

Arcadia University

ScholarWorks@Arcadia

College of Global Studies Student Work

College of Global Studies

Spring 2022

The Patriarch of Publishing: How the Fiction Publishing Industry Clings to Problematic Narratives

Brynn Simon

Arcadia University, bsimon@arcadia.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/global_studies_student_work



Part of the [Social Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Simon, Brynn, "The Patriarch of Publishing: How the Fiction Publishing Industry Clings to Problematic Narratives" (2022). *College of Global Studies Student Work*. 2.

https://scholarworks.arcadia.edu/global_studies_student_work/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Global Studies at ScholarWorks@Arcadia. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Global Studies Student Work by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@Arcadia. For more information, please contact hessa@arcadia.edu, correllm@arcadia.edu.

Brynn Simon

Dr Joanna Simos

INPR 310

13 April 2022

The Patriarch of Publishing:

How the Fiction Publishing Industry Clings to Problematic Narratives

Within her secular work *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, activist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir wrote that “the oppressor would not be so strong if he did not have accomplices among the oppressed.” The use of the term “he” to describe the oppressor indicates that the metaphorical “he” is a symbol for all men. Our society can be described as a “he” due to the ways in which it most benefits cis white heterosexual men – men have society as an accomplice as it was only ever built for the progression of mankind. In one way or another, men hold a more privileged position over others within life; thus why the term “patriarchy” has frequently been used to describe the society in which we currently live. In a patriarchy, society is built upon/for a specific white cishet (cis-gendered and heterosexual) male perspective. This limits a society substantially, silencing the voices of people of color, women, and those in the LGBTQ+ community. White cishet men are rewarded within a patriarchy while all others are punished whether it be socially, financially, emotionally, or physically. The limits of the patriarchy have been enforced for millenia in government, social structures, basic human rights, and in business. While within the past centuries there have been efforts to add representation, rights, and presence of those who the patriarchy punishes, throughout the world there remains evidence of a lack of diversity within businesses. It is white cishet men that tend to be rewarded higher ranking positions, who are respected, represented, and who are praised.

Within the business of publishing fiction, the stories that are being published tend to reflect the values that are upheld within each company – often also reflecting the diversity, or lack thereof, within the business and the society said business is appealing to. Not only is the narrative of the stories that are being limited, but predominantly those who write and edit the stories as well. In the past decade publishing companies have been forced to address their lack of diversity in stories, authors, and editors. As a young lesbian who is completing an internship at a publishing company, addressing the issue of lack of diversity within the business is an extremely important and personal matter. I will be reflecting upon my personal experiences with the company that I am interning for, Paper + Ink Publishing, and will address how they, and other publishing companies, are contributing to the growth of diversity within the field of publishing, as well as the ways in which companies could better adapt to representing diversity.

The lack of diverse representation within literature has weaved throughout multiple cultures and time periods and still continues to this day. Understanding the history of silencing those who were not white cisgender men allows a deeper comprehension of the injustices diverse people faced throughout time, and how it impacts the publishing industry today. Historically, “iconic Greek poet Sappho is known not only for her ahead-of-her-time lyrical poems but also for their themes of female-centered sexuality and love. She was revered during her time, yet her works were burned during the rules of fourth century archbishop Gregory of Nazianzus and eleventh century Pope Gregory VII for their portrayals of lesbianism”(*Hachette Book Group*). Though Sappho was highly regarded within her time, once the power of the Roman Catholic church became most dominant within the vast public of ‘advanced’ society, the strict religious principles held within the organization impacted any published or unpublished works that interfered with their narrative. Similarly, it can be observed how certain countries ban certain

books due to the fact that it displays ‘unpatriotic’ or ‘immoral’ ideas which challenge the ruling members’ narrative. According to *The Nation* cultural and political publication,

Between the years 1950 and 2018, ...
95 percent of books published with major firms like Penguin Random House and Simon and Schuster were written by white people. That gap hadn’t narrowed at all in 2018—white people wrote 89 percent of books published that year. And in 2020, only 10 percent of the New York Times best-seller list were written by people of color (Ho).

