



#Ownvoices, Disruptive Platforms, and Reader Reception in Young Adult Publishing

Leonie Rutherford¹ · Katya Johanson² · Bronwyn Reddan²

Published online: 14 July 2022
© The Author(s) 2022

Abstract

The concept of #ownvoices writing has gained traction in contemporary publishing as both a genre of reader interest and a focus for debates about authors' rights to write cross-culturally. This paper examines tensions the #ownvoices movement reveals between the commissioning, publishing, and critical reception of a book, using debate about Craig Silvey's *Honeybee*, an Australian novel focalized through a young trans protagonist but written by a straight male author. Drawing on the theory of recognition, it analyzes author and publisher media interviews, social media, and literary reviews in mainstream publications, which are given context through with selected interviews with Australian publishers. Misrepresentation and appropriation are concerns for many readers, while judgements about aesthetic quality vary. Structures within the book industries limit the economic representation of diverse creators which, in turn, has implications for the diversity of experience represented in young adult fiction and its literary quality.

Keywords Australian publishing · Reviewing · Digital reception · Young adult · Own-voices

#Ownvoices and Young Adult Fiction

This paper analyzes the effects of the #ownvoices movement in the market for, and consumption of, young adult fiction through a focus on the promotional strategies and reception of Australian author Craig Silvey's recent young adult novel, *Honeybee* [1]. The hashtag #ownvoices marks a significant disruption to the relationship between the publishing company and its readers, signaling a public debate about

✉ Leonie Rutherford
leonie.rutherford@deakin.edu.au

¹ School of Communication and Creative Arts, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, Geelong, VIC 3220, Australia

² School of Communication and Creative Arts, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, Burwood, VIC 3125, Australia

an author's rights to write cross-culturally, and the rights of readers from marginalized identity groups not to be subject to limited or insensitive representation. We analyze author and publisher media interviews, social media reviews, and literary reviews in mainstream publications. Many of these reviews foreground themes of misrepresentation and appropriation of the voices of the marginalized. However, we also find that the discourse of #ownvoices is leveraged to challenge structures in the creative industries and the discursive work of book elites that appear to limit the commissioning and publishing of diverse creators. This, according to some reviewers, is a clear denial of social and economic justice which undercuts the veneer of open-minded allyship in progressive consumers, and within the industry itself. In this way, the article contributes to a growing critical interrogation of the power relations that underpin the publishing industry and are enacted through publishing processes [2, 3].

Discussion of *Honeybee's* reception is contextualized through selected, recent interviews with Australian publishers undertaken as part of a larger study on teenage reading. Between 2020 and 2021, 10 staff from eight publishing companies were interviewed about their YA list and the challenges they faced in publishing books that meet the reading appetite of young Australians. While seven of these companies were independent, Australian companies, selected because their remit included acquisition decisions, the eighth was an Australian branch of a multinational company with a strong YA list. These interviews are used to provide contemporary perspectives on the challenges and ethical issues associated with determining which YA titles to acquire for publication, based on their representation of and interest to the diverse range of young Australian readers.

Honeybee was selected as a case study because it has the hallmarks of an influential Australian cultural product: the author's prior works explore themes of discrimination and are considered suitable for study in Australian schools. Young Adult titles are often initially acquired by Australian publishers when they are seen as having a good chance of being adopted as a curriculum resource; this strategy supports sales targets in Australia's small market, where three of the four dominant companies are educational publishers [4]. Publisher J explained how this consideration sat within their ongoing professional concerns: "I keep an eye on the curriculum at all times, is a book going to be useful to support study of literature?"

