

Latia L. Ward. A Content Analysis of Major Themes in Young Adult and Middle Grades Novels Published Between 2006 to 2015 That Feature Young Undocumented Immigrants as Protagonists. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. October 2015. 98 pages.
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This paper presents a study of common themes in young adult (YA) and middle grades novels published between 2006 and 2015 that feature young, undocumented immigrant protagonists who live in the United States. The themes found in the novels include the realistic yet sometimes sanitized portrayal of the violent experiences of undocumented immigrants, the protagonists' perilous journeys to the United States, their silence over their status as undocumented immigrants, their refusal to be victims which corresponds with a demonstration of agency, their desire for and assistance in getting an education, and their development or display of a hybrid identity. Overall, the novels have happy endings even in situations in which the protagonists do not obtain United States citizenship. Although the prevalence of happy endings may not be entirely true-to-life, reading the novels may be a starting point for exploring issues relevant to undocumented immigration.

Headings:

Children's literature

Immigrants

Immigrants -- Undocumented

Young adult fiction

Young adult literature

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MAJOR THEMES IN YOUNG ADULT AND MIDDLE
GRADES NOVELS PUBLISHED BETWEEN 2006 TO 2015 THAT FEATURE
YOUNG UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS AS PROTAGONISTS

by
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Introduction

For some time, immigration has been a popular topic of discussion. Currently, undocumented immigration seems to be an even more popular topic of discussion. Children's books and young adult (YA) and middle grades novels add to the discourse. In this study, I examine the themes in YA and middle grades novels that feature undocumented immigrants as protagonists. For this paper, the definition of undocumented immigrants is adapted from the law review article entitled *Portraits of the Undocumented Immigrant: A Dialogue* (2009) by Stephen H. Legomsky, a professor at the Washington University School of Law. Undocumented immigrants are people who are not citizens of the United States and who intend to live in the United States without the permission of the United States Government. The undocumented immigrants either did not receive documents that authorize them to be in the United States or did receive documents that authorize them to be in the United States and did not leave at the time the U.S. Government required them to leave (Legomsky, 2009). Given that many undocumented immigrants have chosen to make their homes in the United States and undocumented immigration is a popular issue in the fields of politics, entertainment, the management of public libraries, and the media, an examination of the portrayal of undocumented immigrants in juvenile literature is necessary.

The Undocumented Immigrant Population in the United States

Studying the themes relevant to the portrayal of undocumented, immigrant, youth in YA and middle grades novels is important because there is a dearth of research on this

subject and there are many undocumented, immigrant, youth who live in the United States. According to the most recent statistics from the Department of Homeland Security, approximately 11.4 million undocumented immigrants were living in the United States in 2012. Forty-two percent of these undocumented immigrants entered the U.S. in the year 2000 or later. The number of undocumented immigrants reached 11.8 million, an all-time high, in 2007. Since then, the number has declined due to factors such as the recent recession in the United States and the improvement of economic conditions in Mexico. Of the undocumented immigrants who reside in the United States, the majority, just under 3 million, live in California. Ten percent of undocumented immigrants residing in the United States are under the age of 18 (Baker and Rytina, 2013). For the year 2012, the Pew Hispanic Center found that 1.4 percent of students enrolled in K-12 schools in the United States are undocumented immigrants (Passel and Cohn, 2014).

Undocumented Immigration in Current Events and the Media

The issue of undocumented immigration in the realm of politics.

In a speech on November 20, 2014, President Obama announced executive actions that he was taking regarding the situation of undocumented immigrants in the United States. These actions included expanding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program to include undocumented immigrants of any age and creating a Deferred Action for parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents program (Obama, 2014; USCIS, 2015). Deferred action allows immigrants to remain in the United States for a period of time as long as they meet certain requirements set by the federal government (Obama, 2014). Due to federal court order, U.S. Citizenship and

Immigration Services has temporarily refrained from implementing the executive actions (USCIS, 2015).

As the United States enters a presidential election year, many people want to know each presidential candidate's stance on immigration. The stance on immigration of each presidential candidate and the broader issues of immigration policy are beyond the scope of this paper, however candidates have made headlines for the immigration policies that they advocate. Hillary Clinton, a Democratic presidential candidate advocates making a pathway to citizenship for law-abiding, undocumented immigrants who are contributing to American society. In a video entitled *Sueños* placed on her official website, Clinton focuses especially on undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as young children and the contributions that they could make (Hillary for America, 2015). In contrast, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's plan regarding immigration, which includes building a wall along the United States – Mexico border, and ending birthright citizenship has been characterized as “impractical at best, and at worst inhumane” (Donald J. Trump for President, Inc., n.d.; Reyes, 2015). The fact that both candidates are advocating for policies that impact immigrants, especially young immigrants, shows how the experiences of immigrants are at the forefront of the political landscape.

The issue of undocumented immigration as portrayed in films.

Through movies, producers, directors, and actors have told the stories of undocumented immigrants. *El Norte* (1983), a film directed by Gregory Nava, portrays a young brother and sister who flee political persecution in war-torn Guatemala for a better life in the United States, all the while hoping to one day make enough money to return to

Guatemala. *Bread and Roses* (2000), a film directed by Ken Loach, portrays a young, undocumented woman who leaves Mexico to reunite with her sister in the United States. *A Better Life* (2011), a film directed by Chris Weitz¹, tells the story of the struggles of an undocumented man to find and maintain steady employment while raising his teenage son who was born in the United States. Although teenagers were not the primary audience for these movies, the movies told the stories of young people who faced hardships as undocumented immigrants in the United States.

How one public library faced the issue of undocumented immigration.

Immigration, and the issues that surround it polarize communities and public libraries sometimes get caught in the cross hairs. It's an established principle of library science that librarians should build a public library collection around what the community wants and needs. However, the boards governing some public libraries and the communities surrounding them fear attracting and serving undocumented immigrants through the acquisition of Spanish language materials. Quesada noted that this fear which leads to the exclusion of Spanish language materials from the collection curtails the free access to information of Spanish language speakers who legally reside in the United States (2007). Quesada cited the situation in Gwinnett County, Georgia as a case in point. The library director of the Gwinnett County Public Library was terminated amid the board's concerns that the library's policy of acquiring Spanish language materials would attract undocumented immigrants to the library. Georgia had recently experienced an upsurge in its undocumented immigrant population (Quesada, 2007).

Stories of undocumented immigrants and media attention

Harrowing stories of the journeys that undocumented immigrants make get the most attention from the media. In 2001, the deaths of 14 undocumented immigrant men and teenagers from Mexico garnered national attention. They had died while travelling along a stretch of the Arizona desert known as The Devil's Highway. The dead were part of a larger migrant group which totaled 26 and was known as the Wellton 26, so named after the United States Customs and Border Patrol Station in Wellton, Arizona which was near their path (Scott, 2004). The writer Luis Alberto Urrea penned a narrative account of their journey entitled *The Devil's Highway: A True Story*. *The Devil's Highway* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction in 2005 (Urrea, 2014).

The Issue of Immigration in Literature for Young People

Immigration is not a new theme in young adult and middle grades novels. For over 30 years, authors have been writing stories about immigrants and their experiences with an audience of young people in mind.² In 1975, *Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep was the first YA novel about immigrants to be published (Brown, 2011). Since at least the 1980s, authors have been writing about protagonists who are undocumented immigrants to the United States in stories such as *Lupita Mañana* by Patricia Beatty and *The Crossing* (1987) by Gary Paulsen.