When examining the two aforementioned publishing companies, the reflection of white-centric society onto white stories dominating the publishing industry spanned for more than half a century. Author Rosemarie Ho explains how “publishing is one of white stasis, where only a select few people of color are given opportunities to be published and promoted as whiteness shifts and reinforces its hegemony over the literary sphere”(Ho). The cycle of opposing diverse representation within the publishing industry and society’s dismissal of women, people of color, and those within the LGBTQ+ community lead to never changing discrimination. Should publishing companies not diversify, the long racist, sexist, and homophobic history of the industry will only repeat itself.

Within the past decade, a number of articles have been published discussing the lack of diversity within the publishing industry and therefore began to raise awareness for writers, editors, literary agents, and those who aspire to join the industry that were, and in many cases still are, discriminated against. In order to find the information that best suited my topic, I read through numerous articles and essays, and chose the secondary research that highlighted my

subject of people of color, women, and the LGBTQ+ community. Understanding others' accounts on the issue, as well as acknowledging the statistics representing diversity or a lack thereof within publishing companies allowed me to determine how such a ratio impacts the works being made available to the public. Having access to multiple databases including JSTOR has allowed me to find the most relevant evidence needed to convey the importance of my findings. In addition to secondary sources, I was able to utilize my personal experiences as a LGBTQ+ female interning within the publishing field. Compiling, then organizing such accounts and evidence aided my overall discussion in analyzing which information was vital to my argument, and which could be set aside, thus enabling me to reevaluate my conclusions and the way in which they are presented. This paper is not only a device which displays and raises awareness of such injustices, but acts as a vehicle for movements which advocate those not being recognized, represented, or respected.

In addressing first the way in which whiteness has and still governs which content is released to the public and which authors are supported, it is integral to see how portraying one white narrative does not reflect the diverse cultures and people that live within society. In her article "Arts, Media and Ethnic Inequalities," Dr Sarita Malik explains how "these predominantly white spaces inhibit ethnic minority people from participating, as they are often excluded from the knowledge and/or expected behaviors that are needed for entry"(Malik 173). Not only is it difficult to gain positions within these white dominated spaces, but it is an arduous process to possess the entry requirements for the field as they tend to lean towards those who could afford a college education and unpaid internships. On top of these demands, "ethnic minority people are required to 'act white'—to behave in a certain manner to be included and accepted into certain cultural professions"(Malik 173). The disregard for cultures other than what

is deemed “normal” (ie. those in which supports the straight cis white male) continues to neglect texts and people which truly reflect the world around us. Though society may privilege cishet white males, said group of people are not the only ones to exist within the world. To emphasize the lack of cultural diversity within publishing, one statistic demonstrates that “of the thousands of titles published in 2016 in the UK, fewer than 100 were by British authors from a non-white background”(Malik 173). The lack of diversity lies not within a scarcity of non-white voices, but resides in the rejection of diversity itself. Statistics further clarify that two years later, “the 100 top selling books of 2018 had only one British non-white author... [and that] there [was] a particular lack of ethnic minority representation among senior publishing executives”(Malik 173). The continuous lack of representation within literature and authors displays the publishing companies’ disregard for people of color while reinforcing the confines of the white patriarchal society. Despite the lack of statistical diversity growth, “the publisher Penguin Random House has set a company goal to hire and produce books that better reflect ‘social mobility, ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexuality’”(Malik 173). The goals set by the company are a step in the right direction towards providing the representation that people of color deserve. In hiring a more diverse staff and publishing more diverse authors, Penguin Random House will begin to challenge the racist objectives that have followed the mainstream publishing industry for centuries.

