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We Need Diverse Books and Independent Publishers: A Portland, Oregon, Perspective

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Graduate Research Paper
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Research Question:

"How have these four Portland-based independent publishing houses—Forest Avenue Press, Believe In Wonder, Ripple Grove Press, and Overcup Press—been affected by the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign and organization, if at all?"

Introduction

The We Need Diverse Books organization had its start on the social media platform called Twitter in April 2014 after Ellen Oh and Malinda Lo voiced frustrations about the lack of diversity in children’s literature and how that year’s BookCon planned a panel of children’s authors for their May 31 reader event composed entirely of white men. After talking about it online, and having others join in on the conversation, these two women decided to organize an event from May 1–May 3 in order to raise awareness and do something about this lack of diversity. The first tweet about this event had the #WeNeedDiverseBooks hashtag and sparked a conversation that is still happening—both online and offline—today. We Need Diverse Books is more than a social media campaign; it is a grassroots organization determined to put books with diverse characters out into the world and into the hands of children. They are advocates for diversity—in literature, in schools, and in the workplace—and they spread the word on social media, offer internships and grants for diverse students to enter the publishing world, and offer contests for diverse writers, among many other things. According to their mission statement webpage, diversity includes “LGBTQIA, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities” (We Need Diverse Books).

Diversity is important in the publishing world for many reasons, the first and foremost being that books published in the past have a distinct whiteness to them and that doesn’t reflect the world’s population. Having a diverse set of characters is especially important in the children’s book world, because all children deserve to see themselves in what they read. White children need this exposure to diversity, too, to showcase how people of other cultures live. Additionally, having diverse writers will allow these books to

be true to life and having a diverse workforce will allow these books to be showcased in mainstream publishing. This diversity is what We Need Diverse Books is pushing for.

Methodology

Getting more diverse books out into the world is a noble idea, but have publishers actually been affected by this organization? I wanted to know. In order to answer this question, I conducted email interviews with four Portland-based independent publishing houses, including Forest Avenue Press, Believe In Wonder Publishing, Ripple Grove Press, and Overcup Press. The best way to collect that data was to talk to the publishers of those houses, so I interviewed Laura Stanfill of Forest Avenue Press, Brian Parker of Believe In Wonder Publishing, Amanda Broder of Ripple Grove Press, and Patrick McDonald of Overcup Press. I will go through each publishing house one-by-one in the body of this paper and will form an overall conclusion at the end.

Forest Avenue Press

Forest Avenue Press is an independent press based in Portland, Oregon, that publishes literary fiction. Their “titles are infused with a fresh, complex, sometimes nutty, and often-wondrous approach to storytelling” (Forest Ave Press).

This press had been affected by the We Need Diverse Books organization. While Stanfill had heard of the organization and she knew what it stood for, when asked if it had altered the way she looked at manuscripts she mentioned how “diversity has been important to us since Forest Avenue Press began.” While at first blush this makes it seem like they wouldn’t be affected by the organization, it has caused them to do more in the way

of diversity, like raising awareness through social media, opening up their submission to national authors, openly asking for writers of color, and being more considerate of book covers.

Stanfill notes how it's "absolutely raised awareness, especially in children's literature, about how everybody's stories need to be told, not just certain people's stories." This is what the organization started out to do, to raise awareness and spark conversation about diversity. The organization is a call to action mirrored in many places and people, including Erlene Bishop Killeen's cry to fellow librarians, "This is your challenge! Promote the excellent titles—hold them up and explain why they won awards, why they are important, why they are the best of the best. Include a wide variety of diverse books in every setting possible" (2015, 52). This awareness raising and call to action is also seen in Mira Jacob's speech that Stanfill brings up about "diversity and the problems that exist in the industry." In this speech, Jacob urges people to support the diversity movement any way they possibly can, such as being visible in the conversation, actively doing more to support—and fight for—change, and by "treating your minority writers with the same respect as your non-minority writers" (2016). This support system is something the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign and conversation emphasized.

While Forest Avenue isn't specifically a children's book publishing company, they have done their fair share of calling others to action, too, by participating in conversations online. Forest Avenue has done this in a myriad ways, like "connecting with @writersofcolor, tweeting about Mira Jacob's speeches, putting out calls for diverse authors, sharing calls for diverse authors by presses such as Shade Mountain, retweeting articles tagged #WeNeedDiverseBooks, and sharing links on diversity in publishing"

(Stanfill 2016). This reveals how far the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign has spread, since even those not in their target audience of young-adult publishers are affected by it. And Forest Avenue is certainly not alone in this conversation; other independent publishers have joined, too, including Patoo Press, The RoadRunner Press, Tu Press, Historically Books, Just Us Books, Yali Books, and many others. One simply needs to type in #WeNeedDiverseBooks into a social media platform and thousands of hits will appear.

Concerning continuing the conversation, Stanfill specifically states, “those of us with small presses broadcast more loudly our need and want for diverse authors.” Calls to action like the Twitter event #DVPit started by literary agent Beth Phelan this year, proved just how important diversity is and showed how many agents, publishers, and writers want to broadcast their need for diversity. Phelan is a supporter of We Need Diverse Books and regularly searches for diversity as an agent, and #DVPit is a pitching event where diverse authors can pitch their stories to participating publishing professionals. Phelan started #DVPit “to showcase pitches about and especially by marginalized voices” where twenty-seven agencies, eight publishers—mainly independents—participated, and eight more publishers—including all of the Big Five—retweeted the day of the event on April 19 (2016).

