

## Say the Words: Revealing the Privilege of Silences in Children's Literature

Recently, The Diversity Baseline (2016, January 26) survey showed the overrepresentation of Whiteness is the norm in publishing; in fact this overrepresentation has been clearly identified as a problem in children's literature for years (see Bishop 1982; Nieto, 1992; Martin, 2004; Capshaw 2014). Even with all of this scholarship in the last 30 years, the White experience is so pervasive that it is seen as an unquestioned norm.

Ladson-Billings stressed the unique place reading holds in marginalized communities when she wrote literacy was "property that was traditionally owned and used by whites in the society" (2003, p. ix). The expectation for those of us who are part of mis- and under-represented communities is that we should be silent in the face of racist, sexist and homophobic representations. The act of calling attention to problematic depictions is considered rude, mean spirited, toxic and even violent. This dynamic needs to be recognized, discussed, and transformed to provide more nuanced, varied and authentic representation in the literature and scholarship.

Unsurprisingly, the majority of active, critical voices in children's and YA scholarship identify as members of marginalized communities. Social media has allowed for equal access and so marginalized voices can be heard, sometimes for the first time. In these online spaces White authors, and scholars are often depicted as victims of the vicious "culture cops" (Rosenfield, 2017, August 7) which are more often marginalized voices. This dynamic illustrates what DiAngelo (2011) referred to as White Fragility, a "state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves" (p. 1).

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963/1994) warned against the "appalling silence of the good people" (p. 259). Silence in the face of the reified norm is often considered neutral, polite, and even normal. The act of engaging this silence, calling it out, and naming it is radical and potentially transformative. Those of us who speak directly to the overrepresentation of Whiteness in children's literature do so because we do not have the privilege of silence to protect us, our families, our communities, or our cultures.

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