In addition to people of color, the inclusion of women into the publishing industry - especially in positions of power - has been a slow process. The historically male dominated industry once more has the same reputation of inequality with both women and people of color in terms of obtaining the education and skills necessary to gain entrance to the field in the first place. In order to understand the hardships that women face in joining the industry “we must

look at the processes that lead to unequal outcomes for women and men”(Bobbitt-Zeher 766). The long term repetition of discrimination reinforces the injustices women face. As the “primary causes of sex discrimination are rooted in cultural beliefs”(Bobbitt-Zeher 767), such age old motives need to be rooted out of the industry. The stereotypes and expectations held against women are toxic as they diminish the truth and uniqueness that each woman has to offer to her workplace. The majority of these stereotypes are harmful, as “employers explicitly express ideas about women's assumed traits – traits that would likely be viewed negatively in any job. In these narratives, authority figures draw on traditional stereotypes of women as unintelligent, hormonal, and overly emotional”(Bobbitt-Zeher 773). Despite being rooted in old stereotypes and false information used to justify the mistreatment of women, echoes of these beliefs still exist within the workforce and affect the day to day treatment, promotional opportunities, and hiring process of women. Another example of such mistreatment lies “in a handful of cases, employees referenced the hardships of a woman trying to be successful in a male-dominated position as the rationale for denying them opportunities”(Bobbitt-Zeher 773). The manipulation that such a phrase instills is discrimination enough to represent the field’s malpractice towards women. Making women believe that they are taking the job (that they were awarded due to their hard work) away from a man who could possibly do the job better simply due to the prejudices placed against women, is a petty tactic that attempts to hold men over women. Such male supremacy and narcissism lines the age-old confines of society as a white cishet male perspective is seen as the most valuable perspective within our society.

While tying together gender and sexuality, it can be observed that much like the white male narrative being the most respected – heterosexuality is the overwhelmingly preferred sexuality. The dismissal of the LGBTQ+ community, representation, authors, workers, and even

fictional characters takes away from any representation from the real world, and instead promotes the socially constructed and praised cis het white life. According to the Hachette Book Group, apart of France's largest publishing company, "in 2017, the American Library Association reported that half of the top ten most-challenged books in the country were contested because of their LGBTQ characters and 'sexually explicit' material"(Hachette Book Group). Despite being located in a country that prides itself on freedom of expression and freedom of speech, and existing within what some consider to be a more progressive era, books that challenged the heteronormative society were denied to the public. This lack of representation can be seen as a sign of the blatant disregard for those within the LGBTQ+ community shown by those who chose to halt the publication and/or dispersment of diverse literature.

Regarding a rise in diversity representation in the late 2010s, many questions can be raised as to what the motives are of those who just then began to include diversity for the first time. Are companies hiring more people of color, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community due to their understanding of the need for change? Or are they simply including change due to the pressure of other companies doing the same? Are they putting quality work into diversifying their company and the overall industry? Or are they proclaiming empty promises? Throughout my research and experiences I have found that it differs from company to company.

Upon entering my internship with Paper + Ink, I noticed that I was the only current intern. Due to my experience being remote with the occasional in-person meeting, I only worked with two other people - the owners of the company; Both cis white males. I was extremely nervous at first, I feared that they would give me secretary work, a job which lines up with all of the stereotypes assumed of women. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that while I only

talked to one of the men on occasion, the owner who focuses primarily on the literature aspects of the company was very kind and showed me everything I wished to know. Throughout the entire internship, I constantly feared that they would view me as a foolish girl, not a young woman determined to prove her worth. Upon analyzing my fears, I began to understand why I would fear such things, as I have seen the same situation happen countless times to other women, and I myself have even experienced it previously as well. Another thing that constantly worries me is how I sound in my emails. I myself, along with some other women, tend to use exclamation points and phrases such as: “sorry to bother you” to make our messages come across as friendlier and kind. Whereas most men tend to use a more forward and direct tone to get their message across. The female obligation to be sweet and soft-hearted has plagued myself and others for so long. We should not have to be what men want or expect us to be, especially in the workplace. Therefore, I constantly went through my emails multiple times before I sent them, and made sure that I wasn’t giving into the patriarchal norms while doing my work. It felt refreshing and productive as while I was learning new skills and completing work for my internship, I was also working on bettering myself.