These calls to action are part of the participatory culture Henry Jenkins speaks about in *Spreadable Media*, where fans are “shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing” the original work We Need Diverse Books is doing to speak about other important areas of diversity, such as marginalized voices outside of the children’s book world like Phelan did (Jenkins, et al. 2). Participatory culture is key to this movement, in fact, especially concerning the social media aspect. The #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign

sparked a larger conversation about diversity, not just in the children's book realm but in all aspects of publishing, and the participatory culture of the fans who believe in this movement continue to push it outward. This online conversation is where We Need Diverse Books began and where it will continue to live for many years to come regardless of if the organization continues to grow.

The We Need Diverse Books organization also caused Forest Avenue to open their doors to national submissions in 2014. They did this in order to reach more diverse authors, because Stanfill "wasn't getting enough color diversity when I was only open to Oregon writers." In the same vein, the organization caused her to ask for books by writers of color more openly than before and make diversity top priority in their slush pile by tagging writers of color.

These added opportunities are seen in other diverse publishers across the United States, too. This year Penguin Young Readers are teaming up with We Need Diverse Books to host a children's fiction writing contest to find diverse authors (2016). Opportunities for diversity have even branched out to independent journals and magazines. *Kweli*, a literary journal, had their second annual children's book writers' conference in 2016 honoring Walter Dean Meyers and aiming to celebrate diversity and connect writers and illustrators of color with other publishing professionals in the industry (*Kweli*). *Strange Horizons*, a magazine about speculative fiction, had an open call for submissions during a month-long celebration of queer science fiction from around the world for their "Our Queer Planet" special edition that will be published in July this year (2016).

While the *Kweli* conference and *Strange Horizons* aren't directly connected to the We Need Diverse Books organization, they're worth mentioning because they're the

product of the conversation We Need Diverse Books started. These opportunities are so focused on diversity that they show how important it's become to the publishing community as a whole, and like Forest Avenue, these companies are actively adding more opportunities for diverse authors.

Another facet Forest Avenue is considering because of the We Need Diverse Books organization is book covers. "We're designing a cover for a Filipino-American author now, and the book is set in the Philippines, so it's an issue I'm thinking about" (Stanfill 2016). She doesn't want the cover to be stereotypical, and she's certainly not the only one considering this. Karen Lotz, publisher of Candlewick Press and supporter of We Need Diverse Books, talks about book covers as well saying, "we consistently and consciously make choices to feature characters from many different backgrounds; we choose to illustrate characters of different backgrounds" (Low Feb. 2016). Additionally, this need for more diversity in book covers is shown through Mosaic Stock, the Kickstarter campaign created by Elise Marion that features stock photos of people of all races and backgrounds. Mosaic Stock wants to "change the face of book covers by providing quality stock photos to publishers, authors, and cover artists" (Marion 2015). The Kickstarter was a success, raising \$7,000 and turned the idea into a small business. Clearly fans want more diverse cover designs, and the people depicted on that cover should be something to seriously consider when creating these books. Just like We Need Diverse Books is supporting the content and the writers who pen these stories, Mosaic Stock is helping portray these stories on the covers.

Forest Avenue has worked with freelancers of color, but is always, always looking for more. One issue Stanfill brought up during the interview is the fact that "the publishing

industry is still primarily white.” This dominating whiteness in the publishing community is brought up by the other independent publishers, too, and is something we need to consider. Lee & Low created the Diversity Baseline Survey in response to the conversation sparked by We Need Diverse Books. This Diversity Baseline Survey showcased that nearly eighty percent of publishing professionals are white, heterosexual, and female (Low Jan. 2016). This is a clear issue and is one of the primary reasons why there is a shortage of diverse books out there. Quite simply, we publish what we feel most comfortable publishing—books that reflect our values and ourselves—and because so many people in the industry are white, there is a certain blindness to other cultures.

Opportunities to change this have opened up, like the Association of American Publishers partnership with the United Negro College Fund internship program specifically for African-American students (Bluestone 2016). Lee & Low also has a Diversity in Publishing internship for interns with diverse backgrounds and a partnership with the Center for the Study of Children’s Literature at Simmons College to create a scholarship for students of color so they can enroll in graduate studies (Low Feb. 2016). These opportunities will hopefully be a gateway for more diverse workers to enter the publishing world and will eventually allow more diverse books to shine through. Without the spark of We Need Diverse Books setting this diversity issue aflame and making the publishing industry question why there weren’t enough diverse books being published, this workforce issue might’ve gone unnoticed for many more years. Now, however, there are more opportunities for diverse individuals to enter the publishing field, both in the Big Five and the independents.

Overall, it's quite clear that Forest Avenue Press was affected by the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign and organization. While the organization hasn't changed Forest Avenue's already diversity-centered personal conviction, Stanfill says it's helped the company "be a bit more verbal about such issues and the efforts that are ongoing by offering me ready-made material to retweet and links to share, so I can be part of the awareness-raising." Forest Avenue is clearly part of this diversity movement.

Believe In Wonder Publishing

Believe In Wonder Publishing is a family-owned, independent publishing house based in Portland, Oregon, that specializes in youth fiction. Their focus "is to promote imagination, inspiration, and positive thinking in kids and adults alike" (Believe In Wonder).