Undocumented Immigrants in Literature for Young People: Problem Novel or Adventure Story?

YA and middle grades novels that feature undocumented immigrants as protagonists are examples of the new type of problem novel. English professors and authors of the text book *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, Allen Pace Nilsen, James

Blasingame, Kenneth L. Donelson, and Don L. F. Nilsen, define the problem novel as a story in which “the problems are severe enough to be the main feature of the story” (Nilsen et al, 2013, p. 112). Moreover, the authors of *Literature for Today’s Young Adults* assert that the original YA problem novel includes homogenous characters, takes place in the suburbs, is written in standard English, and is “written in the comic and romantic modes” (Nilsen et al, 2013, pp. 115-116). The new YA problem novel differs from the original in four ways. First, the novels have diverse protagonists. Second, the novels take place in “harsh and difficult places.” Third, the novels include not only the common vernacular, but also profanity. Fourth, the novels “are written in the ironic or tragic modes” (Nilsen et al, 2013, pp. 115-116).

Other scholars have characterized YA and middle grades novels that feature immigrants as “border crossings” and “adventure stories” (Brown, 2011, p. 17; Cummins, 2012, p. 66). In characterizing these novels as “border crossings,” Brown notes that not all the protagonists in novels about immigration journeys are mature enough for the novels to be considered typical coming-of-age stories or bildungsromans (2011, p. 17). In her study of novels that feature undocumented immigrants from Mexico to the United States, Cummins asserts that, “YA novels about undocumented migration are adventure narratives, not political treatises, and focus on individual struggles rather than on the causes of poverty” (2011, p. 66). However adventurous the stories may be, the main action in the stories centers around the protagonists’ lack of documentation and all the problems that entails. Therefore, I describe the novels that portray the experiences of undocumented youth as problem novels.

Research Question

I generated the following research question in order to analyze the portrayal of undocumented immigrant protagonists in YA and middle grades novels: What major themes are present in YA and middle grades novels published between 2006 and 2015 and that feature youthful, undocumented immigrant protagonists? This study of the themes in YA and middle grades novels that feature undocumented immigrants as protagonists is significant because not much has been written on the subject. Scholars have written about the portrayal of immigrants and themes relating to immigration in children's picture books, however few have written about the portrayal of undocumented immigrants in YA and middle grades novels. This paper will add to the scholarship that exists regarding immigration in juvenile literature.

Literature Review

The literature review will cover research and scholarship regarding the lived experiences of undocumented immigrant youth who settle in the United States. First, the journey to the United States will be examined. Second, the well-publicized journey of a young man who migrated from Honduras to the United States in search of his mother will be discussed. Third, the issue of human trafficking will be detailed. Fourth, the challenges and opportunities youthful undocumented immigrants face while trying to get an education will be discussed. Fifth, the robotics team of Carl Hayden Community High School who were able to win the Marine Advanced Technology Education (MATE) Remotely Operated Vehicle Competition in 2004 will be covered. Sixth, the significance of undocumented youth speaking out about their immigration status will be highlighted.

Finally, previous studies regarding the portrayal of immigrants in juvenile literature will be discussed.

Lived Experiences of Undocumented Youth

The journey to the United States.

The lived experiences of youthful, undocumented immigrants contain triumphs as well as tragedies. Many young, undocumented immigrants to the United States are fleeing poverty and violence in their home countries and they want to be reunited with relatives already in the United States (Urrutia-Rojas & Rodriguez, 1997). Most undocumented migrants are otherwise law-abiding people who illegally cross borders with the intention of seeking work (Meneses, 2003).

In the 1980s, children from the Central American nations of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua faced politically motivated kidnappings and murders of themselves and of family members. In addition, militaristic groups often forced children to join their ranks. On top of all these problems, many children experienced homelessness and a lack of adequate meals. These horrendous conditions continued into the 1990s. As a result, children in the nations affected traveled to the United States alone and with family members (Urrutia-Rojas & Rodriguez, 1997). Eighty-two percent of Central American migrant children already had at least one relative in the United States (Urrutia-Rojas & Rodriguez, 1997) and they were willing to face a perilous journey to reach these relatives. The migrant children experienced an average of approximately 3 traumatic events during their journeys to the United States (1997).

These traumatic events included:

being physically assaulted, being sexually assaulted, hunger, being robbed, serious health problems, being seriously threatened or kidnapped, problems with

police, exploitation or abuse, separation from family, death of a family member or other serious accident, being in danger of being returned to one's country, and other. (Urrutia-Rojas & Rodriguez, 1997, p. 160)

These traumatic events often occur in borderlands.

Those who have studied scholarship regarding migration to the United States from Central America note that some places are more dangerous than others. Borders are especially dangerous. Ruiz Marrujo noted,

Because of the tension involved in determining who is "native" and who is "foreign," who must leave and who can stay, borders are neuralgic centers of vigilance, exclusion, coercion, and control and, by extension, places of explicit and latent violence. (2009, p. 39)

Thus, the inherent danger in borders causes challenges for migrants. Furthermore, the borders of United States and Mexico and Mexico and Guatemala are fraught with men's sexual violence against women. Ruiz Marrujo defined sexual violence as "an act that is physical or psychological in nature –a sexual assault as well as a threat of sexual assault, for example –aimed at the sexuality of the woman migrant, at attacking her physical, emotional, and psychic integrity" (2009, p. 33). Ruiz Marrujo noted that this definition of sexual violence takes into account the point of view of the woman harmed and that the target of this violence is the body of the female. Furthermore, the violence itself goes against established practices be they legal or customary. She suggested that sexual violence against women occurs as a reward for the men who perpetrate it, as a way of male-bonding, and as an initiation ritual. She also proposed solutions for how to handle the problem of sexual violence. These solutions include making a record of the violence in order to help the victim and training people who will assist migrant women and men who will need legal and health resources as a result of experiencing or seeing sexual violence (2009).

Ruiz Marrujo also noted the important and powerful role that the coyote plays in border crossings. She stated,

Coyotes, or migrant traffickers, insofar as they have almost exclusive control over the people who have paid them, often gain access to the bodies of women migrants by default. Coyotes may refuse to take a woman with him, threaten to turn her over to unknown men or abandon her midway if she refuses his advances. Aware of the possibility of such a demand and seeking to avoid a confrontation and possibly greater risk, a woman may “agree” from the beginning of her negotiations with a coyote to have sex with him in exchange for his “help” or “protection.” (2009, p. 35)

Thus, coyotes are not just glorified tour guides who are responsible for people’s lives, coyotes hold a dictatorial power over the lives of those they guide across the borders of nations.

In addition to facing physical violence, migrants face harsh weather conditions that can result in loss of life. Organizations exist both to keep a record of these conditions and to assist migrants in their travels. The number of undocumented migrant border crossings has diminished in recent years, yet the number of deaths has risen. During fiscal year 2013, migrants perished at a rate of approximately five per day in the Arizona desert. In order to avoid the U.S. Government’s security mechanisms at the border, migrants have begun crossing at increasingly unsafe and isolated places. At the medical examiner’s office in Tucson, the remains of those who have died in the desert (usually due to weather-related elements of heat and cold) are stored and a file is created for each body. Due to an anonymous donor’s gift of \$175,000 for the development of a computerized database, keeping track of and identifying the dead has become more efficient. Work, such as identifying which files correspond to bodies that are missing body parts, used to take months however now this work only takes hours. The medical

examiner's office began keeping track of the migrant dead in 2008 and maintains an association with Humane Borders, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (Santos and Zemansky, 2013). Humane Borders has been keeping track of migrant deaths in the Arizona desert since 1999 and also provides the placement of water stations in the desert and warning posters in border towns for the benefit of migrants and those who are considering migration (Humane Borders, 2015). Although most of the dead bounds found in the desert belong to Hispanic males aged 20 to 35 (Santos and Zemansky, 2013), the journey outside of authorized channels of transportation to the United States from Mexico and other places in Central and South America is dangerous for anyone.