Fortunately, Paper + Ink represents a wide range of representation and diversity within their works. In proofreading and editing multiple stories, I’ve noticed that publishing stories and authors from diverse, mainly underrepresented areas and cultures is the most important aspect to the company. So far, they have published works from: Japan, Russia, Egypt, Indonesia, Latvia, Lithuania, Indonesia, Georgia, Estonia, and more. They ensure that the works they are planning to publish are translated in the most preservative nature of the original language and story so that none of the work is lost or misconstrued while being rendered to english. Considering multicultural sensitivity and using the most appropriate and respectful terms when discussing the

literature, authors, and cultures are imperative to the company. In proofreading both *In Dreams: The Very Short Stories of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa* and *Emissaries* by Dean William Rudoy, I have noticed the multiple layers of diversity present within each work and will further discuss the importance of representation.

In Dreams, Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's 1914-1927 never before translated Japanese short story collection provides a unique perspective of the past. In western culture, Asian countries, cultures, and people tend to be overlooked and combined into one mass entity while there lies a multitude of diversity within each nationality and culture. *In Dreams* allows readers to see metropolitan Japan through the eyes of a Japanese man, a perspective often overlooked by stories surrounding white American or eurocentric men, and sometimes women. Titles such as *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, *Ulysses*, *The Age of Innocence*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and more dominate the conversation when discussing popular 1920s literature. In the present day, works still center around predominantly white cultures and experiences. Within the 80s there lied a culture war as the white narrative was pushed, and other works featuring diversity were deemed as "problem novels," one concept specifically "featured a Chinese-born, mathematically gifted, sixteen-year-old female protagonist confronting sexism, white racism, and, perhaps most frustratingly, [and] Chinese racism"(Stetz 45), and was denied publication. Acknowledging the limitations put on literature being published by those within the industry who comply with and aid in the persistence of a toxic white focused system. Paper + Ink not only acknowledges the past, but pulls works which did not receive the full world wide respect and appreciation that they deserve and allows access to multiple perspectives, writers, and stories. Bringing in multiple points of view from diverse perspectives is essential, as "realism, it would seem, relies just as much upon the cultural point of view of both readers and writers as it does upon any formalistic

structures or strategies that are inherent in the text”(Stetz 47). In only learning and representing one specific group of people, not only are those who are not being represented missing out on public acknowledgement and respect, but all are only learning one singular perspective, thus skewing one's understanding of the world. In telling only one perspective, only that one perspective is being represented and respected, as any other culture would be ‘othered’ in comparison to the ‘normal’ white existence. For example, it “has long been true in the American imagination, the suburbs are the visible symbol of socioeconomic success; traditionally, they have represented ‘making it,’ and they continue to play that emblematic function today for newer Americans”(Stetz 49). In purposely excluding cultures that do not align with the white patriarchal motives and experiences, publishers are aiding in the discrimination against people of color, women, and the LGBTQ+ community, as no such cultures are respected and represented within a white cisgender male society. Paper + Ink is one company that is taking steps not only towards representation of people and cultures who are ‘othered,’ but using their privilege and platform to allow diverse voices to be heard.

The second story that I proofread for Paper + Ink, *Emissaries*, highlights the perspective of author Dean William Rudoy and the challenges and joys he’s faced throughout his eventful life. The set of autobiographical short stories discusses his experiences of growing up in the 50s in America, both as a gay and Jewish man. The family stories he tells gives readers a unique insight into the culture he was surrounded with. While his family experiences and growth as a gay man is important, the primary focus of the book lies within his accounts as a counselor to troubled youths, and how they effected him as a person. The LGBTQ+ and Jewish representation along with the focus on mental health displays the importance of such communities and ailments. Understanding the lives of others - whether it be offering a new perspective to those who are not

apart of or used to such experiences, or offering an extended hand as if to say “you are not alone,” Rudoy’s writing being represented and supported by Paper + Ink assists in bringing diversity into the publishing industry.