This press has also been affected by the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign and organization. Parker instantly knew about We Need Diverse Books. He goes to their site often and follows their movements closely on social media. Like Forest Avenue, diversity has been important to their company from the beginning. Parker even says how "the books I've been creating have always been diverse in characters." However, like Forest Avenue, the organization has encouraged them to do more, such as be a multiplier on social media, realize there is a need for the books Believe In Wonder publishes and to get those books into more venues, plan to partner with other local organizations, and participate in panels about diversity.

Believe In Wonder Publishing is a multiplier for the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign. Grant McCracken uses this term—multipliers—to describe fans when they "treat the good, service, or experience as a starting point. Multipliers will build in

some of their own intelligence and imagination” (McCracken). Doing so, that is building on the original content for their audience and adding more people within their circles to the conversation, adds value to the original content. By “reposting a great deal of [We Need Diverse Books] posts on [our] Facebook page with #diversityinpublishing,” Believe In Wonder adds value to the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign (Parker 2016). The call to action aspect of the campaign cries out for this very thing, for multipliers to take the diversity idea and spread it out as far as they possibly can in order for their voices to be heard. Believe In Wonder is doing just that.

Another multiplier that Parker brings up is the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign. Eleven-year-old Marley Dias started this project-turned-social-media campaign when she grew tired over how the books she was reading didn’t feature black girls. This is a much bigger issue, though, as the Cooperative Children’s Book Center yearly analysis revealed that “fewer than 10 percent of children’s books released in 2015 had a black person as the main character” (Anderson 2016). Marley didn’t know the statistics, though, she just knew that her elementary books “were all about white boys and dogs,” wanted to do something about it, started a project to collect one thousand books with black girls as protagonists, and collected almost four thousand thus far (Anderson 2016). This is a multiplier to the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign—and is like what Believe In Wonder is doing—because #1000BlackGirlBooks is often filed with We Need Diverse Books, is brought up in numerous conversations about diversity in children’s literature, and is tagged with the organization’s hashtag. They treat We Need Diverse Books as a starting point and add this #1000BlackGirlBooks project into the mix. Additionally, it highlights how many people have noticed this lack of diversity. After all, a young girl—the same child

this organization is trying to push diversity for—is also thinking about the lack of diversity in her books and would like to help end it.

A major push for Believe In Wonder's *The Wonderous Science* series is highlighting Young Adult fiction that specifically has diverse characters within them. "As we continue to promote our book series, we are going to make sure to continue the dialog about diversity in publishing, particularly in YA books and graphic novels" (Parker 2016). This combined marketing can be seen in other publishing houses, too, like Entangled Publishing's "Meet Our Diverse Heros and Heroines this April" social media push and how they celebrated the #WeNeedDiverseBooks hashtag in April, and in the other social media pushes like the #DVPit (Suzuki 2016).

The We Need Diverse Books organization has encouraged Believe In Wonder's work and has shown them that there is a real need in the community—for minorities and as the whole—for their books. "Diversity in youth fiction helps to broaden the readers' view of the world, as well as inspire people of varying ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation, and social economic status to reach for new heights" (Parker 2016). This is true. Quite simply, diverse literature can help kids—regardless of what race, sexual orientation, or otherwise—be more aware of the diversity around them. Additionally this support for diverse books in the community can be seen in the donations We Need Diverse Books received, including a \$7,000 donation from the Picture Book Summit last year and a \$25,000 sustaining donation from the LJTJ Fund this year (2015 and 2016). Obviously, publishers, writers, and readers want and need more diverse books in the world.

This encouragement to publish diverse books can be seen in many other places as well, like in the new imprints and awards being created to meet this need. Simon &

Schuster Children's launched Salaam Reads, an imprint that focuses on Muslim characters and stories in order to fulfill the need to have children "have a book when they're growing up that they can see themselves in" (Alter 2016). Zareen Jaffery, executive editor of Simon and Schuster, acknowledges the personal connection she has to the We Need Diverse Books organization, because growing up she "didn't see myself reflected in books back then," and how "the best I can do, and encourage everyone else to do . . . is to reflect on the role you play in the book publishing process, and think on ways you can help create a more just and inclusive world" (Alter 2016). The Virginia Association for School Librarians formed a new award called the 2016 VAASL Diverse Book Award in cooperation with the We Need Diverse Books organization in order to celebrate diversity (VAASL State Book Award). These new endeavors showcase how the We Need Diverse Books organization, and the additional multipliers talking about diversity, has encouraged many different organizations to do more to meet the want and need of diverse books in their community.

The We Need Diverse Books organization has also encouraged Believe In Wonder to get their books out to new venues and how "at one time, it was thought that books feature African American characters were less desirable to readers, and that notion has been disproved" (Parker 2016). It's true; books about minorities do sell, and they do win awards. Look no further than *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson, which won the numerous awards and according to Nielsen Bookscan, sold over one hundred and twenty-two thousand books (2016). Matt de la Peña, an advisory We Need Diverse Books board member, won a 2016 Newbery Medal for *Last Stop on Market Street*, and he hopes to use his platform to raise awareness of other writers of color (Cheney-Rice 2016). *Last Stop on Market Street* has sold over forty-two thousand books thus far according to Nielsen

Bookscan (2016). The venues—independent bookstores in particular—are also doing their part to hand-sell diverse titles, including creating specialized window and book displays, making sure their newsletters are diverse, making sure the diverse sections stand out among the rest, focusing on the children instead of the parents, and suggesting diverse titles for book clubs (Rosen 2016). *We Need Diverse Books* is shining a light on these facts, and *Believe In Wonder* is pushing diverse titles out into more venues in response.