In contrast to the journey across the desert that most Central and South Americans face, most Cubans who enter the United States illegally enter by sea and reach land in Florida (Wasem, 2009). In fiscal year 2007, the Border Patrol apprehended 68,016 migrants from nations other than Mexico and 4,295 of these migrants were Cuban (Wasem, 2009). Travelling by boat in the ocean can be dangerous and in the Cuban town of Perico, many people have stories to tell of the relatives they have lost (Potter, 2007).

Solutions to immigration challenges have been proposed, however the challenges may be more complex than previously thought. The passage of the Secure Fence Act in 2006 is one of the proposed solutions to prevent illegal entries and illegal drug smuggling across the U.S.-Mexico border³. However, many proponents of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border have not considered how a wall would disrupt the lives of animals and plants that are native to the region (Cohn, 2006).

Undocumented migration may also be viewed as a human rights issue. Cultural anthropologist Dr. Guillermo Alonso Meneses has suggested that the Border Patrol's

practice of leaving the remote areas with the most dangerous terrain and harshest climate unpoliced is done on purpose and is therefore may be a human rights violation because undocumented migrants are naturally drawn to places that are not under the surveillance of the Border Patrol and due to the elements in those places, many migrants die or suffer harm (2003). From 1998 to 2002, there were 3000 deaths of undocumented migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border (Meneses, 2003). These deaths occurred at a rate of about 300 every year (Meneses, 2003).

Enrique's Journey.

In *Enrique's Journey: The True Story of a Boy Determined to Reunite with His Mother*, *Los Angeles Times* journalist Sonia Nazario, wrote about the challenges faced by a migrant boy who travelled from Honduras to the United States. After a test run with a friend, 17 year old Enrique left Honduras in the year 2000 to reunite with his mother who had moved to the United States 11 years earlier. His mother left Honduras to seek employment that would allow her to provide food, clothing, and education for her children. Enrique⁴ made eight attempts to cross into the United States and on the eighth attempt he was finally successful. Multiple attempts to reach the United States are common. Along the way, he was badly robbed and beaten by bandits and therefore needed medical treatment. He also suffered hunger and thirst throughout his journey (Nazario, 2013).

One particularly harrowing portion of Enrique's journey took place in the Mexican State of Chiapas which is extremely dangerous territory for migrants. Chiapas is known as "la bestia" or "the beast" and the general attitude of people who live in Chiapas is one of fear of and disdain for migrants (Nazario, 2013, pp. 65-66). In

explaining why they did not help migrants who passed through Chiapas, local residents recounted the story of a man who gave a group of migrant men shelter and a job and the men robbed and murdered him. In Chiapas, Enrique was especially alert and developed a list of rules for survival during his journey to the United States (Nazario, 2013).

Human trafficking.

Some young, undocumented immigrants to the United States are victims of human trafficking. In her study entitled, *Women, Migration, and Sexual Violence*, Ruiz Marrujo noted that the selling of women and girls to work in the sex industry is problematic (2009). According to the U.S. State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report*, human trafficking is the "recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion (Department of State, 2015). Domestic servitude is a type of human trafficking in which the victim is forced to work in someone's home and is rarely paid for work and usually does not get breaks. Authorities have less access to private households than they do to public places and therefore, conditions of domestic servitude may not readily be exposed (Department of State, 2015).

In a study funded by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division, Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) found that during the 2014 calendar year it received over 24,000 signals⁵ from across the nation regarding incidents of human trafficking. Although the NHTRC has noted that it cannot determine whether the signals it receives are accurate, the report is informative nonetheless. Based on information gathered from incoming signals, the majority of signals came from California and

involved the type of labor that is domestic work. Of the victims involved in labor trafficking, over half were female and over 60 percent were foreign nationals (NHTRC, n.d.).

Education.

Usually, schools are a safe haven from the enforcement of immigration laws and undocumented students do not have to worry about being deported to their countries of origin while on school grounds. Although the Supreme Court asserted that there is no fundamental right to an education, it held that a Texas law which withheld state funds for the education of undocumented immigrant children and allowed school districts to refuse admission of these children violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment in *Plyler v. Doe*⁶. Many of the undocumented youth who have enrolled in college were able to complete their K-12 education because of the decision in *Plyler v. Doe*. Even still, in the time since the Court handed down the decision over 30 years ago, *Plyler v. Doe* has faced both subtle and overt challenges. These challenges range from requiring parents who are registering their children for school to present driver's licenses and social security numbers, the segregation of immigrant children into separate schools and programs, and the magnified difficulties that undocumented students face when their successes are publicized, to name a few (Olivas, 2012).

Assistance in getting a college education.

Undocumented students also receive assistance in getting a college education. However, legal, financial, and institutional obstacles prevent the vast majority of undocumented immigrant youth from enrolling in college. It is estimated that only five to ten percent of undocumented youth pursue post-secondary education (Enriquez, 2011,

citing Gonzales, 2007). However, there are ways for undocumented youth to raise the money and support they need for their education. After journalist Joshua Davis published an article regarding the Carl Hayden robotics team in *Wired*, readers of the article started a scholarship fund which team members were able to use to assist them in paying their college tuition (Davis, 2014). Laura Enriquez studied undocumented Hispanic youth who had successfully enrolled in college to see what social capital⁷ they possessed and used and how their experiences could be replicated in the lives of other undocumented immigrants. From 2007 to 2010, Enriquez interviewed 54 undocumented Hispanic college students who resided in and around Los Angeles, California. She found that undocumented, Hispanic, youth utilize “patchworking,” a practice of figuratively knitting together their sparse and varied social capital to form the social capital that they need to help them enroll in college (2011, pp. 480-481). Furthermore, she found that undocumented, Hispanic, youth gathered more useful information from similarly-situated peers than from school teachers and administrators (Enriquez, 2011).

Carl Hayden Community High School’s 2004 robotics team.

Luis Aranda, Christian Arcega, Lorenzo Santillan, and Oscar Vazquez were members of the Carl Hayden Community High School robotics team that won the Marine Advanced Technology Education (MATE) Remotely Operated Vehicle Competition in 2004. They defeated other competitors, including the team from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Although the team members had entered the United States as undocumented immigrants and attended a school where over 70% of the students receive free or reduced lunch, they won. Not only did they excel at the MATE competition, they excelled in academics. The coaches, two teachers at Carl Hayden, Fredi Lajvardi and

Allan Cameron had set minimum grades that the students had to receive in their coursework in order to continue on the team. One of the team members, Lorenzo, had been getting Cs and Ds and was failing geometry, however he began applying himself to academics in order to stay on the team. Due to his extra time spent studying, he began making As on geometry tests (Davis, 2014).

