, and Total categories in table 1 suggest greater variation in the number of books published each year and added to the *SHCC* in the Non-BAARD and Total categories, an examination of the coefficient of variation—the percent of variation relative to the mean—reveals greater variation in the number of BAARD titles published each year and included in the *SHCC* (%CV = 29.19%) than among the number of Non-BAARD titles published each year (%CV = 21.32%). Consequently, the number of BAARD titles published each year and included in the *SHCC* can be seen to vary slightly more than the number of Non-BAARD titles published each year and included in the *SHCC*.

As the descriptive statistics above demonstrate, the number of BAARD titles published each year and included in the *SHCC* varied to a slightly greater extent than the number of Non-BAARD titles published each year and included in the *SHCC*. To determine whether the variation in the number of BAARD titles included in the *SHCC* was statistically significant and reflected the influence of the 2014 WNDB and #ownvoices movements and related activism, the data were divided into two categories based on publication date—Pre-WNDB (2008–2014) and Post-WNDB (2015–2018)—and then compared using an independent samples *t*-test (table 2, table 3). While a difference of 0.286 between means indicates a small increase in the average number of BAARD titles included in the *SHCC* between 2015 and 2018, this increase is not statistically significant ($t = -0.218$, $df = 9$) and does not demonstrate the influence of WNDB and allied activism on the number of BAARD titles in statistical terms.

Table 2: BAARD Titles Published 2008–2014 and 2015–2018

BAARD Titles	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	% Coefficient of Variation
2008–2014	7	6.71	1.976	29.45%
2015–2018	4	7.00	2.309	32.99%

Table 3: T-test Results Comparing 2008–2014 and 2015–2018 Means of BAARD Titles

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Confidence Level	
						Lower	Higher
2008–2014 vs. 2015–2018	-0.218	9	0.832	-0.286	1.1312	-3.253	2.682

Recommendation Levels Associated with BAARD and Non-BAARD Titles

Of the 2,261 titles in the sample, 1,661 were assigned a recommendation level of “Core Collection” (henceforth, “CC”) and 600 were assigned a recommendation level of “Most Highly Recommended” (henceforth, “MHR”) (table 4). An average (mean) of 151 titles published each year between 2008 and 2018 were assigned “CC” labels, and an average (mean) of 54.55 were assigned “MHR” descriptors. While the largest number of titles judged “CC” ($n = 211$) was published in 2013 and the largest number of “MHR” titles ($n = 83$) was published in 2017, the smallest number of “CC” titles ($n = 73$) was published in 2008 and the smallest number of “MHR” titles ($n = 40$) was published in 2010. Although the average number of titles assigned “CC” appears to vary to a greater extent than the average described as “MHR,” the coefficient of variation for each category reveals that the number of titles published each year and assigned either “CC” or “MHR” labels vary nearly identically (%CV “CC” = 25.47%; %CV “MHR” = 24.37%), suggesting that a consistent proportion of titles published each year between 2008 and 2018 was described as either “CC” or “MHR.”

Table 4: Proportion of Titles at “CC” and “MHR” Recommendation Levels

	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i> as % of Total	Publication Year Minimum	Publication Year Maximum	Mean Per Year	Std. Dev.	% Coefficient of Variation
“Core Collection” Titles	1,661	73.46%	73	211	151	38.463	25.47%
“Most Highly Recommended” Titles	600	26.54%	40	83	54.55	13.292	24.37%
Total	2,261	100%	113	294	205.55		

A comparison of the number of BAARD and Non-BAARD titles described as “CC” or “MHR” shows more variation in recommendation level between categories (table 5). Whereas the BAARD titles included nearly twice as many “CC” as “MHR” records, Non-BAARD titles featured almost three times as many “CC” as “MHR” records. The coefficient of variation demonstrates that the proportion of “CC” to “MHR” recommendations was fairly consistent among the Non-BAARD titles (%CV “CC” = 25.69%; %CV “MHR” = 24.31%); however, this same statistic indicates more variation among the number of BAARD titles described as “MHR” than “CC” (%CV “CC” = 54.45%; %CV “MHR” = 78.77%). Thus, while the proportion of Non-BAARD titles assigned “CC” or “MHR” recommendation levels varied consistently over time, the number of BAARD titles published each year and assigned either “CC” or “MHR” recommendation levels varied to a greater degree, with the most variation seen in the number of titles assigned “MHR” status.