Believe In Wonder is opening their doors for submissions this year and are dedicated to finding diverse YA fiction in order to continue to support this movement. This also spurred on a partnership idea with Portland State University's book publishing program, in order "to give students a chance to intern on some awesome projects" (Parker 2016). This partnership between companies in order to create more opportunities for diversity is seen in other places, too, like the new partnership between Harlequin and *Seventeen* to form a fiction imprint named *Seventeen Fiction* from Harlequin Teen. Natashya Wilson, Harlequin Teen's executive editor, says, "we found a partner who shared our enthusiasm for championing compelling fiction featuring diverse characters" (Lodge 2016). Their first book is *Something in Between* by Melissa de la Cruz, a novel that "centers on the daughter of Filipino immigrants, who is living the American dream until she learns that her family is in the U.S. illegally and may be deported" (Lodge 2016). While this partnership isn't directly connected to *We Need Diverse Books*, it's clear they are determined to be involved with the diversity conversation in YA publishing *We Need Diverse Books* started, just like *Believe In Wonder*.

University publishers are teaming up, too, like partnership between Duke University Press, the University of Georgia Press, the University of Washington Press, and the MIT

Press to create the Diversity Fellowship Program. Inspired by the We Need Diverse Books conversation, this fellowship program aims to increase diversity in the workplace by offering apprenticeships in acquisitions departments (McLaughlin 2016). These partnerships demonstrate how far We Need Diverse Books has traveled, so much so that once separate organizations chose to combine their forces to add to this movement.

Conferences and panels are other ways that Parker participates in the diversity conversation. He was a moderator for the Diversity and Inclusion in YA and Children's Literature Transmit Culture, a guest speaker at Rose City Comic Con panel about Dystopia and YA Fiction and Diversity, and spoke to art students at Mississippi State University about entrepreneurship, which included a segment about diversity (Parker 2016). There is certainly no shortage of panels on diversity these days because of the conversation sparked by We Need Diverse Books. Their organization alone had two official panels in April, two lined up for May, and one each in June and July (We need Diverse Books).

Overall, it's quite clear that Believe In Wonder Publishing was affected by the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign and organization. Like Forest Avenue, they don't intend to change anything specific about their publishing company, but the organization did encourage them to do more with the diversity-centered books they already have.

Ripple Grove Press

Ripple Grove Press is a family-owned, independent publisher based out of Portland, Oregon, that publishes children's picture books. Their mission is to "surround ourselves

with great writers and talented illustrators to make the best and most beautiful book possible” (Ripple Grove Press).

I was a little shocked over my findings from Ripple Grove. Broder had heard about the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign, but she didn’t know what it was about specifically (although she could gather what the organization was trying to do from the name itself, which is a great reason why names of movements like this should be so descriptive). Even though they are the target publishing company, Ripple Grove hasn’t been affected by We Need Diverse Books much. “Most important for our company is the story. . . . We try to consider diversity in our books without it being a distraction or making it more important than the story. We use it when we can so it will not take away from something else” (Broder 2016). So they do look for diversity in their manuscripts, but story is more important to them. But what about diverse authors? While they “look for manuscripts that have a very broad appeal and are from a broad swath of people,” Ripple Grove doesn’t choose stories because of the author’s diversity (Broder 2016).

This is certainly an interesting perspective. Stories should be the most important factor that publishers look for in a book, how the characters are portrayed, how the plotline twists out, and if the ending is satisfactory. After all, a good book is first and foremost a good story. And this perspective certainly isn’t specific to Ripple Grove. During an interview about diversity, Zareen Jaffery of Simon and Schuster points out how during the submission stage “we acquire books because we are drawn to the writing and story” (*Story and Chia* 2014). Certainly in all publishing houses, story has to come first.

Broder makes a good point about diversity in saying that “it needs to come about slowly and thoughtfully and not pushed into creating books that aren't going to be relevant

in the future.” She’s right. Diversity shouldn’t be forced. These stories need to come out naturally and thoughtfully by writers who are diverse themselves in order to be relevant for future generations. This is why writing contests, like the Penguin Young Readers one, are so important. Having a contest specifically for diverse writers would show them support and would allow them to hone their writing skills so the stories they do submit to publishers might have a better chance at being picked up.

Ripple Grove hasn’t participated much in the online conversation concerning We Need Diverse Books. Broder says how “it’s not something we actively plan to do but we occasionally will retweet or repost articles that interest us” and “hashtags don’t get our attention so much. They come and go in a twitter feed so quickly.” This is something to consider concerning We Need Diverse Books. The organization started on Twitter as a hashtag and gained thousands of posts, retweets, and likes. The movement expanded with the help of multipliers to encompass much more than the original hashtag, and was transformed with things like #diversityinpublishing, #1000BlackGirlBooks, and #DVPit. Still, is this enough? According to Ripple Grove, maybe not.