As a global phenomenon playing out primarily on social media platforms, the #ownvoices movement provides voice to the political opinions of readers that intervene in and call to account their local publishing ecologies. In this light, *Honeybee* takes certain risks in writing cross-culturally about an identity group that the author does not share. The novel tells the story of "Sam/Victoria", and their achievement of an adult identity as a trans woman after a childhood marred by trauma. Their coming-of-age is aided by a series of enabling friends, most notably an elderly widower that Sam meets on a bridge as part of the mutual suicide attempt that opens the novel. Silvey's prior works have been critically successful. His second novel, *Jasper Jones* [5], won or was shortlisted for several international awards. A film adaptation was released in 2017. It was also acquired for sale in the US by Penguin Random House in 2011. Importantly, while the title character, Jasper, is an Indigenous teen, the first-person narrator is a bookish white boy. The novel does not appropriate the

Indigenous perspective though it foregrounds Jasper's discrimination. However, Silvey, a cis het man, took a more controversial route in writing *Honeybee* using the first-person voice of a trans teen. This decision ensures that the reception of *Honeybee* is firmly situated within the contested politics surrounding identity and inclusivity that has recently energized and polarized the field of YA literature and publishing internationally.

The #ownvoices movement originated on Twitter in 2015 in response to perceptions that the book industry prioritizes diverse books rather than diverse authors. Its creator, Corinne Duyvis, advocated use of the hashtag to recommend works featuring the authentic voices of diverse authors. Since that time, it has been recognized in the practices and promotional communications of the book industry, "used across the board in reviews, in editorial content, and in marketing materials to highlight when an author is writing from their personal experiences in a marginalized group" [6]. This coincides with a period of self-reflexive critical attention within Australian publishing companies. One interviewed publisher, for example, noted that their company saw young adult fiction as "the perfect place to really start making sure that all young people feel represented in fiction", but that "with that comes all sorts of sensitivities. Especially if we ourselves have not had the experiences of the characters in the book or the authors" (Publisher B). Publisher G described their awareness that their small Australian company was comprised of "mostly middle-class women", and that they were "very limited in ... our white middle-class networks".

The #ownvoices argument for authentic representation of lived experience is reserved primarily for the use of first-person narration; this is interpreted as the literary equivalence of "black-face" in the performing arts, one fraught with the risk of dangerous cultural stereotyping. However, debate has increasingly moved beyond deficiencies of representation that objectify audiences. It now includes, and even foregrounds, a new recognition of the cultural labour of writers who identify as racially-, gender-, neuro- or ability-diverse.

Theoretical Frame: Recognition and Redistribution

To frame the shifting valuation of cultural labour, the paper draws on the philosophical concept of recognition. Theories of recognition underpin "identity politics", through which marginalized groups demand recognition of aspects of self which are "neglected or demeaned by the dominant value and norm system of their society" [7]. In studies of the racialized discourse of colonialism, for example, scholars detailed how victims have suffered severe psychological harm by being depicted as inferior humans [8]. Failures of recognition, of which stereotypical characterization in literature and art are prime examples, damage subjects' relationship to their concepts of self.

Nancy Fraser, argues that to focus primarily on identity threatens the more essential project of redistribution, and that to guarantee equal participation in public life, two kinds of recognition are required [9]. Cultural respect functions to confer psychological validation, and redistribution of goods and opportunity provides a remedy for economic exploitation. This concept has been discussed in recent studies of

diversity in publishing. Booth and Narayan identify themes of “visibility” and “possibility” in the value that writers from marginalized communities attribute to their books for teenage readers, “either through the book’s literal ‘place’ in the market or through the positive representations ... of what is ‘possible’” [10].

Recognition and opportunity are clearly interdependent and cast light on #own-voices campaigns. Challenging depictions of minority identity groups, in this case non-binary gender, as flawed, or empty sites of trauma implies the need for writing that provides sensitive and *informed* representation. Such representation provides psychological recognition to readers from these and adjacent groups. Such demands, especially for those reviewers or activists who work in the literary field, are intertwined with calls for access to agency and the rewards of labour within the publishing and adjacent book industries.

The concept of recognition as representation has often been deployed in debates about traditional broadcast media and citizenship formation. Activists have historically argued that legacy media have a responsibility to enable minority groups to see themselves reflected back as part of a diverse citizenship. The ABC Charter, for example, requires it to broadcast programs that “contribute to a sense of national identity” and “reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community” [11]. The SBS Charter aims to “increase awareness of the contribution of a diversity of cultures to the continuing development of Australian society” [12]. The educative value of young adult fiction about diversity, even where the writer does not share the minority group’s identity, and where the major market is envisioned as an out-group (e.g. white, cis-gender, abled), is often used to defend such cross-written fiction. Publisher press surrounding *Honeybee* makes use of this kind of argument.