Table 5: BAARD and Non-BAARD Recommendation Levels

BAARD Titles								
	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i> as % of Total BAARD Titles	<i>N</i> as % of Total Titles	Pub. Year Minimum	Pub. Year Maximum	Mean Per Year	Std. Dev.	% Coefficient of Variation
“Core Collection”	49	65.33%	2.17%	2	9	4.45	2.423	54.45%
“Most Highly Recommended”	26	34.66%	1.15%	0	6	2.36	1.859	78.77%
Total	75	100%	3.32%					
Non-BAARD Titles								
	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i> as % of Total Non-BAARD Titles	<i>N</i> as % of Total Titles	Pub. Year Minimum	Pub. Year Maximum	Mean Per Year	Std. Dev.	% Coefficient of Variation
“Core Collection”	1,612	73.74%	71.30%	71	206	146.55	37.647	25.69%
“Most Highly Recommended”	574	26.26%	25.38%	39	78	52.18	12.687	24.31%
Total	2,186	100%	96.68%					

The odds ratio associated with the recommendation levels assigned to titles in each category provides more information regarding the variation in recommendation levels and the differences in proportions of BAARD and Non-BAARD titles described as “CC” or “MHR.” To calculate the odds ratio (*r*), the proportions of BAARD and Non-BAARD titles assigned “MHR” status were used to determine an association between BAARD status and “MHR” assignment:

$$\hat{p}^1 = \text{Proportion of BAARD titles assigned “MHR” status}$$

$$= 0.3466$$

$$\hat{p}^2 = \text{Proportion of Non-BAARD titles assigned “MHR” status}$$

$$= 0.2626$$

$$r = \frac{\hat{p}^1}{\frac{(1-\hat{p}^1)\hat{p}^2}{1-\hat{p}^2}}$$

$$r = 1.49$$

The resulting odds ratio indicates the influence of the categorical variable (BAARD status) on the test variable (recommendation level). Specifically, BAARD titles are 1.49 times more likely to be assigned “MHR” status than Non-BAARD titles.

Because the recommendation levels of “CC” and “MHR” imply a difference in quality between “Core Collection” and “Most Highly Recommended” titles, and because this difference in quality has not been quantified by the *SHCC*, it is similarly challenging to quantify the degree to which the odds ratios differ and the effects that a title’s description as BAARD or Non-BAARD might have on its tendency to be assigned “CC” or “MHR” status. Two statistical measures, Hedges’ *g* and Cohen’s *d*, can help to determine the potential “effects” of the independent variable (BAARD status) on the dependent variable (recommendation level). To measure these effects, the data set was coded to assign each title a number that corresponded with its recommendation level (0 = “CC”; 1 = “MHR”) as well as a number that corresponded to its BAARD status (0 = Non-BAARD; 1 = BAARD). The mean recommendation levels associated with each category (BAARD [M_1] vs. Non-BAARD [M_2]) along with the mean squared error (MSE) were used to calculate Hedges’ *g*:

$$g = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{\sqrt{MSE}}$$

$$g = \frac{0.35 - .026}{\sqrt{.194}} = .20$$

The results from calculating Hedges’ *g* were then applied to the calculation of Cohen’s *d*:

$$d = g \sqrt{\frac{N}{N - 2}}$$

$$d = .20 \sqrt{\frac{2261}{2259}} = .20$$

The resulting statistic, 0.20, demonstrates that a title's BAARD status has a "small" effect,³⁰ supporting the observation that BAARD titles tended to be described as "MHR" to a greater degree than Non-BAARD titles and suggesting that individual BAARD titles were more likely than Non-BAARD titles to be assigned the "MHR" recommendation level.