Another issue Broder brought up is one we see across all the publishers: whiteness in the publishing industry. Ripple Grove has been affected by this, too, and even though they haven’t done much in the way of We Need Diverse Books, the lack of diversity in the workplace is an issue brought into their view because of this organization. Ripple Grove does have interns, but they “have not had any interest from anyone other than white women for our intern program” (Broder 2016). I, a white female, can attest to this as I interned for Ripple Grove for two terms. This lack of diversity is also reflected in Ooligan Press, where they get their interns, as a large portion of the students are white and female.

This lack of diversity in the workplace is a common complaint in the publishing world, but publishers, universities, and organizations are trying to change this.

Even though they haven't been affected much by the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign or organization, Ripple Grove still considers this movement a step in the right direction, that talking about it will bring about awareness and eventually change. Right now, though, they're "sticking with their original mission to bring great stories to life, no matter where they came from" (Broder 2016). Maybe their thinking will change later on, maybe not. For them, story is the most important thing, and as a fellow publishing professional and writer, I can certainly appreciate that point of view.

Overcup Press

Overcup Press is an independent publishing house based in Portland, Oregon, that specializes in art, travel, design, epicurean, and picture books. They produce "unique titles that have a strong design element and illuminate the niches" (Overcup Press).

Like Ripple Grove, I was surprised over my findings concerning We Need Diverse Books and Overcup Press. They are the least affected by the social media campaign and organization. McDonald hadn't even heard of the movement, but he did hear of a "really cool little kid who was pushing for more diverse books and it seemed like she was the spokesperson for something bigger." This little girl is none other than Marley Dias, and while Overcup had never heard of We Need Diverse Books specifically, they had heard of the multipliers of this movement. This showcases just how important multipliers can be. However, just like Broder, McDonald did admit that he could figure out what the organization stood for because of the descriptive name.

Concerning diverse manuscripts, Overcup doesn't have a slush pile and while they do consider diversity a little, McDonald says, "the quality has to come first." Overcup and Ripple Grove are connected in this way. They both need the story or the quality to stand out. Overcup also considers the marketing aspect of their books. They have to know how to market the book before they acquire it, which makes sense.

Marketing might be something hindering other publishers from taking on diverse manuscripts and is a debated topic among professionals in the industry. There is a panel during this year's BookExpo America conference hosted by the Children's Book Council specifically on "Strategies for Selling Diverse Books," and Grace Lin, an author and illustrator of children's book, posted a "Cheat Sheet for Selling Diversity" in 2014 in preparation for a We Need Diverse Books panel that people still reference today (BookExpo America and Lin). So clearly there's some chatter about how exactly to market diverse books, so if there's not a clear-cut way of doing things, perhaps not all publishers are willing to take that risk. (Although, to be fair, there really is no clear-cut way of marketing a book since each book project is different.)

Overcup doesn't participate in the social media conversation about diversity, though admittedly social media isn't "one of the hats" McDonald wears. In fact they're the least of all four publishers I interviewed to engage in the conversation. I only found one tweet in the past four months having specifically to do with diversity, with the post mentioning PubWest and Mira Jacob's speech. Considering McDonald had never heard about the movement, though, this isn't surprising.

Overall, while they aren't affected by this organization and don't participate in the social media conversation, they do understand how their manuscript and author choices

are seen in the larger picture. “If given the choice of two ms [manuscript] of equal quality and marketing potential, I would select the one that would increase the diversity of the press” (McDonald 2016). So while We Need Diverse Books doesn’t overly affect them, diversity is on their minds. However, the quality has to come first.

Conclusion

The main thing I learned in interviewing these publishers is that it’s quite rare to have not heard of We Need Diverse Books, or one of the diversity-related social media bursts or offshoots. While all four publishers know diversity is important, whether or not they were affected by the movement is really a mixed bag overall. Some publishers—like Forest Avenue and Believe In Wonder—were affected by the We Need Diverse Books movement and it caused them to do a lot more in the way of diversity, while others—like Ripple Grove and Overcup—weren’t affected by the movement that much and needed story and quality to come first.

Ripple Grove and Overcup don’t really add to the social media conversation surrounding We Need Diverse Books, and Ripple Grove even admitted that hashtags don’t usually capture their attention. I’m left to wonder, did We Need Diverse Books do enough in the way of spreading the word on social media? However, both Believe In Wonder and Forest Avenue are dedicated to the social media movement and actively do more to support it. These differing perspectives show how being affected by something really depends on the company, how something that creates such a splash in some publishing companies might just be a dribble in others.

While the data to support this would be nearly impossible to grasp without more one-on-one interviews with other publishers across the United States, perhaps more independent publishers are following the trajectory of Ripple Grove and Overcup. They might not be affected by the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign and organization. After all, there was another call to action this year. In an address to the Independent Publishers Guild conference, Elsevier Chairman YS Chi specifically said, “tomorrow's publishing industry is going to have to have a much more diverse focus than it has in the past—and I believe that independent publishers are in a uniquely strong position to lead the way” (2016). Why have another call to action if everyone is onboard? It may be that these two independent publishers point out a bigger issue in the publishing world—that not everyone is pushing for diversity as hard as they can.