In recent decades the media and performing arts industries have introduced initiatives and structures to increase participation in creative workforces. Inclusion as producers and co-producers recognizes minority groups not just through representation but through access to economic opportunity. Examples include the ABC Television’s Indigenous unit, which has evolved to become a major producer of content, platforming Indigenous filmmakers and producers to build wider audiences [13]. It is more difficult to find examples in mainstream publishing which, in Australia, is a leaner industry. One solution internationally has been the establishment of minority and First Nations publishing ventures. Magabala Books, for example, is supported by government and philanthropic partners and develops opportunities for Indigenous creators and publishing professionals [14]. Internationally, “the publishing industry has made efforts to develop recruitment strategies and paid internship opportunities that target Black, Asian, minority ethnic and First Nations employees” [15]. However, whether the proportion of diverse authors published has increased remains unclear.

Established and newly commissioned writers have been the subjects of social media campaigns by #ownvoices readers. While some of this negative groundswell focuses on insensitivity to particular audiences, other critiques challenge the perceived appropriation of first-person perspective by a writer who does not share a minority identity [16]. While not escaping critique, *Honeybee* was not subject to widespread cultural challenge. This is partly because of astute marketing, the positioning of the book between young adult and adult readerships, and a general

rhetoric of piety expressing a kind of gratitude that the empathetic craft of a well-respected author should be trained on an under-represented identity group. Reception by trans or non-binary readers complicates this picture.

Author and Publisher Press Interviews

The marketing of *Honeybee* is carefully positioned to articulate and defuse suggestions of appropriation. An important part of publisher Allen & Unwin's strategy was to publicize Silvey's outreach to the trans community, the value of such representation for trans and non-binary readers, and the value in providing empathic education for others. Interviewed by Melanie Kembrey, Silvey's publisher, Jane Palfreyman, defends Silvey's right, as a cisgender male, to "create Sam" by citing the "moving responses" of young transgender people to the novel: "Craig has a real gift for empathy and making a reader feel part of someone's life and feelings ... that is the great power that writers have" [17].

Palfreyman's emphasis on the educative value of the novel aligns with the trend of issues-based commissioning in YA fiction, which is influenced by curriculum relevance and a sense of reader interest. She maintains that trans readers will see themselves in the book, while majority readers will find it educative and relatable. Silvey has spoken at length about his outreach to the trans community while writing the novel. This research and endorsement forms part of his legitimization strategy. Silvey says he read testimonies, researched internet forums and video confessionals, conducted interviews and worked with trans and gender non-binary support groups [17]. While Silvey stresses his sensitivity as an "ally" he defends the right of authors to leverage "characters and narrative elements that don't emerge from [their] lived experience". Cross-over writing, he says, should be judged on its "intention, process and execution" [17]. Similar talking points emerge in a *Guardian* interview with Justine Hyde, where Silvey is positioned as a thoughtful author acting in good faith who demonstrates the educative importance of the writer's art. The story's genesis in an incident in which Silvey's brother had to talk a young transgender person down from an overpass in Perth "inspired me to educate myself about the challenges this character would be facing" [18]. Hyde, a long-time library executive, is aware of the #ownvoices debate. Quoting Ernest Price, an #ownvoices writer-educator, she reframes publisher and author messaging about audience reception. Because they so rarely see themselves in books, Price says "there is a very real possibility that this book will be well-received by many young trans readers ... [but] it is taking up space that could be filled by work written by trans and gender diverse writers" [18]. Pinpointing Silvey's positioning in the Australian literary ecology as a writer whose work is marketed to both adult and young adult audiences, Hyde emphasizes the book's placement as one of "four big Australian novels being released at the sweet end of the publishing year, when shoppers are beginning to contemplate which books to give as stocking stuffers for Christmas" [18]. Significantly, all three discount department stores—Kmart, Target, Big W—stocked the book, arguably predicting it would not generate significant backlash from potential buyers.