The variation in the number of BAARD titles assigned "CC" and "MHR" status (table 5) prompted an exploration of this variation in the form of a comparison of the mean recommendation levels in this category prior to and following the 2014 groundswell of political activism contemporary to the founding of WNDB. Drawing from the numerically coded data described above, the mean recommendation levels assigned to BAARD books published between 2008 and 2014 (pre-WNDB) and between 2015 and 2018 (post-WNDB) were calculated (table 6). The mean recommendation levels associated with BAARD titles published pre- and post-WNDB revealed a greater variation in recommendation level assignment pre-WNDB (%CV = 71.43%) and what seemed to be an increase in the number of titles assigned "MHR" status post-WNDB. A comparison of these recommendation-level means by way of an independent samples *t*-test (table 7) indicated that the difference between the mean recommendation levels was significant at the level of $\alpha = 0.101$ (2-tailed; $t = 1.66$) with an upper-tailed measure of significance of $\alpha = 0.051$ ($t = 1.29$). While these figures suggest a weak relationship between recommendation level and the pre- or post-WNDB (2014) period in general, the level of significance associated with the upper-tailed calculation demonstrates that the proportion of "MHR" titles among the 2015–2018 subsample is significantly different from the proportion of "MHR" titles among the 2008–2014 subsample; in short, a statistically significantly greater number of titles published in 2015–2018 were assigned "MHR" recommendation levels in the *SHCC*.

Table 6. BAARD Titles and Recommendation Levels, 2008–2014 and 2015–2018

BAARD Titles	“Core Collection” N	“Most Highly Recommended” N	Mean 0 = “CC” 1 = “MHR”	Std. Dev.	% Coefficient of Variation
2008–2014	34	13	0.28	0.20	71.43%
2015–2018	15	13	0.46	0.26	56.52%
Total	49	26	0.35	0.23	65.71%

Table 7. T-test Results Comparing 2008–2014 and 2015–2018 Recommendation-Level Means of BAARD Titles

BAARD Titles	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig. (upper-tailed)	Mean difference (Pre – Post)
2015–2018	1.66	73	0.101	NA	-0.19
2008–2014	1.29	73	NA	0.051	-0.19
BAARD Titles	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig. (upper-tailed)	Mean difference (Pre – Post)

Diversity of Authors Responsible for BAARD and Non-BAARD Titles

The 2,261 records of titles published between 2008 and 2018 and included in this sample were attributed to 1,434 unique authors: 52 unique authors were responsible for the 75 titles included in the BAARD category, 1,398 unique authors were responsible for the 2,186 titles in the Non-BAARD category, and 8 authors were responsible for both BAARD and Non-BAARD titles (table 8). Of the authors responsible for BAARD titles, four were credited with more than two titles: eleven books by Walter Dean Myers, four books by Kwame Alexander, three books by Kekla Magoon, and three by Laurie Halse Anderson appeared among the “CC” and “MHR” titles described as BAARD. In comparison, 383 of the authors responsible for Non-BAARD books were credited with more than two titles. While Maggie Stiefvater was the only author responsible for the same number of titles in the Non-BAARD category as Walter Dean Myers

(11), thirteen authors responsible for Non-BAARD books were credited with six or more titles. A comparison of the proportion of authors responsible for more than two titles in either the BAARD or Non-BAARD category shows that a greater proportion of authors of BAARD titles were responsible for a larger number of BAARD books than authors of Non-BAARD titles. Whereas the percentage of Non-BAARD authors responsible for more than two titles in the category (27.40%) represents a fraction of the proportion of unique authors responsible for Non-BAARD books, the percentage of BAARD authors responsible for more than two titles in the category is proportionally greater than the representative percentage of unique BAARD authors (7.69% vs. 3.58%). This comparison—when considered beside the number of titles per unique author in each category—reveals that a smaller number of authors is responsible for a larger number of BAARD titles, and a larger number of Non-BAARD authors is responsible for a smaller number of Non-BAARD titles. Consequently, titles in the Non-BAARD category exhibited greater numeric diversity in authorship than titles in the BAARD category.