The teachers at Carl Hayden knew that members of the robotics team were undocumented. The Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) teacher thought it was unfortunate that someone of Oscar's caliber could not enter the military due to his undocumented status. In addition, the coaches of the robotics team were aware of some of the students' status as undocumented immigrants. During one trip to the beach as part of the research they were doing for the MATE competition, Fredi and his students encountered an immigration checkpoint. He told the students to give him their school identification cards and said, "And nobody talk besides me. Understood?" (Davis, 2014, p. 107). In addition to teaching, the teachers were present to provide guidance and maintain the silence about the students' immigration status when necessary. The revelation of their status at immigration checkpoints was one of the risks the students were willing to take in order to participate in the MATE competition in California (Davis 2014). The challenges that Carl Hayden's robotics team faced are detailed in the book *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream* by Joshua Davis, the documentary film *Underwater Dreams* (2014) produced by Mary Mazzio, and the movie *Spare Parts* (2015) starring George Lopez.

Breaking the silence.

The fear of deportation that is manifested in the silence that many undocumented immigrants maintain about their status is another major theme. Immigration status and the potential of deportation, is not just something that affects the immigrants, but also impacts the communities in which they live. This year, the Los Angeles Unified School District began allowing its in-house attorneys to represent students facing deportation in limited circumstances (Blume, 2015).

In the last eight years, undocumented youth have been breaking the silence that shrouds them and making themselves more visible in order to advocate for their own interests as they pertain to jobs and education (Galisky, 2012). Real-life stories of undocumented youth have been published in the documentary film *Papers: Stories of Undocumented Youth* and in its companion book, *Papers: Stories by Undocumented Youth* (Galisky, 2012). In the book, undocumented youth from all over the world tell their stories about the harsh realities they face due to being undocumented without mincing words. One undocumented youth recounts being told that she “was dumb like a bag of hammers” by an instructor (Galisky, 2012, p. 10). Other undocumented youth speak of “the brick wall that never crumbles” in regard to services and opportunities they cannot receive due to lack of U.S. citizenship (Galisky, 2012, p. 21). There is no happy-ending (at least not yet) for the undocumented youth who have chosen to tell their stories in *Papers*.

Previous studies regarding immigrants in juvenile literature

Scholars have written about educating teachers to be sensitive to immigrant students in their K-12 classrooms by introducing the teachers to children’s books about

immigrants. In a study entitled *Countering narratives: Teachers' Discourses About Immigrants and Their Experiences within the Realm of Children's and Young Adult Literature* (2010), Jennifer Graff, an associate professor in the Reading, Writing, Children's Literature and Digital Literacies Program at the University of Georgia at Athens, found that the use of immigration stories as a pedagogical tool helped teachers be sensitive to the experiences of immigrants in the United States. Graff developed a graduate level class in which students learned about immigration and examined their own beliefs about immigration through reading immigration stories (both YA and children's books), participating in in-class activities and discussions, and writing journal entries. A year later, Graff interviewed each student individually to see what lasting effects participating in the class had on them. Her study of class participants included ten K-12 teachers and two post-secondary teachers. Graff's goal for the graduate level class was to provide resources and circumstances for teachers to better comprehend immigrants' experiences in the United States and to motivate the teachers to take action based on what they had learned (transformative action). Graff found that not only did the teachers want to continue the conversation regarding immigration, they did continue the conversation through practices of transformative action such as promoting literature regarding the experiences of immigrants in both classrooms and school libraries, providing professional development to teachers, and hosting clubs for students (Graff, 2010).

Similarly, Margaret N. Gregor and Connie Green, professors at Appalachian State University, found that reading immigration stories allowed the teachers to relate the experiences of the characters in the books to the experiences of their own students, examine their own thoughts regarding immigration, and be cognizant of the hardships

immigrants face. Gregor and Green developed a class for degree seeking graduate students in the Reading Education program to help the students become sensitive and knowledgeable regarding the experiences of their K-12 students who are immigrants. In this class, the students were required to read both fiction and non-fiction children's books about the experiences of immigrants and write an immigration story based on research. Gregor and Green plan to continue this project and hope that other teacher education programs will implement similar projects (Gregor and Green, 2011).

Ruth McKoy Lowery, Pamela Jewett, and James W. Stiles, professors of education, noted that teachers who learn about the experiences of immigrants and refugees can better meet the educational needs and provide a welcoming atmosphere in their classrooms for students who are immigrants and refugees. The authors wrote about the importance of including immigration stories in the curricula in their article regarding the 2013 Children's Literature Assembly (CLA) Workshop held by the National Council of Teachers of English. Teachers, authors, and illustrators attended the CLA Workshop to share and gather insights regarding telling immigration stories. McKoy, Lowery, and Stiles also noted that introducing stories of immigration into the curricula is a way to educate students regarding issues of immigration (2013).

There have also been studies regarding children's books that portray immigrants. Glória Bastos, a professor in the Education Department at Universidade Aberta in Portugal and Maria da Conceição Tomé, a Ph.D. student at Universidade Aberta in Portugal asserted that contemporary Portuguese children's and YA literature that portrayed immigrants and their experiences featured themes of the loneliness, discrimination, and hardships immigrants face as well as their integration into society and

the maintenance of their dignity. Bastos and Tomé also noted that the books are often didactic and have a storyline that teaches young readers that disrespecting people because they are immigrants is wrong (2013).

In their study of the representation of multilingualism in eight children's and YA books, Professors Ghiso and Campano found that some books present speaking in English as the ultimate goal of the protagonists while other books celebrate the protagonists' multilingual heritage. They also noted that books with themes of language and identity also convey messages regarding citizenship. In the books that they studied, the use of language was a way to blend in, be affirmed in one's culture, or learn from others. The authors also explored not using language or silence as a means of resistance. Ghiso and Campano noted that an author's decision not to use the words "undocumented" or "illegal" to describe one of the characters in a picture book highlighted the fact that a person's possession or lack of possession of documents required for immigration is not necessarily a part of a person's identity (2013, p. 53).

In *Immigrants as Portrayed in Children's Picture Books*, a 2004 study, by Linda Leonard Lamme, Danling Fu, and Ruth McKoy Lowery, the authors found that depressing and difficult topics such as undocumented immigration, discrimination, and having to return to one's home country due to economic hardships in the United States are themes left out of picture books that portray the experiences of immigrants. Based on their own research and the lived experiences of two of the authors who are immigrants, the authors divided the picture books into three categories according to the themes found therein. The first category, "Making the transition," dealt with immigrants' journey to the United States and their lives in the United States. The second category, "Making the

connection,” dealt with immigrants’ connecting the culture in their home country to the culture in their newly adopted country and maintaining traditions. The third category, “Becoming an American,” dealt with the immigrants’ assimilation (2004, p. 124).

Overall, these books portrayed the experiences of immigrants in a hopeful, positive light (2004).

There have also been studies about young adult and middle grades novels that portray immigrants. For a doctoral thesis entitled *Reading Immigration Stories: Emotion and Literary Imagination in School-Based Book Clubs* (2010), Mark A. Lewis studied the use of immigration stories in a sixth grade English classroom at a middle school in the western part of the United States. The school had a strong bilingual Spanish-English program with classes taught in both Spanish and English and signage around the building in both Spanish and English. In the 21-student English class that Lewis observed, 19 students participated in his study and the students were divided into book clubs that read and discussed the following novels about undocumented immigrants: *Crossing the Wire* (2006) by Will Hobbs, *Lupita Mañana* (1981) by Patricia Beatty, *Ask Me No Questions* (2006) by Marina Budhos, and *Journey of the Sparrows* (1991) by Fran Buss. Lewis noted that the teachers created a classroom climate in which the students, some of whom were either immigrants or the children of immigrants, felt comfortable sharing about their experiences. Lewis found that the students, inspired by the immigration stories they were reading, engaged in story-telling which caused them to examine more closely their own lives and the lives of their fellow students (2010).