Social Media Responses

Social media campaigns that magnify negative reviews have the potential to effect publisher's bottom lines or result in postponement or cancellation of a title [19]. A scan of reviews on *Goodreads* gives a useful overview of the range of critique produced by dedicated contributors to this online reading platform that arguably might have resulted in "cancellation" [20]. Our analysis illustrates the divide between marginalized readers hoping to recognize themselves in the book and mainstream readers' expectations for a story that provides opportunity for education and a window into the experiences of others. *Goodreads*, owned by Amazon since 2013, is not primarily a platform for selling; it allows users worldwide to make or search for book reviews and feeds into library recommendations. The average reader rating of *Honeybee* on the social cataloguing site was 4.43/5—suggesting that industry marketing discourse resonated convincingly with most contributors. As of 24 April 2021, there were 10,438 ratings for *Honeybee* and 1034 reviews. The least favourable reviews (1 star, 72 in total) raise objections to the novel on 4 major fronts: (1) *inauthenticity*, or major deficiencies in representation of the everyday reality experienced by non-binary or genderqueer persons; (2) *appropriation*, in both representational and economic justice sense; (3) *trauma mining*, or the relentless depiction of physical and psychological violence against a trans youth for entertainment purposes; (4) *failures of craft*, writing that focuses on stereotyping characters or genre tropes that are marginal to the main arc of the story.

A review of the novel by *fantine* (self-identified as a bookstore worker and a member of the LGBTQI+ community), canvasses all these critiques, starting with inauthenticity as a failure of representation born of the writer's lack of experience of his major characters' life worlds: "Has Silvey been to a drag show? does he know even one drag queen?? because I can say with confidence this shit would never happen [...] [21]. Trauma mining is a theme that appears consistently in social media reviews, as well as in reviews for mainstream news publications, as we discuss below. Liam Cross pairs this with the craft failure in terms of over-rehearsal and repetition of suffering for entertainment purposes. All the trauma is "crammed into the life of one sad 14 year old who chants a mantra of self loathing taken from the first edition of the DSM ... for no apparent reason other than the drama of it all..." [22]. *Fantine's* response is more visceral: "Silvey is a cis man writing detailed sexual, emotional and physical violence against a trans teenager ... This is where I feel the novel is harmful" [21]. Criticisms that the novel is poorly written are also common. Critiques include the poorly crafted plot, which "meanders from tragedy to tragedy like a super cut of 18 seasons of [RuPaul's Drag Race] workroom confessionals" [22]; or the "one-dimensionality" of the characterization and depiction of social milieu [21].

These gender-diverse readers berate the failure of writers and publishers (who claim the status of ally) to provide real recognition of LGBTQI+ creators through economic redistribution. They suggest a more effective political action for cis writers would be to co-author with a trans person, minimizing risk for publishers.

Instead, “Silvey is profiting off the experiences of a marginalised group and taking up space because ... there is a limited quota of LGBT+ books published by the big houses” [21]. The bad faith of the book industry and book elites is a theme that surfaces across a range of reviews, from an excoriation of the book as a “holiday release for boomers” to satire of liberal readers, who want to perform empathy and woke morality at book clubs [21, 22].

Economic recognition appears in more positive reviews as well. Mary views the book as well-intentioned but finds it “begs the question of why a cis male is succeeding whilst trans authors are overlooked” [23]. In 5-star ratings, reviewers tend to place higher value on literary elements, together with the educative value for cis-gender readers. Amanda acknowledges #ownvoices anxieties but is comforted by the author and marketing press about Silvey’s research with trans readers [24]. She has received an advanced review copy of the book, a marketing strategy designed to “build buzz” with online influencers [20]. The book’s strong relationship themes and educative potential for readers earns her rating.

Mainstream Press Literary Reviews

Reviewers for more mainstream publications often occupy a dual position in the literary market. As critics, they have a role in influencing the value of the works they review. But many, especially in Australian publishing, are also working writers. This double positioning comes with professional tensions which may make it more difficult to write “bad reviews” [25, 26]. Despite a foregrounding of literary themes and tacit alliance with the book’s promotional discourse, many literary reviewers, aware of the #ownvoices debates, carefully perform their own identity positions while deferring political judgement.