Table 8. BAARD and Non-BAARD Authors

	Unique Authors	Unique Authors Responsible for > 2 Titles	Titles per Unique Author in Each Category	Unique Authors as % of Total Number of Authors	Authors Responsible for > 2 Titles as % of Unique Authors
Of BAARD Titles	52	4	0.69	3.58%	7.69%
Of Non-BAARD Titles	1,398	383	0.64	97.42%	27.40%
Total Unique Authors (w/o repetition)	1,434				

Discussion

An examination of the proportions of titles published between 2008 and 2018; cataloged as describing Black African American people, characters, or experiences; and recommended at the “Core Collection” or “Most Highly Recommended” levels by the *Senior High Core Collection*

(*SHCC*) reveals that the resource has, in the past decade, included a consistently small proportion (3.32%) of fictional titles described in a way that suggest their centering of Black African American characters and experiences. While titles described in this way represent a minority in the *SHCC*, the proportion of titles in this subgroup that are “Most Highly Recommended” (“MHR”) is notably greater than the proportion of “MHR” titles that are not cataloged with what this study refers to as Black African American–Related Descriptors (BAARD). The BAARD titles examined in this study were 1.49 times more likely to be assigned a recommendation level of “MHR,” the highest level of recommendation given to titles by the *SHCC*. This difference in the proportion of BAARD to Non-BAARD titles in general and in the proportion of the “Most Highly Recommended” BAARD and Non-BAARD titles more specifically can be interpreted and understood in terms of what researchers and critics, drawing from Raymond Williams’s use of the term, have described as librarianship’s “selective tradition.”³¹ Williams describes the selective tradition as that process by which the contemporary culture identifies and preserves that which, in the contemporary moment, it considers valuable and representative of the past. This process is one of exclusion and dominance, writes Williams, as those charged with preserving the past may be interested in keeping certain of its artifacts alive because they “represent a genuine contribution to cultural growth” or because they can “be used in a particular way to support our own [contemporary] reasons” and values.³²

Anne Lundin has applied this idea of the selective tradition to the work of early youth services librarians, writing that these early practitioners operated within “an ideology of reading based on transcendent spiritual values of literature” and were in their practices of reviewing, recommendation, and selection not only “producing” but also “reproducing” a canon of children’s literature characterized by the “Anglophilia and Romanticism” these practitioners associated with the literature they considered of highest quality and value for young people.³³ In creating this canon, Lundin argues, these early youth services librarians reproduced the social and cultural hierarchies in which they themselves were embedded. Consequently, this canon of “best books,” point out Violet Harris and Wanda Brooks and Jonda McNair, has historically valued titles written by white authors that reflect dominant (white) and stereotypic (racist) perspectives and has traditionally excluded the works and voices of BIPOC.³⁴

A closer look at the titles and authors responsible for those BAARD books recommended by the *SHCC* demonstrates the endurance of the selective tradition that Lundin, Harris, and

Brooks and McNair identify and critique. Of the 26 BAARD titles that are recommended “most highly,” nearly half (10) are works of historical fiction. Nearly half again of these historical fiction titles (4 of 10) are described with the subject term “Slavery fiction” and are either set during the American Revolutionary War (3 of 4) or the American Civil War (1 of 4). This notable trend supports author Kekla Magoon’s assertion that “for a long time now, the publishing industry has expected books about Black people to have a certain tone, cover certain ground, and adhere to a particular narrative.”³⁵ As the *SHCC* sample suggests, historical fiction—and fiction about Black African Americans set during a time of legal slavery—represents one such “particular narrative” of presumed value. That three of the books described as “Slavery fiction” are first-person narratives related from the perspective of Black African American characters and written by white authors (Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Chains* [2008] and *Ashes* [2016]; M. T. Anderson’s *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing* [2008]) lends further credence to Magoon’s argument that “the industry positions”—and rewards, as the “MHR” designation of these titles attests—“white writers as the key to creating diversity [in literature].”³⁶ If, as Lundin, Harris, and Brooks and McNair have argued, the selective tradition not only perpetuates but also congratulates the white racial bias implicit in a white-dominant aesthetic upheld by a majority-white profession,³⁷ this influence is clearly felt in the *SHCC*’s inclusion and significantly greater valuation of literature that reflects (and, in the case of the works created by white authors, emerges from) a dominant and white perspective. This comparison demonstrates the *SHCC*’s reproduction of the lack of authorial diversity in the youth literary publishing world, a phenomenon that has been captured in the data on books by and about BIPOC published for children and teens compiled annually by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin–Madison,³⁸ and the consequent greater “apartheid of children’s literature” about which C. Myers wrote in 2014.