Joanne Brown, a retired English professor of Drake University, presented her findings regarding the immigration experience in *Immigration Narratives in Young Adult*

Literature: Crossing Borders (2011). Brown chose to focus on narratives that present the stories of young immigrants to the United States and were set in the mid-1800s to the present. The immigrants in the stories she studied could be classified into one of four groups: documented, undocumented, those who seek asylum, and those who live in exile. In analyzing the stories, Brown considered why the immigrants came, their modes of transportation, hardships they faced, how being an immigrant affected their children, and what ideas can be gathered about youthful immigrants and immigration within the United States (2011).

Amy Cummins, an assistant professor of English at the University of Texas Pan American, describes her study as the first study to tackle the issue of undocumented immigrants who make the journey from Mexico to the United States in YA novels (2012). Cummins asserted that others may be reluctant to study the issue because of its controversial nature. Cummins study is timely given that 78% of all undocumented immigrants in the United States are from nations within North America which includes Mexico, and nations in Central America, with the majority being from Mexico (Baker and Rytina, 2013). In her study of 11 novels published between 1981 and 2011, Cummins found that the message promoted embraced a “concept of hybrid identity” as advocated by Gloria Anzaldúa (2012 p. 69). In this concept of hybrid identity, apparently opposite concepts such as citizen and non-citizen coexist and are reconciled. Thus, one can belong anywhere because “the skin of the earth is seamless” (2012 p. 69 quoting Anzaldúa). Anzaldúa’s concepts of hybrid identity and identity formation are especially important in the analysis of the novels in my study of 12 YA and middle grades novels.

As mentioned earlier, undocumented immigrant youth are attending schools in the United States. Furthermore, they experience challenges in furthering their education due to their undocumented status and they often fear deportation. Previous studies on immigration themes in juvenile literature and their use in classrooms show that having teachers read immigration stories and reflect upon them will sensitize teachers to the experiences of immigrants and equip teachers to meet their educational needs. Moreover, including juvenile literature on immigration, especially undocumented immigration in the K-12 curriculum allows teachers to introduce issues regarding immigration to students who may not have thought about such issues. More importantly, youth who are immigrants can see their life experiences reflected in literature. This reflection can be a basis for affirming their life experiences and starting a dialogue about immigration in the United States.

Methodology

The research question for this study is: What major themes are present in YA and middle grades novels published between 2006 and 2015 and that feature youthful, undocumented immigrant protagonists? I have conducted a content analysis of these YA and middle grades novels. A content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (White and Marsh, 2006, pp. 23, 27, quoting Krippendorff). Two types of content analysis are quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis. Whereas quantitative content analysis consists of testing hypotheses, qualitative content analysis consists of generating a research question or questions which directs the research and impacts data that are collected (2006). For this study, the data consists of 12 English

language, contemporary, YA and middle grades novels published between the years 2006 to 2015 that feature young people who are undocumented immigrants to the United States as the protagonists or main characters.

The twelve titles are not an exhaustive listing of novels published in this time frame. However, I made an effort to include stories that focus on the journey to the United States, living in the United States, or a combination of both experiences. A qualitative content analysis is appropriate for this study because the content of the books which includes the themes found therein sheds light on patterns of themes found in recently published novels about young, undocumented immigrant protagonists.

I had a set of criteria for the books I wanted to study. The novels had to be English language middle grades and YA novels that are stories of contemporary, realistic fiction. Therefore, books for young children and adults were excluded. In addition, historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, etc. were all excluded.

Because I chose to study the portrayal of undocumented immigrants in YA and middle grades novels, these stories had to feature a young undocumented immigrant as the primary protagonist. While the undocumented immigrants could be emigrating from any country the world, they had to be immigrating to the United States and the novel had to have its initial publication date between the years 2006 to 2015 in keeping with my desire to study contemporary fiction in contemporary times.

I selected novels that met my criteria from lists in blog entries regarding YA, middle grades, and children's literature. The blog Nerdy Book Club had an entry entitled *Ten Young Adult Books that Reflect the US Immigration Experience* and from it I selected the middle grades novels *Crossing the Wire* (2006) by Will Hobbs and *Illegal* (2011) by

Bettina Restrepo because these were books that fit the criteria that I had set. The blog Pragmatic Mom had an entry entitled *Undocumented Immigrants in Children's Books* and from it, I selected the middle grades novels *Ask Me No Questions* (2006) by Marina Budhos and *Return to Sender* (2009) by Julia Alvarez because these books also fit the criteria that I had set. In Google's search engine, I conducted a search of the terms "novel ya immigrant" without quotation marks and found the YA novel *The Secret Side of Empty* (2014) by Maria E. Andreu. I found two of the YA novels, *Sofi Mendoza's Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico* (2007) by Malín Alegría and *Dream Things True* (2015) by Maria F. Marquardt on Amazon.com and Goodreads.com, respectively, through serendipity.

Also, I conducted a search in Children's Literature Comprehensive Database for novels that met my criteria. In the global search box I typed the terms "illegal aliens" without quotation marks. Then I selected "Subject Hdgs" in the "Search Specific Field:" dropdown menu box, "10-18" in the "Reader's Age:" box, and "Fiction" in the "Category:" box. The results yielded 53 books. Some of the books listed in the results, such as *Illegal* and *Return to Sender*, were also listed in the aforementioned blog entries. I found the following middle grades novels that I had not yet considered and decided to include these in the study: *Star in the Forest* by Laura Resau (2010), *Heat* by Mike Lupica (2006), and *Until I find Julian* by Patricia Reilly Giff (2015). Table 1 shows the 12 novels that were analyzed for this study.

Table 1

Bibliographic Information of the 12 Novels in this Study

Novel	Audience
Alegría, M. (2008). <i>Sofi Mendoza's guide to getting lost in Mexico</i> . New York: Simon Pulse.	Young Adult
Alvarez, J. (2009). <i>Return to sender</i> . New York: Random House Children's Books.	Middle Grades
Andreu, M. E. (2014). <i>The secret side of empty</i> . Philadelphia: RP Teens.	Young Adult
Budhos, M. (2007). <i>Ask me no questions</i> . New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	Young Adult
Giff, P. R. (2015). <i>Until I find Julian</i> . New York: Wendy Lamb Books.	Middle Grades
Hobbs, W. (2007). <i>Crossing the wire</i> . New York: Harper Trophy.	Middle Grades
Jaramillo, A. (2008). <i>La línea</i> . New York: Square Fish.	Middle Grades
Lupica, M. (2012). <i>Heat</i> . New York: Puffin Books.	Middle Grades
Marquardt, M. (2015). <i>Dream things true</i> . New York: St. Martin's Griffin.	Young Adult
Purcell, K. (2013). <i>Trafficked</i> . New York: Speak.	Young Adult
Resau, L. (2012). <i>Star in the forest</i> . New York: A Yearling Book.	Middle Grades
Restrepo, B. (2011). <i>Illegal</i> . New York: Katherine Tegen Books.	Middle Grades

While reading the novels, I developed a matrix based on the themes that emerged as I read the novels. Although not every book has every theme, I chose these themes based on their prominence in the books under consideration. By creating the matrix, I am not making a judgment as to whether these themes should be included in the novels, however, I am noting the presence of these themes.