However, while not all publishers are pushing for this movement, quite a lot of publishers are taking action, as seen in the many examples I gave. Here in Portland, Forest Avenue and Believe In Wonder are certainly doing their part. One other thing to consider is how this diversity conversation started by We Need Diverse Books has washed over into other worlds as well, like the education sector. LightSail, a digital library for teachers and students in the K-12 sector, is doing their part to spread the word. “We have advocated for additional diverse selections in e-book format, and also suggested that the covers of these books should reflect diversity” (Sliwerski 2014). They’ve done this in the background for quite a while but because of We Need Diverse Books, they’re speaking aloud. The We Need Diverse Books conversation has also breached the United States. Inspired by the movement, Canadian publisher Greenwood Books released a new catalogue focused on their diverse titles and launched a micro-site all about diverse books (Cerny 2016). If more

people and industries come into this conversation and add their own voices, values, and actions, this diversity movement sparked by We Need Diverse Books could keep building momentum.

Publishing is notoriously slow, so I believe it will take a long time for the industry to decide what's going to happen either way. And obviously the movement We Need Diverse Books started is much bigger than books; the movement spans generations, cultures, and opportunities outside of the publishing sphere. I can't speak for all the publishers, so I'll narrow my focus down once more to my specific independents. Here in Portland we have two on either side, two publishers affected by We Need Diverse Books and two not so much. Three out of the four concede the conversations sparked by the movement are important, and all four can agree that diversity in general is important. At the very least, We Need Diverse Books has pushed diversity into slight consideration for Ripple Grove and Overcup, and at the most, the movement encouraged a great deal more opportunities from Believe In Wonder and Forest Avenue.

Overall, though, it's quite clear that the #WeNeedDiverseBooks social media campaign and organization did something here—it pushed diversity into the minds of independent publishers where the idea might not have been before. For an organization where diversity is the foundation of their movement, this is certainly an important affect to have on the independent publishers in Portland, Oregon.

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Appendix
(Interviews with the Publishers)

LAURA STANFILL – FOREST AVENUE PRESS

Have you heard about #WeNeedDiverseBooks?

Yes.

Do you know what that organization is trying to accomplish?

Yes.

Has it affected the way you look at manuscripts?

No, because diversity has been important to us since Forest Avenue Press began; it's not something that is more important because of the campaign, although I think the campaign has absolutely raised awareness, especially in children's literature, about how everybody's stories need to be told, not just certain people's stories.

Have you published more diverse books since then?

I opened to national submissions in 2014 with a focus on reaching more diverse authors; prior to that, I was publishing only Oregon authors, and there's less diversity here than in some other places in the country. We openly ask for books by writers of color in the hopes of adding more to our list.

Have you hired more diverse staff members since then?

I don't have staff.

Do you think it has changed the publishing industry? How?

I'm not sure; the campaign started with a focus on children's lit, and that's not a world I'm familiar with. I do think there's more of a conversation going on now, and more of an urgency around finding these voices and bringing them into print, but the publishing industry is still primarily white and there are a lot more problems to address.

Do you think there is still more to change? Like what?

Absolutely. Listen to Mira Jacob's speech from

PubWest: <http://beyondthebookcast.com/we-are-not-strangers-here/>

She talks about how she was treated by a radio broadcaster while on book tour, and other related issues, and the first time she gave that speech, it was at Publishers Weekly's party in New York this fall. People talked over her. I know—I was there in the front row and could hear. But it was horrid. Here she was giving this speech about diversity and the problems that exist in the industry, and the mostly white room was completely ignoring her, except for those of us up close who could hear. The sound system was horrid, the bar had been open for a while, and the publishers were there to celebrate each other, not necessarily to listen to an author—so there were all sorts of extenuating circumstances—and yet, it made a statement. That there's still a lot to change. Mira has gone on to speak about this issue a lot, and right after the party, her speech was published in BuzzFeed,

where it went viral, so she's reaching more people now than she might have otherwise. But there's still a lot to change.

I started reporting on what people at PubWest said they were going to go home and do after hearing Mira. One started a volunteer program for inner-city youth after hearing her. Another changed his reading habits. Another started asking questions about diversity in film to his blogging audience. Those of us with small presses broadcast more loudly our need and want for diverse authors; @writersofcolor on Twitter is a great resource that I didn't know about until recently.

Book covers are also an issue—how that issue of race or identity is played and whether it's in a stereotypical way. Mira—and I think this is in the Q and A which wasn't recorded—rattled off a list of things she didn't want on her cover, like saris, elephants, spices, etc. I can't remember the whole list. She ended up with a great cover but not all authors of color have a voice in that arena and are stuck with stereotypical covers that white executives think might sell. We're designing a cover for a Filipino-American author now, and the book is set in the Philippines, so it's an issue I'm thinking about.

Have you participated in any diverse panels or workshops, in Portland, Oregon, or in any other states?

Panels that feature diverse writers or publishers? Or panels about diversity? I haven't been on a lot of panels overall so I'm probably not the best person to answer this. I usually speak solo. Of the few panels I've been on, featuring publishers in Portland, I believe we've all been Caucasian, but we're looking at about three panels total—two at Wordstock, one in Manzanita. Those are the only ones that come to mind.

Do you intend to participate in any panels or workshops about diversity?

If they're offered at a conference I'm attending, yes. I might go listen to a diversity panel if it's a one-time thing on a date when I can attend, but I probably wouldn't sign up for an hours-long diversity workshop, unless it was publishing related.

Have you added to the conversations on social media?