Study Limitations

This study’s attempt to quantify changes in patterns of recommendation and inclusion in a single but influential bibliographic resource is necessarily limited to an exploration of the number and diversity of titles and authors responsible for books described in terms that suggest their address of distinctly Black African American protagonists, lives, and experiences. This narrow focus on descriptors specific to one facet of the African diaspora means that this study has excluded titles

that haven't been cataloged with descriptors that suggest an individual title's address of the experiences of people who may identify or be identified as Black people, Black Americans, Afro-Caribbean people, Afro-Latinx people, or as people of mixed race. Additionally, this focus on titles described with terms that have been historically and are contemporarily used to indicate works that center Black African American experiences and histories means that this study does not address or capture titles describing the experiences and histories of people whose races, ethnicities, genders, and abilities contribute to and inform literary diversity writ large. As a consequence, the results of this study are not generalizable to a larger population.

Relatedly, the results of this study are limited by two assumptions. The first is the potentially erroneous assumption that the *SHCC* records that employed descriptors indicating a work's address of Black African American protagonists, lives, and experiences and that were included in the study sample represent the extent of titles included in and recommended by the *SHCC* that center on Black African American lives and experiences. The second assumption is linked to this study's use of publication dates to represent years of *SHCC* resource development activity. Although the *SHCC* develops its bibliography on a continual basis, the editorial staff's attention to weeding suggests the potential for the bibliography to grow through retrospective collection development, in which titles published in the past are newly added to a collection or bibliography. By focusing only on titles published during and between 2008 and 2018, this study assumes that the records describing these titles represent the extent of selection during this period of time.

Conclusion

This study documents and compares the number and diversity of fiction titles described as representing or addressing Black African American protagonists, lives, and experiences; published between 2008 and 2018; and included in the online version of the *Senior High Core Collection (SHCC)*. The findings highlight the paucity of titles described in terms of their address of Black African American experiences included in the *SHCC* as well as the lack of authorial diversity exhibited in these recommendations. While the number of titles cataloged with descriptors that indicate these titles' centering of Black African American protagonists do not appear to have increased in response to We Need Diverse Books, #ownvoices, and related social justice movements, it is notable that the proportion of these titles assigned the highest

recommendation level by the *SHCC* (“MHR”) has both historically exceeded the proportion of the same titles not cataloged with Black African American–related descriptors and has seemed to increase over time. Whereas this assignment of greater value (and encouragement of selection) suggests an effort on the part of the *SHCC* to promote material about Black African American experiences, the fact that these highly recommended titles tend to reproduce dominant (read: white-sanctioned) narratives is remarkable. A closer examination of the genres and subjects represented in the *SHCC* is clearly warranted and would further describe the selection and recommendation practices evident in the *SHCC* and reproduced by the librarians and library workers who rely on this source for collection development.