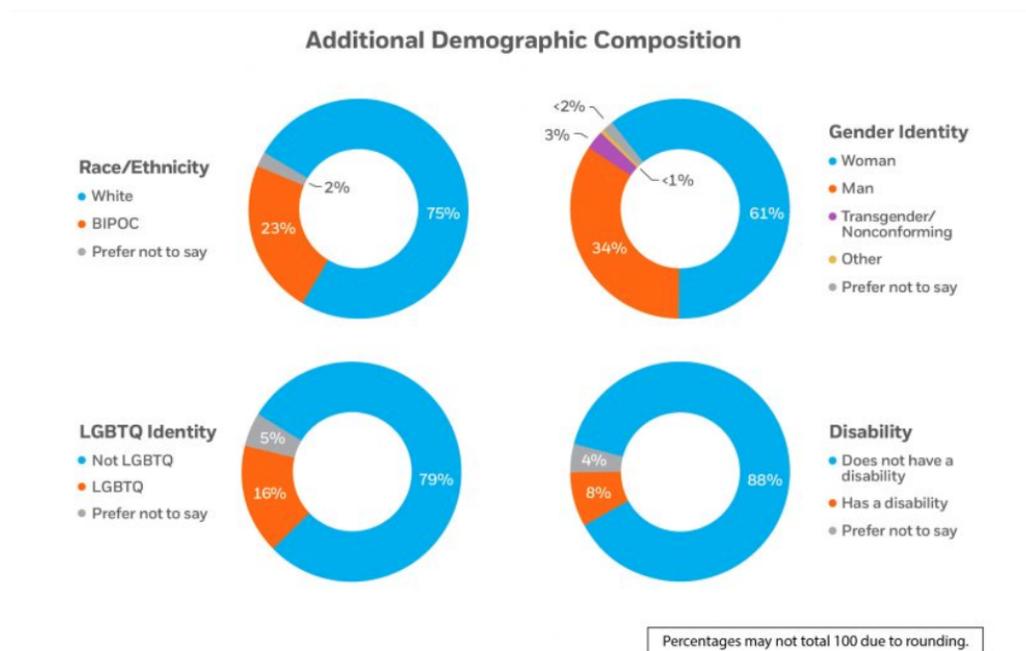
Though there are more people not being represented than those being represented within the white patriarchal publishing industry, including even a small amount of diversity aids both those who are finally being represented, as well as those who have no connection to said diversity. It is vital to the academic and social growth of children, teenagers, and adults that multiple perspectives and cultures are being represented and discussed in a respectful manner. In addition to that, “it is important to acknowledge the issue of cultural identity that they elide. How ‘young adults’ identify themselves and the community to which they belong will have much to do with their embrace of or resistance to any given story as an example of realism”(Stetz 47). Allowing people with differing cultures to feel represented is a key component to the success of the publishing industry as there is a possibility that more people will write and buy books if they felt they could openly express themselves in reading and writing. Confronting toxic stereotypes and allowing new voices to be heard will offer both a greater amount of content available, and more honest, not politically charged white washed content. Encouraging diversity in literature is important especially at a young age, as these books will be “illustrating, especially for the benefit of young white readers, that life in middle class America is, for Asian Americans, an inescapably politicized experience, filled with racially and culturally inflected dilemmas”(Stetz 47). The comprehension of the discrimination Asian Americans face, for example, could be grasped at a younger age and thus children would grow to be more understanding and knowledgeable on how toxic white privilege is.

Companies such as Paper + Ink who are traveling to find underrepresented authors, works, and cultures, translating them in the most respectful way possible, and publishing said works so that they are available to a wider audience are doing their part to ensure that there is a place for diversity within the publishing industry. In his article on language barriers within publishing, Richard B. Primack explains how “over the past few decades, the English language has come to dominate modern... literature”(Primack 290). It would seem that the majority of the most known content is coming from countries in which English is the primary language. Other nationalities and cultures are being overlooked for western cultures, as it seems that western culture is dominating other parts of the world and influencing other cultures. As a result of that, non-English speaking countries must learn English so that they do not fall behind, and can keep up with the latest findings (Primack 290). The prioritization of English over all other languages displays the lack of respect and representation that society has for all other languages, nations, and cultures - as if to say that the English speaking society is the most important in the world, and all others should adapt as so. In raising awareness of the stories and authors present in different cultures and languages, respect and appreciation is being given to the diverse groups that have been deemed ‘inferior’ by western society.