Yes, by connecting with @writersofcolor, tweeting about Mira Jacob's speeches, putting out calls for diverse authors, sharing calls for diverse authors by presses such as Shade Mountain, retweeting articles tagged #WeNeedDiverseBooks, and sharing links on diversity in publishing.

Do you intend to participate in the social media conversations? If so, how?

Continuing to do what I have been doing. The social media campaign hasn't impacted me as much. I was well aware of wanting to be more diverse already, and with the campaign's initial focus on children's books, I've been shouting out the message along with the others, but it hasn't changed my business practices. It's so important to get everyone's stories out there, not just certain people's stories, and that does stay true for adult literary fiction, which is what I publish. #WeNeedDiverseBooks has definitely helped raise awareness and consciousness about what is out there, and what needs to change, but it hasn't changed my personal consciousness. It has helped me be a bit more verbal about such issues and the

efforts that are ongoing by offering me ready-made material to retweet and links to share, so I can be part of the awareness-raising.

Are you considering publishing diverse manuscripts or hiring diverse people (or freelancers) in the future?

Yes; we don't hire staff but have worked with freelancers of color and are always looking to add more. Diversity is a top priority in our slush pile reading; we tag books by writers of color to give them added emphasis in the pile because we want to acquire more of them.

If you're already participating in the diversity conversation on social media, do you feel like you are making an impact to the society or your group of followers?

I'm not sure. It's so hard to measure. People do like and retweet, but they're likely the people already following the issue, and wanting to make a difference too. My followers are mostly publishing-related people, and with all the studies and data and articles lately about diversity, many of them are already well aware of the issues.

Are you considering changing anything in your particular publishing house now that you know diversity is so important?

It's been a priority from the start, as I mentioned earlier, and a big reason why I went national with submissions. I just wasn't getting enough color diversity when I was only open to Oregon writers; gender and sexuality diversity, and books about difference and otherness and people of color have all come to me fairly frequently, but books by diverse writers, not as much.

BRIAN PARKER – BELIEVE IN WONDER PUBLISHING

Have you heard about #WeNeedDiverseBooks?

Yes! I frequent the site, and follow them closely on Facebook. I also repost a great deal of their posts on my own Facebook page with #diversityinpublishing

Do you know what that organization is trying to accomplish?

They highlight work being done in the publishing industry to make books more diverse and inclusive. These highlights include book lists featuring characters of color and varying sexuality, as well as book features, and programs that promote diversity in books.

Has it affected the way you look at manuscripts?

It has encouraged the work that my company, Believe In Wonder Publishing, is doing to promote diversity in YA, kid lit, and middle reader fiction. It demonstrates that there is a real need for the kinds of books that we are working on, in not only minority communities but in the larger reading community as a whole. Diversity in youth fiction helps to broaden the readers' view of the world, as well as inspire people of varying ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation, and social economic status to reach for new heights—allowing them to write their own definitions of who they are and what they can be.

Have you published more diverse books since then?

The books I've been creating have always been diverse in characters, but it has encouraged me to make my books available in a more venues. At one time, it was thought that books feature African American characters where less desirable to readers, and that notion has been disproved. Much to the contrary, there is a real desire for imaginative stories that feature minority characters.

Have you hired more diverse staff members since then?

We're still growing a company, but our desire to make hiring diverse staff a priority.

Do you think it has changed the publishing industry? How?

I feel that issues of diversity in the publishing industry have been a problem for a long time. Readers are just starting to become more vocal about them, and increased discussion about racial discrimination and sexual identity has brought this all to the forefront.

Representation is even for crucial in the modern age, as our society begins to breakdown the static ideas of our cultural and personal identities, we look to literature to help us redefine what it means to be an individual. Characters have always been a huge part of how we define ourselves, and the new generation of readers are noticing the inequity that has existed for generations before them.

Do you think there is still more to change? Like what?

The fight is definitely ongoing. Even today, which is evident in the #1000BlackGirlBooks, representations of minorities, the LGBTQ community, and women are still far from what they should be. Progress has been made, but work still must be done, a lot of which is just breaking down old ideas that still exist in the publishing industry. We need to move beyond clichés.

Have you participated in any panels or workshops about diversity, in Portland, Oregon, or in any other states?

Yes. I was moderator for a panel conducted by Transmit Culture at Portland State. The talk was titled Diversity and Inclusion in YA and Children's Literature, and featured DongWon Song, book publicist and editor; S. Renee Mitchell, community activist, author, and speaker; and Alicia Tate, YA Librarian for Multnomah County Libraries.

In 2015, I was a guest speaker at Rose City Comic on a panel about Dystopia in YA Fiction, discussing why it has become more popular in recent years. A great deal of the discussion centered around diversity.

I also recently spoke to graduating art students at Mississippi State University and art and writing entrepreneurship, and talk a good bit about diversity in the art world.

Do you intend to participate in any panels or workshops about diversity?

I will be presenting at 2nd Star Festival this year "Things I've Learned on My Way to Wonder," a discussion on the art life and entrepreneurship.

Have you added to the conversations on social media?

I share and support a good deal of organizations that are promoting diversity, in addition to talking about it a lot. The major marketing push for my new book series, *The Wonderous Science*, is spotlighting YA fiction that has diverse casts.

Do you intend to participate in the social media conversations? If so, how?