These conclusions have decided implications for practice. First, as this research demonstrates, teen librarians and school librarians who serve teens must realize that it is no longer enough to simply “be aware” of diversity issues in teen literary publishing. These issues extend to and shape the bibliographic resources that library staff employ to develop library collections of material for teens. Consequently, today’s librarians and library workers must regard the diversity (or lack thereof) of the sources they consult to recommend material for addition to library collections and consider how and if these sources of recommendation perpetuate or contest a singular aesthetic or a “selective tradition” that privileges the ideologies of whiteness that continue to constrain library collections.³⁹ Considering the political and social implications of collection development decisions must become an established part of professional practice. Librarians serving teens must make it a professional habit of mind to examine their own selection and recommendation practices as well as those of the tools they use in developing collections.

Notes

¹ Todd Honma, “Trippin’ Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies,” *Interactions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2005): 1–26; Shane Hand, “Transmitting Whiteness: Librarians, Children, and Race, 1900s–1930s,” *Progressive Librarian*, nos. 38/39 (2012): 34–63; Isabel Espinal, Tonia Sutherland, and Charlotte Roh, “A Holistic Approach for Inclusive Librarianship: Decentering Whiteness in Our Profession,” *Library Trends* 67, no. 1 (2018): 147–62.

² Meredith E. Wickham and Miriam E. Sweeney, “Are We Still Transmitting Whiteness? A Case Study of a Southern, Rural Library’s Youth Collections,” *Library Trends* 67, no. 1 (2018): 89–106.

³ This is not to overlook the anti-racist work of pioneering librarians Pura Belpré, Charlamae Hill Rollins, Augusta Baker, and others mentioned in Kathleen L. Horning, “Milestones for Diversity in Children’s Literature and Library Services,” *Children and Libraries* 13, no. 3 (2015), or the work of the librarians who maintained the Council on Interracial Books for Children, whose work is being digitized and collected in a project spearheaded by Nicole Cooke.

⁴ Nicole Overton, “Libraries Need Diverse Books,” *Public Libraries* 55, no. 1 (2016): 13–14; Kafi Kumasi, “Roses in the Concrete: A Critical Race Perspective on Urban Youth and School Libraries,” *Knowledge Quest* 40, no. 5 (2012): 32–38.

⁵ Rudine Sims Bishop, “Reflections on the Development of African American Children’s Literature,” *Journal of Children’s Literature* 38, no. 2 (2012): 5–13.

⁶ Kathy Ishizuka, “Can Diverse Books Save Us?” *School Library Journal* 64, no. 1 (2018): 28–33.

⁷ Christopher Myers, “The Apartheid of Children’s Literature,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2014; Walter Dean Myers, “Where Are the People of Color in Children’s Books?” *New York Times*, March 15, 2014.

⁸ Diane Patrick, “Libraries, We Need Diverse Books Share Common Goal,” *Publishers Weekly* 263, no. 12 (2016): 36–38.

⁹ Corinne Duyvis, “#OWNVOICES,” *Corinne Duyvis: Sci-Fi & Fantasy in MG & YA*, n.d., <https://www.corinneduyvis.net/ownvoices/>.

¹⁰ Thomas Crisp, Mary Napoli, Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, and Angie Zapata, “The Complexities of #OwnVoices in Children’s Literature,” *Journal of Children’s Literature* 46, no. 2 (2020): 5–7.

¹¹ Nancy Larrick, “The All-White World of Children’s Books,” *Sunday Review*, September 11, 1965, 63–65.

¹² Rudine Sims, “What Has Happened to the ‘All-White’ World of Children’s Books?” *Phi Delta Kappan* 64, no. 9 (1983): 650.

¹³ W. D. Myers, “Children’s Books: ‘I Actually Thought We Would Revolutionize the Industry,’” *New York Times Book Review*, November 9, 1986, 50.

¹⁴ Cooperative Children’s Book Center, “Books by and/or about Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (All Years),” School of Education, University of Wisconsin–Madison, October 27, 2020, <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-about-poc-fnn>.

¹⁵ Jon Ostenson, Rosie Ribeira, Rachel Wadham, and Katie Irion, “Hunky Cajuns and Gay Sextons: Diversity as Represented in Adolescent Book Reviews,” *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults* 7, no. 3 (2016): 1–15; Vicky Smith, “Unmaking the White Default,” *Kirkus Reviews*, May 4, 2016, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/news-and-features/articles/unmaking-white-default/>.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Sanford Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies: A Tract on the LC Subject Heads Concerning People* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 1993).