Findings and Discussion

YA and Middle Grades Novels That Feature Undocumented Immigrants as the Protagonists are Problem Novels

The 12 novels include many of the elements of the new problem novel as defined by Nilsen and his colleagues (2013). For the novels in this study, the main problem is that the protagonists lack legal immigration status. As mentioned earlier, the protagonists are undocumented immigrants from all over the world and their families are at varying levels of economic self-sufficiency. Nine of these novels take place or have scenes in the dangerous borderlands between nations. Even one novel that is primarily set in the suburbs, *Trafficked*, deals with the enslavement of the protagonist, an enslavement which hides in plain sight. Although the novels are written in standard English, they are often interspersed with the words from the foreign languages that the characters speak. Many of the novels under consideration contain elements of tragedy as the protagonists have to cope with the deportation, kidnapping, or death of loved ones.

Common Themes in YA and Middle Grades Novels That Feature Undocumented Immigrants as the Protagonists

In the 12 novels under consideration, there are protagonists who enter the United States without permission in addition to those who overstay their visas. Moreover, the undocumented immigrants come from places as far away as Bangladesh and Moldova and as near as Mexico. The protagonists come from varying economic situations as well. Some of them are from working class families and others are from families that live in extreme poverty. Regarding the experiences of the protagonists who are undocumented youth, the themes listed below were prominent in the lives of the protagonists. While not

all of the 12 novels under consideration contain every theme, each novel contains at least one of the following themes:

- Realistic portrayals of how the protagonists became undocumented
- Realistic yet sometimes sanitized portrayals of the violence or the threat of violence that undocumented immigrants face
- Sanitized with a happy ending which features a dramatic courtroom or courtroom-like scene or a change in the law
- Sanitized with the protagonist or a loved one of the protagonist expressing hope for the future which is tied to getting legal immigration status
- The peril inherent in the journey to the United States
- The silence maintained over undocumented status (at least until they realize that people including neighbors and school officials will help them)
- Strong protagonists who demonstrate agency
- The protagonists (or friends of the protagonists) express a desire to go to school
- The protagonists receive assistance in getting an education
- The protagonists develop or display a hybrid identity (a type of psychological borderland)

Next, I will discuss each one of these themes and provide examples from the novels of how these themes are presented.

Realistic portrayals of how the protagonists became undocumented.

Overall, how the protagonists became undocumented (the manner in which the protagonists enter the United States and the motive the protagonists have for entering the United States, in other words, their origin) is realistic. Aviva Chomsky, a professor of

history at Salem College, noted that undocumented immigrants from Mexico rarely overstay visas and are more likely to enter the United States illegally. However, undocumented immigrants from other nations are more likely to enter legally, yet overstay their visas (2014). In the novels under consideration, Chomsky's assertion is demonstrated. In ten of the 12 novels, the protagonists enter the United States illegally to flee harsh conditions in their home countries. The situation for many of the protagonists in novels which portray the journey from Mexico to the United States includes such extreme poverty that hunger is a factor. In the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, "For many *mexicanos del otro lado*, the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live" (2012, p. 32). Characters who come from families that overstay their visas seem better off economically than characters whose initial entrance into the United States is illegal.

Hannah is one such protagonist whose initial entrance into the United States is illegal. In *Trafficked*, Hannah is a 17-year-old girl from Moldova. In Moldova, she lives in an apartment with her grandmother. In this apartment, both the electricity and the telephone are disconnected due to non-payment of bills. To make matters worse, Hannah and her grandmother are about to be evicted. Hannah has a desire to immigrate to the United States in order to continue her education and to work to provide money for an eye surgery that her grandmother needs. Led to believe that she will be living with a nice Russian family, Hannah accepts a job as a nanny in Los Angeles, California. Although Hannah begins the journey to the United States with a legal document, her Moldovan passport, her captors and their associates require her to use fraudulent documents to enter the United States. The storyline of *Trafficked*, reflects the statistics of the NHTRC on

human trafficking that reveal that most victims of human trafficking work in houses in California.

In *Illegal*, Nora and her mother enter the United States illegally by riding in the back of a truck that is transporting mangoes from Mexico to Texas. Like characters in other novels, money is tight for Nora and her mother and once in Houston, they move into a small, rat-infested apartment that smells of urine. They come to Texas to reunite with Nora's father and because the family farm in Mexico is suffering under the drought.

In *Sofi Mendoza's Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico*, Sofi was brought to the United States by her parents when she was three years old. Sofi's parents had told her that the United States "was nothing like Mexico, where politicians were crooks, cops abused their power, and if you were poor, there was no way to get ahead" (2008, pp. 5-6). Unbeknownst to Sofi until later in the book, her green card is fraudulent and her entry into the United States is illegal.

In *La Línea*, 15-year-old Miguel and his 13-year-old sister Elena decide to leave Mexico for the United States because they want to be reunited with their parents and there is a drought which makes them unable to grow crops of corn. Without the money that their parents send them, they would be hungry. Although Miguel tries to hide his preparations to travel north from Elena, Elena recognizes that he is going to the United States and secretly follows him. Once Elena and Miguel are reunited along the path, they travel by bus, train, and on foot through the desert, meeting interesting characters along the way, until they cross the border.

In *Crossing the Wire*, 15-year-old Victor's family is starving. They live on a farm in Los Árboles, Mexico where no one could afford a car or tractor. Due to the death of

Victor's father in a construction accident in South Carolina, they no longer have the benefit of the money that he would send to them. Victor farms corn and sells a crop every year but is having little success with this because the price of corn is falling and Señor Rivera, his best friend Rico's father, tells him that if he tries to sell corn this year, he will get almost nothing in exchange. Meanwhile, Victor's sisters wear worn out clothing, his little brother has no toys, and the entire family suffers from hunger. Victor gives a portion of his food to his little brother to alleviate his suffering. Therefore, Victor decides that he will go to the United States, crossing illegally, so that he can find work and send money back to his family.

In *Return to Sender*, María Dolores Cruz's father had been a farmer on his father's farm in Las Margaritas, Mexico, however, he could not make enough money farming to support himself and his family. So one day, a four-year-old Mari, her father, mother, and Uncle Felipe set out for the United States. They begin travelling by bus and then are led by mean coyotes on a walk through the desert in order to cross the United States-Mexico border.

In *Dream Things True*, Alma's family migrates to the United States from their home in San Juan, Mexico because the price of corn in Mexico falls so low that her father, a farmer, who now works as a gardener, cannot sell corn for a profit. Her father eventually goes to the United States to find work. When Alma is two years old and her brother Raúl is five years old, they walk across the desert with their mother and then cross the border in a car with a relative who allows them to use the identification for his children who are legal residents.

In *Star in the Forest*, Zitlally's parents decide to migrate to the United States because there are very few jobs in their hometown of Xono, Mexico. There are jobs in teaching at the elementary school level, however, Zitlally's father is not qualified to do that. Like many other undocumented immigrants from Mexico portrayed in YA and middle grades novels, Zitlally and her family walk across the desert during their journey to the United States.