Alex Gallagher, a trans man, pens one of the most trenchant critiques of Silvey’s work. They cite the “platform[ing of] works about marginalised communities from people who don’t share that identity” within the frame of economic redistribution [27]. Gallagher offers two arguments: (1) that the authentic experience brings increased resonance and affect for gender diverse readers; and (2) that the inevitable “missteps” of cis writers come at both a psychological and political cost for readers, cementing the discourse of caricature. Gallagher explicitly rebuts the industry’s argument that, “trans narratives by high-profile cis writers are opening up the eyes of readers who otherwise wouldn’t be exposed to them”. Cis writers, in their view, lack the deep experience of difference required to create the experience of empathic identification in readers. However, the review’s most cogent critique addresses book industry structures that privilege established cis writers. Authors and publishers, in Gallagher’s view, have a responsibility to mentor and yield space to diverse creators:

[P]art of being a good ally is knowing when and how to use your platform to lift others up – there are ways of advocating for trans people that don’t require writing a book attempting to capture their experiences. Sometimes, it just means knowing how to take a step back [27].

While registering disquiet about the rights of a cis author to appropriate the space for gender diverse representation, Fiona Wright's review is structured as a "compliment sandwich". It praises Silvey's portrayal of the adolescent Sam as "acutely perceptive and imaginative", identifying the novel primarily as a coming-of-age story. It ends with a judgement of the novel as a rousing endorsement of the theme of unconventional familial love. Nevertheless, Wright leverages the experience of her lover, a trans woman, to offer a second-hand critique of Silvey's deficiencies of representation, trauma mining, and usurpation of the voice of the marginalized: "so many of the stories that exist about people like her centre on their pain and trauma and their struggle—and this is, she sometimes says, exhausting." [28] Wright avoids judging the politics of opportunity for trans creators. She offers, instead, a political reading of the strategy of the "reveal". The way in which Sam's gender identity is revealed as "something startling or surprising", she says, "feels othering or almost exploitative" [28]. Arguably the naivete is designed to avoid alienating the implied majority audience. Wright seems to gently hint that this lack of self-awareness in the character-narrator is a stumbling block in the psychology of recognition for gender diverse readers.

The last 2020 review we discuss focusses almost exclusively on failures of craft. According to Matt Saberhagen, *Honeybee* frustrates its blurb's promise of a gripping page turner, lacks a clear plot or relationship arc for its protagonist, and exhibits shallow and inconsistent characterization [29]. In narrative terms, Saberhagen's review suggests that characters are not represented with any true interiority. Trauma is related in a flat style but lacks the conceptual point-of-view necessary to convey affect and thus to create reader empathy. Where Wright sees an uplifting story of unconventional families, Saberhagen is frustrated by the apathy of its central character, arguing that *Honeybee* "lacks a discernible overarching plot or goal for Sam. While this is not atypical of real life, it leaves the reader feeling as though Sam lacks agency, subject to the desires and actions of others as they are just swept from event to event" [29]. Despite its failures, Saberhagen suggests that *Honeybee* has value as part of a citizenship education project primarily for cisgender readers and writers.

Oliver Reeson's more recent literary essay, which postdates the publicity surrounding the book's release, focusses on the pre- and immediate post-publication discursive work surrounding *Honeybee* [30]. Like Gallagher, Reeson is a trans man. Unlike them, however, Reeson pillories critics who choose the safer path of cultural critique, rather than paying meaningful attention to literary writing. Reeson shrewdly details Silvey's stilted sentence construction as "impenetrable present narration" that denies the reader access to a "nuanced, complex inner life for Sam" while readily acquainting them with Sam's traumatic past. Explicating other literary works they feel have used transness with a narrative purpose, Reeson suggests that better literature might be a catalyst for expanding the reader's understanding of gender nonconformity in "transformative" ways. Silvey, they suggest, offers "dull writing" that most Australian critics are too "bored" or too "lazy" even to question [30]. Reeson's critique of *Honeybee*'s literary merit argues that it fails the key criteria emphasized by Australian YA publishers as crucial to the commissioning of YA fiction – that books are, first and foremost, a "good story" [15].