¹⁷ Cooperative Children's Book Center and SLJ Staff, "An Updated Look at Diversity in Children's Books," *School Library Journal*, June 19, 2019, <https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=an-updated-look-at-diversity-in-childrens-books>.

¹⁸ Ostenson, Ribeira, Wadham, and Irion, "Hunky Cajuns and Gay Sextons."

¹⁹ Antonio Backman, Chayse Sundt, and Sarah Park Dahlen, "Asian American Teen Fiction: An Urban Public Library Analysis," *Journal of Research on Libraries & Young Adults* 9, no. 1 (2018): 1–22; Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies*; Steven A. Knowlton, "Three Decades since *Prejudices and Antipathies*: A Study of Changes in the Library of Congress Subject Headings," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (June 2005): 123–45.

²⁰ See, e.g., Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies*.

²¹ Grey House Publishing, "Senior High Core Collection," H. W. Wilson, https://www.hwwilsoninprint.com/senior_core.php.

²² NoveList, "Core Collections: Collection Development Policy," EBSCO Information Services, September 26, 2014, https://www.ebscohost.com/promoMaterials/Core_Collections_Selection_Process_Recommendation_Levels.pdf.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Smith, "Unmaking the White Default."

²⁵ See, e.g., Thomas Crisp, Roberta Price Gardner, and Matheus Almeida, "The All-Heterosexual World of Children's Nonfiction: A Critical Content Analysis of LGBTQ Identities in Orbis Pictus Award Books, 1990–2017," *Children's Literature in Education* 49, no. 3 (2018): 246–63; Melanie D. Koss, Nancy J. Johnson, and Miriam Martinex, "Mapping the Diversity in Caldecott Books from 1938–2017: The Changing Topography," *Journal of Children's Literature* 44, no. 1 (2018): 4–20.

²⁶ "Core Collections: Collection Development Policy."

²⁷ "Preface," *Senior High Core Collection: Collection Development Recommendations by Librarians for Librarians*, 21st ed. (New York: H. W. Wilson, 2018), vii.

²⁸ Barbara A. Bristow, ed., *Sears List of Subject Headings*, 21st ed. (Ipswich, MA: H. W. Wilson, 2014), xxxi.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ David M. Lane, *Online Statistics Education: An Interactive Multimedia Course of Study*, Rice University, University of Houston–Clear Lake, and Tufts University, <http://onlinestatbook.com>.

³¹ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Cardigan, UK: Parthian, 2011); Anne H. Lundin, *Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature: Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 33, 34.

³² Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 74.

³³ Lundin, *Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature*, 33, 32, 34.

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³⁴ Violet Harris, “African American Children’s Literature: The First One Hundred Years,” *Journal of Negro Education* 59, no. 4 (1990): 540–55; Wanda Brooks and Jonda C. McNair, “‘But this story of mine is not unique’: A Review of Research on African American Children’s Literature,” *Review of Educational Research* 79, no. 1 (2009): 125–62.

³⁵ Kekla Magoon, “Our Modern Minstrelsy,” *Horn Book* 96, no. 3 (2020): 47.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁷ ALA Office for Research and Statistics, “2017 ALA Demographic Study,” American Library Association, 2017, <http://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/Draft%20of%20Member%20Demographics%20Survey%2001-11-2017.pdf>; Lee & Low Books, Laura Jiménez, and Betsy Beckert, “Where Is the Diversity in Publishing? The 2019 Diversity Baseline Survey Results,” *The Open Book Blog*, January 28, 2020, <https://blog.leeandlow.com/2020/01/28/2019diversitybaselinesurvey/>.

³⁸ Cooperative Children’s Book Center, “Books by and/or about Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (All Years).”

³⁹ Hand, “Transmitting Whiteness”; Wickham and Sweeney, “Are We Still Transmitting Whiteness?”