Yes. As we continue to promote our book series, we are going to make sure to continue the dialog about diversity in publishing, particularly in YA books and graphic novels. We feel that presenting diverse perspectives and characters broadens the world view of young readers, presents them with different points of view, and gives all readers a chance to see themselves in a new light.

Are you considering publishing diverse manuscripts or hiring diverse people (or freelancers) in the future?

Yes and yes. Our company, Believe In Wonder Publishing, will be opening our doors to manuscript submissions this year, and we are dedicating ourselves to finding new and diverse voices in YA fiction. We hope to partner with Portland State University's Publishing Program to give students a chance to intern on some awesome projects.

Are you considering changing anything in your particular publishing house now that you know diversity is so important?

Not really. It has been a focus for us from the beginning, and things are just starting to ramp up for us.

AMANDA BRODER – RIPPLE GROVE PRESS

Have you heard about #WeNeedDiverseBooks?

I have heard of #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign but I don't know much about it.

Do you know what that organization is trying to accomplish?

I don't have a lot of information about it but I think I could figure out that the organization is trying to increase diversity in books with more diverse authors/illustrators and the characters they're creating.

Has it affected the way you look at manuscripts?

We try to keep in mind creating diverse characters and stories but most important for our company is the story.

Have you published more diverse books since then?

We try to consider diversity in our books without it being a distraction or making it more important than the story. We use it when we can so it will not take away from something else.

Have you hired more diverse staff members since then?

We do not have employees but our interns do not reflect a more diverse attitude. Mostly because the pool to draw from is not very diverse!

Do you think it has changed the publishing industry? How?

I do think it has changed the industry but it's a slow change. Presses are more aware of diverse audiences and the need to showcase different backgrounds.

Do you think there is still more to change? Like what?

Absolutely! There will always be a lag in diversity in books versus the population. It's a factor of who is doing the publishing, which is primarily white. I think it needs to come about slowly and thoughtfully and not pushed into creating books that aren't going to be relevant in the future. The fact that we're talking about it is the first step to creating awareness and change.

Have you participated in any diverse panels or workshops, in Portland, Oregon, or in any other states?

I went to the Transmit Culture Women in Writing and Publishing Talk at PSU.

Do you intend to participate in any panels or workshops about diversity?

Not at the present time.

Have you added to the conversations on social media?

Not really. It's not something we actively plan to do but we occasionally will retweet or repost articles that interest us.

Do you intend to participate in the social media conversations? If so, how?

Not actively. I think the thing is we use social media as an important marketing tool but hashtags don't get our attention so much. They come and go in a twitter feed so quickly. I'd like to see more workshops and article written with children's books in particular. Maybe this is old-fashioned thinking and it will change as we progress in our business but as of right now we are sticking with our original mission to bring great stories to life, no matter where they come from.

Are you considering publishing diverse manuscripts or hiring diverse people (or freelancers) in the future?

We look for manuscripts that have a very broad appeal and are from a broad swath of people but we do not actively chose manuscripts because they come from a different background. We do not have employees and have not had any interest from anyone other than white women for our intern program.

Are you considering changing anything in your particular publishing house now that you know diversity is so important?

We have not made it a main deciding factor in any of our works but we do look for ways to include diverse people and ideas in our current projects.

PATRICK MCDONALD – OVERCUP PRESS

Have you heard about #WeNeedDiverseBooks?

Yes. But maybe no. I heard a thing on NPR with this really cool little kid who was pushing for more diverse books and it seemed like she was the spokesperson for something bigger. If this isn't the same thing, you should find that segment on their website. It's relevant to your interest, I believe.

Do you know what that organization is trying to accomplish?

I'll assume it's self-evident from the name.

Has it affected the way you look at manuscripts?

We don't have an open submission policy so we don't have a slush pile. That said, when we are considering new titles, I suppose it does affect it in some way, but the quality has to come first.

Have you published more diverse books since then?

Of the seven titles that we've published (and counting our next book) we've published more women than men. Three women and two men. (One of the men has done a series of books with us). Also, one of our authors is a Japanese woman, so we have that.

Have you hired more diverse staff members since then?

My wife is the only full-time employee at Overcup. I've created a job for her.

Do you think it has changed the publishing industry? How?

I have no idea. It's quick to jump on trends but slow to change and adapt. Probably no real change at big houses, but independent publishing is where you'd likely see that change.

Do you think there is still more to change? Like what?

I'm convinced that America is changing and that the books we publish as a nation need to reflect that if they are to remain relevant cultural artifacts.

Have you participated in any panels or workshops about diversity, in Portland, Oregon, or in any other states?

I have not.

Do you intend to participate in any panels or workshops about diversity?

If asked I would consider it.

Have you added to the conversations on social media?

I don't have a large hand in our social media efforts. It's one of the hats that I don't wear.

Do you intend to participate in the social media conversations? If so, how?

Don't plan on wearing that hat anytime soon.

Are you considering publishing diverse manuscripts or hiring diverse people (or freelancers) in the future?

We've discussed it, but it really is more driven by the quality of the project first and then if we know how to market it next.

Are you considering changing anything in your particular publishing house now that you know diversity is so important?

I'm aware that it's an issue industry-wide and so I'm sensitive to how the choices we make are viewed in the larger context. If given the choice of two ms [manuscript] of equal quality and marketing potential, I would select the one that would increase the diversity of the press.