In *Heat*, a 10-year-old Michael, his 15-year-old brother Carlos, and their father travel by boat from Cuba to Florida. Their entrance into the United States is illegal and they are undocumented immigrants. The reason they left Cuba for the United States is not given, however, Michael and Carlos know that they do not want to return to Cuba.

In *Until I Find Julian*, Tomàs who had been working in the United States returns to Mexico and tells Julian's family that a construction site in which he and Julian were working was raided by the authorities and he does not know Julian's whereabouts. Concerned about his brother and knowing that the family cannot survive without the money that his brother was sending home, 12-year-old Mateo, Julian's younger brother, decides to enter the United States illegally in order to find Julian. Mateo travels by truck, on foot, and in an inner tube across the Rio Grande.

In two of the 12 novels under consideration, the entry into the United States does not play a major role. Only one of these two novels expressly states that the initial entrance into the United States was legal. Interestingly, the protagonists in both of these novels have access to an exceptional education.

In *Ask Me No Questions*, 14-year-old Nadira's family enters legally, however they allow their visas to expire. Nadira states,

we knew we were going to stay past the date on the little blue stamp of the tourist visa in our passports. Everyone does it. You buy a fake social security number for a few hundred dollars and then you can work. (p. 7).

Therefore, although Nadira and her family were not undocumented when they entered the United States, they became undocumented due to overstaying their visas. Money is tight, but they have money to eat at diners. Notwithstanding the family's financial situation, Nadira's sister Aisha has access to an education that allows her to be eligible to take the entrance exam for Stuyvesant High School and Bronx High School of Science.

M.T., the narrator of *The Secret Side of M.T.*, is silent regarding details about her family's voyage to the United States such as their mode of transportation and whether the initial entrance was legal. However, M.T. does note that her now 39-year-old father came to the United States when he was 22-years-old and had intended to work and save money to start a business in Argentina. She also noted that he had dropped out of high school and currently works as a waiter.

Money is tight for M.T.'s family. They live in "affordable housing" and often eat from a "ninety-nine-cent bag of beans" (pp. 19, 22). M.T. notes, "We are what people would call poor" (p. 46). At one point, the phone line and electricity are cut off at the apartment of M.T.'s family due to nonpayment. Even still, M.T. has access to a good education at Goretti, a school run by nuns. Her senior year, M.T. takes a rigorous course load which includes two English classes, one of which consists of only National Honor Society students. M.T. also makes money tutoring other students in math, English, and social studies. M.T. would have been valedictorian and a member of the National Honor Society if she had not dropped out of school for a brief time.

Realistic yet sometimes sanitized portrayals of the violence or the threat of violence that undocumented immigrants face.

Part of the novels realistic portrayals of the experiences of undocumented youth is the fact that the novels portray violence or the threat of violence that many undocumented immigrants face due to their undocumented status. Of the 12 novels under consideration, nine present episodes of violence or the threat of violence that the protagonists face as a consequence of being undocumented. Sometimes the violence or threat of violence presented is sanitized. I considered the violence sanitized if the protagonists did not actually experience the violence themselves and loved ones or other people the protagonists knew of actually experienced the violence. In three novels, the protagonists themselves do not face violence or the threat of violence, but people they know do. Coyotes, or people whose job consists of helping migrants cross borders appear frequently in the 12 YA and middle grades novels under consideration. Some coyotes are portrayed as trustworthy and some are portrayed as unscrupulous. Coyotes often figure prominently in journey to the United States.

One novel, *Trafficked*, presents a realistic and disturbing portrayal of the violence that an undocumented immigrant faces. An agent named Olga told Hannah that she would be paid \$400 a week as a nanny in Los Angeles. In actuality, Hannah's captors, Lillian and Sergey, exploit her due to her undocumented status by making her work all day and requiring her to sleep in an uninsulated garage. After three weeks, her captors still haven't paid her and they dismiss her assertions that people in the U.S. are supposed to work 40 hours a week. When Hannah asks about wages, Lillian even goes so far as to say that Hannah owes Lillian and Sergey money.

Hannah's captors instill in Hannah sense of fear regarding her undocumented status with the expectation that Hannah's fear will make her reluctant to call the police and therefore easier to exploit. Twice, Hannah experiences an attempted sexual assault. One day, when she is at the house alone, Paavo Shevchenko, Sergey's friend attempts to rape her. On another occasion, shortly after Hannah has learned of her grandmother's death, Sergey attempts to rape her. Hannah also experiences violence at the hands of a woman. When Lillian becomes jealous of Paavo's attention toward Hannah's hair, she cuts off Hannah's hair. Jealous of Sergey's attention to Hannah, Lillian beats Hannah so badly on Christmas Eve that Hannah has to be examined by a physician and have the bones in her nose reset.

In *Illegal*, the violence that Nora experiences as a result of being undocumented is more toned down than the violence that Hannah experiences in *Trafficked*. Nora is always able to defend herself so that she does not experience serious bodily harm. When the unscrupulous coyote tries to charge Nora 2000 pesos each for her and her mother's passage to the United States and Nora replies that she does not have that much money, he threatens her by telling her, "Then go back to your village, unless you want to pay with your virginity" (pp. 45-46). Nora convinces him to take the 1500 pesos that she has and he goes away. Furthermore, when the driver of the truck in which Nora and her mother ride in, demands to be paid an additional fee once they are in the United States and Nora refuses to pay, a fight ensues in which Nora bites his arm and pokes his eyes in order to get away.

In *Sofi Mendoza's Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico*, Sofi hires a flashy but unscrupulous coyote named Rico to get her across the Mexico-United States border.

When Sofi meets him, he attempts to rape her but she defends herself by poking him in the eye with a statue of Saint Juan Soldado and “kneeing him hard in the balls” (pp. 234-240).

In *La Línea*, violence and the threat of violence as a result of being undocumented immigrants figures prominently, although the protagonists, Miguel and Elena, are spared from the more horrific experiences. During the journey, Elena and Miguel are mugged by a guy named Colmillo and his partner as they rest in a space that is frequented by migrants. Colmillo holds a gun to Elena’s head and touches her face. Miguel is overcome with “[a] deep, terrible dread” (p. 55). Fortunately, the muggers only take their money (however, Elena has more money hidden away), bus tickets, and Miguel’s knife and soccer jersey. Miguel directs the robbers to money hidden behind a barrel and the robbers take the money and leave him and Elena alone.

Just as in the situation with the robbers, Miguel and Elena are always able to defend themselves. In another particularly disturbing incident, Miguel, Elena, and their friend Javier are travelling by train when a gang appears and they must run for their lives. The gang forcibly removes three girls from the train and takes them into the bushes. Elena is fearful, yet unharmed because they are able to escape.

In *Crossing the Wire*, Victor experiences violence and threats of violence as a result of being an undocumented immigrant. The cholos, or street children, are a group that see migrants as an easy target for getting money. At one point, when Victor and his friend Julio are resting outside in Nogales, a border town, cholos approach them with the intent to rob them. Julio pulls a knife on them and they go away. At another point when Victor and Rico are trying to devise a way to get out of a border town, cholos offer to

guide them through the tunnels to get them across the United States-Mexico border and Rico refuses because he knows that the proposition is a scam, having been robbed the previous day by cholos in a tunnel.