As someone who grew up reading a great deal of literature, I already had mapped out which publishing companies I wanted to research due to their large influence and presence within the bibliophile community. Despite the academic articles I researched, I found myself hoping that the publishers in which I had supported for so long would defy the statistical probability of being non-inclusive. In learning about the morals of the publishing company I interned for, it made me more curious about the morals of the larger companies, as it seems a common occurrence that the larger the company the more profit driven its intentions are. I spent

time combing through recent articles which discuss the lack of diversity within literature, and analyzed the statistics placed on a number of the companies website while noting the date they began recording such statistics and observing if they rose numerically over the years. Such information would show not only how seriously each company took the issue of lack of diversity, but would also display if any companies had been concerned about such a misjustice prior to other companies, or if it was a chain reaction of other companies' movements which influenced a transformation in policy.

In regards to the major names in the publishing industry, each differs in plans to promote more diversity and has shown more growth than others. For example, while Simon & Schuster have stated that they are working on improving multicultural representation, they have not put any statistics on their website regarding the diversity amongst writers and employees within the company. Whereas Penguin and Bloomsbury both have made public the results of diversity levels within each company. Penguin Random House's 2019 - 2021 diversity statistics display the areas in which more diversity is needed.



(Penguin).

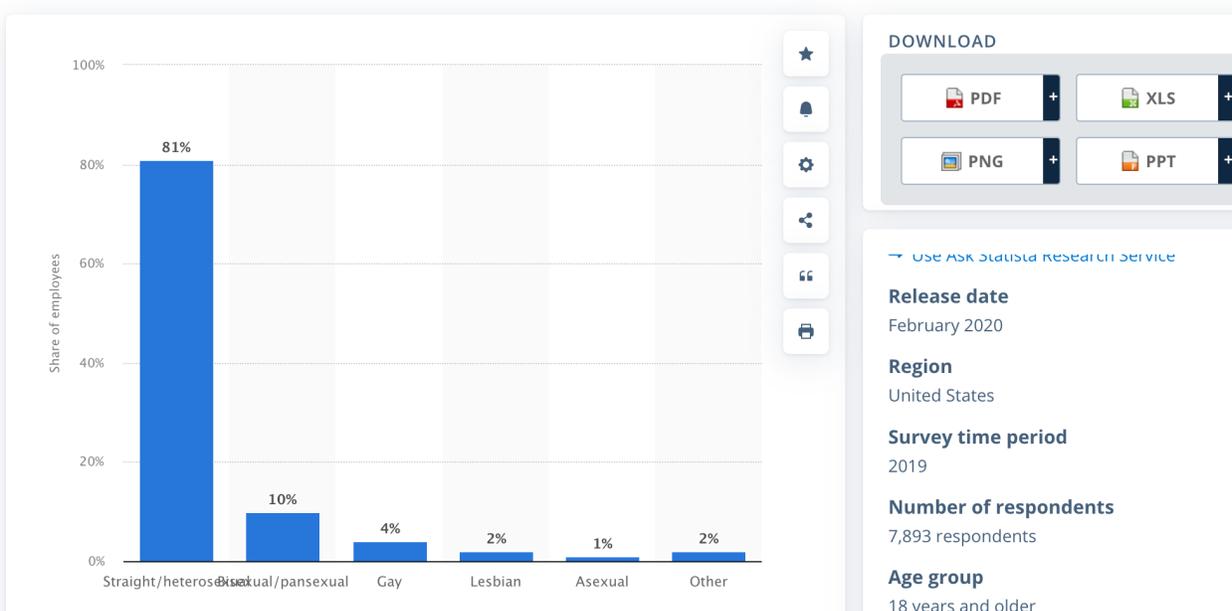
While there are more females than males within the industry, there are only around six percent of other gender identities present. Similarly, the disability to no disability ratio is eight percent to eighty eight percent. The LGBTQ+ Identity shows that seventy nine percent of their demographic are straight, leaving only ten percent to represent the diverse community.