Discussion and Conclusions

What insights can be gleaned from this analysis of reception across reviewing platforms? And what does it imply in terms of a disconnect between publishing industry and reader evaluations of quality, or the ability for marginalized readers to see themselves in books they may wish to read? The reviewer's identity position is clearly determinative in conditioning aesthetic and political response to the text and the morality of its commissioning and writing. This positioning informs not only a political stance on how well publishing serves creators and audiences, but deep disagreement on the novel's merit as an aesthetic object. One explanation for the latter can be found in the theory of standpoint aesthetics.

Standpoint Aesthetics

In Lawrence's analysis of sensitivity reading (SR) in the publishing and library science industries, standpoint aesthetics is leveraged to counter claims of censorship [31]. The theory of Feminist Standpoint Aesthetics posits that "taste – broadly speaking – our capacity to produce, appreciate, and judge aesthetic value – is deeply social [...] Social location systematically shapes ... how both art and nature are understood, appreciated, and evaluated" [32]. Evaluation of aesthetic criteria, such as quality of characterization, plausibility of plot and verisimilitude of the rendition of social settings and details, in this view, are inflected by the identity positioning of writer, publisher, and readers. Lawrence cites Mark Haddon's bestseller, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* [33], as a case in point. This mystery is narrated by its teenage protagonist, identified by Haddon in interviews, as having Asperger's syndrome. The plot centres on the mystery of the murder of a neighbour's dog. Neurotypical reviewers typically praised the depiction of the teen as true to life. However, Elizabeth Bartmess, a disability activist and neurodiverse reviewer, was categorical in her judgement that the "book portrays its autistic protagonist in ways that will give readers negative, incorrect, and in some cases abusive ideas about autistic people" [34]. She identifies dangerous stereotypes of the autistic: "as unsympathetic, elitist, violent", and lacking empathy. She argues that the book "normalizes abuse" and attaches responsibility for abuse to the "autistic protagonist" rather than those who abuse him [34]. "Privileged" reviews such as Bartmess' highlight the extent to which representational deficiencies not only impact aesthetic valuation of craft (e.g. how well-rounded a character can be seen to be by a range of readers) but the ethical imperative to ensure that marginalized groups receive "more accurate and dignity preserving" representation in literature [31]. Some SR editors have described themselves as "taking one for the team", suggesting that unexamined depictions can, in effect, land psychological blows on readers from marginalized groups.

There are to our knowledge no public statements about whether Silvey's novel was, or was not, reviewed by a sensitivity reader. However, the theory of

Standpoint Aesthetics accounts for the widely divergent appreciation of the quality of the characterization amongst readers. Where Wright sees sensitive depictions of relationships, Gallagher and *fantine* identify stereotypical and flat characters, and lack of verisimilitude. These flaws, they argue, are directly attributable to the inevitable lack of perspective on trans life available to a cisgendered male writer.

Evaluation or Promotion: The Role of Reviewers in the Publishing Economy

A different take on positionality or standpoint is articulated by scholars in publishing and evaluation studies. Reviewers are “market mediators”; their recommendations inform potential consumers about books that readers might want to buy. Based on quantitative demographic data from over 74,000 reviews in prestigious Australian reviewing journals, Alexandra Dane shows that reviews are essential to constructing literary prestige and opening up opportunity for writers in the literary field—opportunity for which identity factors such as gender affect the economics of column space and perceptions of literary value [35]. Reviews influence whether a book becomes a bestseller, makes its way onto curricula, and so on. As Phillipa Chong points out, reviewers frequently occupy more than one space in the economy of publishing. She notes that the contemporary fiction market in the US has a “switch-role structure meaning that market actors are not fixed” as novelists, but also act as reviewers [25].

In Australia too, many reviewers of fiction are themselves writing novels in the same market. Reviewers such as Wright, themselves novelists, hedge negative comments, to a greater or lesser extent, via the rhetorical structure of their reviews. The argument for visibility and economic recognition from #ownvoices reviewers often explicitly points to the compromised position of writers and commissioning actors within the system that leads to self-interested evaluation of a book’s quality and appeal to readers.