Concerning race/ethnicity, there remains a large amount of white people to BIPOC, leaving more cultures, communities, races, and ethnicities underrepresented (Penguin). Bloomsbury also has a low percentage of ethnic minority representation recruited within the UK in 2020, at just ten percent (*Diversity*). According a study preformed by research expert Amy Watson, within US publishing industries in 2019, eighty one percent of the demographic were labeled under heterosexual or straight, while only nineteen percent - ten percent of those being bisexual or pansexual - represented other sexualities within the LGBTQ+ community.

Media > Books & Publishing

PREMIUM

Distribution of employees in the publishing industry in the United States in 2019, by sexual orientation



(Watson).

While the numbers shown across such large companies may be an improvement from the past, it is troubling that diversity remains at a low level within the influential industry that publishing is. Until the numbers are nearly equal in terms of representation of communities, gender, and race/ethnicity, an injustice is being done onto readers, writers, and workers connected to publishing companies.

Though many may be used to the lack of representation of LGBTQ+, people of color, and women, it is no way to continue making and producing content to the public. The lack of representation are therefore respect for diversities leaves writers at a disadvantage as they cannot express themselves and be heard, leaves readers at a disadvantage as they understand only one white heteronormative patriarchal narrative and grow without seeing any representation, and leaves companies themselves at a disadvantage as they pass on a multitude of new and important content and people. Dismantling the disrespect and discrimination shown to such groups of people is essential to improving the quality of life of most people, as it would not quite put white men at a disadvantage, but would take away the unjust power over others that should not have been bestowed upon them in the first place. Should companies put more emphasis on the importance of diversity, and improve representation within one's own company, the industry as a whole would benefit simultaneously as would countless individuals. Acknowledging the problematic history of lack of representation, as well as negative stereotypical representation, within writing and correcting the cishet white male oriented process in which books are written and reach the public is vital to the overall growth of literature, and the rippling effect it has on society.

Works Cited

Akutagawa, Ryūnosuke. *In Dreams: The Very Short Stories of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa*. Paper + Ink Publishing. (Not yet published).

Bobbitt-Zeher, Donna. “Gender Discrimination at Work: Connecting Gender Stereotypes, Institutional Policies, and Gender Composition of Workplace.” *Gender and Society*, vol. 25, no. 6, Sage Publications, Inc., 2011, pp. 764–86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23212199>.

Diversity and Inclusion, www.bloomsbury.com/uk/connect/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion/.

Ho, Rosemarie. “The History of Publishing Is a History of Racial Inequality.” *The Nation*, 27 May 2021, www.thenation.com/article/culture/richard-jean-so-redlining-culture-interview/.

“Important Milestones in LGBTQ Publishing.” *Hachette Book Group*, 24 June 2021, www.hachettebookgroup.com/articles/important-milestones-in-lgbtq-publishing/.

Malik, Sarita, and William Shankley. “Arts, Media and Ethnic Inequalities.” *Ethnicity and Race in the UK: State of the Nation*, edited by William Shankley et al., 1st ed., Bristol University Press, 2020, pp. 167–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv14t47tm.14>.

“Penguin Random House U.S. Publishing Programs Audit Findings: Penguin Random House.”

PenguinRandomhouse.com,

www.penguinrandomhouse.com/penguin-random-house-u-s-publishing-programs-audit-findings/.

Primack, Richard B. “Diversity: Publish Again in Another Language.” *Conservation Biology*,

vol. 15, no. 1, [Wiley, Society for Conservation Biology], 2001, pp. 290–91,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2641672>.

Rudoy, Dean William. *Emissaries*. Paper + Ink Publishing. (Not yet published).

Stetz, Margaret D. ““Chinese, Japanese, What’s the Difference?”: Lensey Namioka’s Realist

Young Adult Fiction.” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol.

41, no. 2, Midwest Modern Language Association, 2008, pp. 44–54,

<https://doi.org/10.2307/20464272>.

Watson, Amy. “Publishing Industry Employees U.S. by Sexuality.” *Statista*, 3 Dec. 2021,

www.statista.com/statistics/1218785/publishing-industry-workforce-by-sexual-orientation-us/.