Risk Minimization in Publication and Marketing Strategies

Fiction published for a youth audience is more likely to include works that are cross-culturally written [31]. Young adult titles also run a greater risk of attracting negative social media attention for their failures of representation. Identity policing featured in the online critique of Becky Albertalli’s novels [16]. Amélie Wen Zhao’s debut fantasy novel, *Blood Heir*, is another example of an online campaign resulting in delay to the book’s release due to its perceived insensitivity to readers of colour [19]. Although the underlying risks associated with cultural appropriation are not new [36], social media platforms have lowered the threshold for participation in the literary field. They have platformed a vastly wider and perhaps more democratic range of reader responses than review columns in legacy media..

Despite the success of *Jasper Jones* as a young adult text, Allen & Unwin chose to market *Honeybee* as general fiction. The publisher’s comments, discussed above,

use tropes such as the superior insight and imagination of the author, that echo Romantic representations of artists. This rhetoric effectively attempts to position the writer outside the more mundane terrain of identity politics or “cancel culture”. Taken together, these marketing strategies predict reader discomfort with Silvey’s assumption of the trans voice, countering with a narrative that minimizes potential negative critical reception. Many of the higher star reviews on social media seem to be convinced by this positioning around the moral exceptionalism of the artist, and express trust in the due diligence of the author and the creative license that should be allowed to the writers of fiction.

Towards Economic Recognition

The aim of the current paper is not primarily to make a case for intervention in cultural policy settings. Rather it has argued that the discursive labour of the #own-voices movement has disrupted the relationship between the publishing company and its readers and, thus influenced publishing strategies. However, given the increasing call for economic redistribution evidenced by reviewer comments, it is worthwhile considering how publishers, who express a desire to be more diverse in their acquisitions could be aided by public investment. In a small market, the desire for a more generic “Australian” story with cross-over appeal to a range of demographics means that there is limited scope for turning “allyship” into positive discrimination towards marginalized identity groups. The examples cited earlier, in the cases of ABC Indigenous and SBS, demonstrate the results of public funding for Australian, First Nations, and multicultural content. These initiatives are the result of policies that invest resources in prioritizing diverse creatives, not just diverse representation – precisely the inclusive strategies that the #ownvoices movement endorses.

Acknowledgements This work was supported by The Australian Research Council under Grant LP180100258, and The Australian Copyright Agency’s Cultural Fund.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article’s Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article’s Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

1. Silvey C. Honeybee. Sydney: Allen and Unwin; 2020.

2. Johnson MJ. Digitally-social genre fiction: citizen authors and the changing power dynamics of writing in digital, social spaces. *Textual Pract.* 2020;34(3):399–417.
3. Larson C. Open networks, open books: gender, precarity and solidarity in digital publishing. *Inf Commun Soc.* 2020;23(13):1892–908.
4. IbisWorld. Book Publishing in Australia—Market Research Report. 17 July. 2021. <https://www.ibisworld.com/au/industry/book-publishing/171/>
5. Silvey C. Jasper Jones. Sydney: Allen and Unwin; 2009.
6. Vanderhage G. What is #Own Voices. *Brodart Books and Library Services*; 2019. <https://www.brodartbooks.com/newsletter/posts-in-2019>.
7. Iser M. Recognition. In: Zalta EN, editor. *The stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition). California: Metaphysics Research Lab; 2019.
8. Fanon F. *Black skin, white masks*. New York: Grove Press; 1952.
9. Fraser N. Social justice in the age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition, and participation. In: Fraser N, Honneth A, editors. *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange*. New York: Verso; 2003. p. 7–109.
10. Booth E, Narayan B. Towards diversity in young adult fiction: Australian YA Authors' publishing experiences and its implications for YA Librarians and readers' advisory services. *J Austral Library Inf Assoc.* 2018;67(3):195–211.
11. ABC. Legislative Framework. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. <https://about.abc.net.au/how-the-abc-is-run/what-guides-us/legislative-framework/>
12. SBS. SBS Charter. Special Broadcasting Services. <https://www.sbs.com.au/aboutus/sbs-charter>
13. ABC. ABC Indigenous Portal. Australian Broadcasting Corporation. <https://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/about-us/>.
14. Magabala Books. About us. <https://www.magabala.com/pages/about-us>.
15. Johanson K, Rutherford L, Reddan B. Beyond the 'good story' and sales history: where is the reader in the publishing process?. *Cultural Trends*, e-published 10 March 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2022.2045864>
16. Irankunda L. Identity policing in YA: Becky Albertalli's heartfelt coming out essay opens up an important conversation. *The Mary Sue* 2020. <https://www.themarysue.com/identity-policing-in-ya-becky-albertallis-heartfelt-coming-out-essay-opens-up-an-important-conversation/>
17. Kembrey M. Craig Silvey's new novel is bound to face intense scrutiny. He's OK with that. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 September 2020.
18. Hyde J. Craig Silvey on writing from a trans perspective: 'a novelist is required to listen, to learn'. *The Guardian*, 30 September 2020.
19. Kirsch, C. Citing social media controversy, debut author delays publication of YA novel . *Publishers Weekly* (31 Jan 2019).
20. Driscoll B. How goodreads is changing book culture. *Kill Your Darlings*; 2021. <https://www.killyourdarlings.com.au/article/how-goodreads-is-changing-book-culture/>
21. fantine. Review of Craig Silvey's *Honeybee*. In *Goodreads*; 2020. <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3414489009>
22. Cross L. Review of Craig Silvey's *Honeybee*. In *Goodreads*; 2020. <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3745533154>
23. Mary. Review of Craig Silvey's *Honeybee*. In *Goodreads*; 2020. <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3592983925>
24. Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews. Craig Silvey's *Honeybee*. In *Goodreads*; 2020. <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/3388823436>
25. Chong PK. Playing nice, being mean, and the space in between: book critics and the difficulties of writing bad reviews. In: *Moments of valuation: exploring sites of dissonance*, 133–46. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2015.
26. Stinson E. How nice is too nice? Australian book reviews and the 'compliment sandwich.' *Aust Humanit Rev.* 2016;60:108–26.
27. Gallagher A. Why should trans people trust non trans authors to lead the conversation about our identities. *The Guardian*; 2020. 16 October 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/oct/16/why-should-trans-people-trust-non-trans-authors-to-lead-the-conversation-about-our-identities>.
28. Wright F. *Honeybee* by Craig Silvey review—a tender but uncomfortable coming-of-age story. *The Guardian*, 25 September 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/sep/25/honeybee-by-craig-silvey-review-a-tender-but-uncomfortable-coming-of-age-story>

29. Saberhagen M. Honeybee by craig silvey gets 5 out of 10. Xpress Magazine, 7 October 2020. <http://xpressmag.com.au/honeybee-by-craig-silvey-gets-5-10/>.
30. Reeson O. Not who but how. *Sydney Review of Books*; 2021. Published electronically 27 April 2021. <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/silvey-honeybee/>.
31. Lawrence EE. Is sensitivity reading a form of censorship? *J Inf Ethics*. 2020;29(1):30–44.
32. Lorraine R, Brand PZ. Feminist standpoint aesthetics. In: Davies S, Higgins KM, Hopkins R, Stecker R, Cooper DE, editors. *A companion to aesthetics*. Hoboken: Wiley; 2009.
33. Haddon M. *The curious incident of the dog in the night-time*. London: Jonathan Cape; 2003.
34. Bartmess E. The curious incident of the dog in the night-time. *Disability in Kidlit*; 2015. <http://disabilityinkidlit.com/2015/04/04/review-the-curious-incident-of-the-dog-in-the-night-time-by-Mark-Haddon/>.
35. Dane A. *Gender and prestige in literature: contemporary australian book culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; 2020.
36. Knox M. The Darville made me do it. *The Sydney Morning Herald*; 2005. Published electronically 9 July 2005. <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/the-darville-made-me-do-it-20050709-gdlnkg.html>.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.