Drug smugglers are another group that views undocumented immigrants as easy targets for the drug operation because the immigrants need a way to get into the United States and some will transport drugs in order to do that. Although Victor and his friend Rico do not carry drugs for the drug smugglers Jarra and Morales, Victor and Rico agree to carry food for them. When Jarra and Morales begin to think that Victor and Rico will tell what they have seen and heard of the drug operation, Jarra and Morales plan to kill Victor and Rico. Victor and Rico have to run for their lives.

Until I Find Julian presents the threat of violence as a result of being undocumented. Before Julian travels to the United States, Mateo reminds Julian of the warning their mother gave them about coyotes, “Mami says they’re desperate men. They rob the travelers, and sometimes they even kill” (p. 6). Mami’s description of coyotes aligns with the portrayal of coyotes in Ruiz Marrujo’s study discussed above. Mateo’s grandmother whom he affectionately calls Abuelita also warns him, “You must watch everyone and everything constantly...Think before you act. Move slowly, carefully. Be deliberate” (p. 11). Through these warnings, Mateo knows that he needs to be on the lookout for violence.

Ask Me No Questions, *Return to Sender*, and *Star in the Forest* all present sanitized versions of violence. In *Ask Me No Questions*, Nadira, the protagonist, does not experience any violence as the result of being undocumented, however her uncle experiences violence due to his nationality and immigration status. When the family goes

to retrieve him from the detention center, he walks with a limp and has bruises and cuts on his arms which implies that he was tortured (p. 100-101). Later, her uncle says, “They humiliated me...They put lights on my face for hours. They gave me no food. They treated me like a liar” (p. 102). Thus, the violence is sanitized because Nadira does not experience it herself, however the violence is realistic because Budhos, the author obtained the idea to include this type of violence from the testimony of actual immigrants who had been detained by the government.

In *Return to Sender*, Mari does not face violence due to her undocumented status, however she does experience name-calling. Classmates Ronnie Pellegrini and Clayton Lacroix call her “illegal alien” (pp. 64-65). Although Mari does not face violence, her mother faces violence. When Mari’s mother is making the trip back to the United States after visiting her dying mother in Mexico, she is kidnapped and enslaved by a gang of coyotes and the chief coyote severely beats her for making a phone call home. Mari’s mother suffers additional horrors, but Mari notes that, “when I am more grown-up, she will tell me the whole story” (2009, p. 314). Thus, the realistic violence that Mari’s mother has faced is sanitized in that it is not explicitly stated. Moreover, the undocumented status of Mari’s mother made her more of a target for exploitation. Due to being a migrant travelling without papers, it is harder for her to prove her identity if she wants to report the abuse to the authorities.

In *Star in the Forest*, 11-year-old Zitlally herself does not experience violence or the threat of violence due to being undocumented, but her father does. On his return trip to the United States after being deported, her father is abducted at the United States – Mexico border by a gang who holds him for ransom. Fortunately for Zitlally and her

family, her mother is able to pay the ransom and her father is able to escape. Her sister Dalia notes that Papá is an easy target because he is an undocumented immigrant. She also tells Zitlally that the police will be interested in returning him to Mexico, not reuniting him with his family.

Sanitized with a happy ending which features a dramatic courtroom or courtroom-like scene or a change in the law.

In real life, not all undocumented immigrants receive United States citizenship, permission to stay in the country, or another hearing regarding their immigration case. Of the 12 novels under consideration four present situations in which there is a happy ending which features a dramatic courtroom or courtroom-like scene or a change in the law. Therefore, the U.S. legal system is presented as accommodating if one perseveres. Incidentally, these novels which feature a courtroom or courtroom-like scene or change in the law also feature storylines in which the characters hope to remain in the United States legally.

In *Ask Me No Questions*, after Nadira's family has been unsuccessful in getting lawyers to help them, Nadira successfully launches her own investigation into why her father has been detained by the U.S. government. She discovers that the government has mistaken her father for another man who spells his last name with an "e" as in Hossein. But Nadira's father spells his last name with an "a" as in Hossain. Her father is saving his money in an account maintained by Ali-Uncle to pay for his children's education, not to fund terrorism. When Nadira presents Ali-Uncle's letter stating what her father's money is for and all the cash that her father has saved at her father's preliminary hearing, the judge sees that there is a case of mistaken identity and recommends that her father's

appeal for residency be heard. At her father's appeal for residency, the judge grants him permission to file a new application for residency and even states that his paperwork will be processed with accuracy.

In *The Secret Side of Empty*, M.T. perseveres through her father's abusive behavior, her own depression that leads to suicidal thoughts, an estrangement from her best friend, and a break-up with her boyfriend in addition to the challenges that come with being undocumented. At the end of the book, the president issues an executive order regarding undocumented immigrants who entered the United States at age 16 or younger. Due to this executive order, M.T. can get a work permit and is safe from deportation. M.T. feels relieved, "I close my eyes, for the first time in a long time not wading a lake of silence. The future begins to take color in my mind. And it shines" (p. 330). Thus, the hope that M.T. feels for the future is tied to M.T.'s relief of not having to leave the United States.

At the end of *Sofi Mendoza's Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico*, Sofi is declared to be a United States citizen. Her paternal grandmother is a U.S. citizen who was illegally deported years ago. Her father is granted United States citizenship based on his mother's status as a United States citizen. There is a dramatic scene at the border in which Sofi, her father, her paternal grandmother, aunt, uncle, cousins, and lawyer support her as she meets with an immigrant agent at the border. Her lawyer, Mr. Wilcox, with a court order as proof, asserts that Sofi is a United States citizen and Sofi is allowed to pass through to the United States.

In *Return to Sender*, there is a dramatic scene at a satellite office of the Department of Homeland Security in St. Albans in which Mari tells the story of her

family and why her parents should not be held as criminals. Mari's mother's personal items had been found among the things of the coyotes who had kidnapped her and the government had mistaken her mother for one of the traffickers. Her father was also facing criminal charges for resisting arrest and hitting a federal agent. Mari feels the weight of responsibility on her shoulders and thinks, "[Mr. Calhoun] was saying *we*, but it was up to me, and I knew it" (p. 287). However Mari's perseverance paves the way for criminal charges against her parents to be dropped. Due to Mari's intervention and explanation of events, Mr. O'Goody recommends that her mother be released from detention pending her hearing. Eventually, criminal charges against Mari's father for resisting arrest and hitting an immigration officer are dropped. The dropping of these charges will allow Mari's father to return to the United States ten years from now. Ten years from now Ofie will be 18 and as a United States citizen, she will be able to sponsor her non-citizen family members in immigrating legally to the United States.

Sanitized with the protagonist or a loved one of the protagonist expressing hope for the future which is tied to getting legal immigration status.

In six of the novels, characters express hope for the future regarding their immigration status. In *Trafficked*, after being told that she will have to cooperate with law enforcement's case against her captors if she wants to remain in the United States, Hannah makes the decision to remain in the United States.

In *Illegal*, Nora tells the priest, Father Michael, that she is an undocumented immigrant. Father Michael responds by saying, "God doesn't care about your status. He wants you to have faith...And like your own father, he wants you to have hope. You

have not been abandoned” (pp. 241-242). Nora’s hope for the future is tied more to her religious belief than to an expectation that the law will change.

In *La Línea*, Miguel does not return to Mexico because he knows that as an undocumented immigrant he will not be allowed back into the U.S. He has made a life in the U.S. however, he has hope that one day, he will be able to return to Mexico and be allowed back in the United States and he plans to return his grandmother’s medallion of the Virgin at that time.

Crossing the Wire has a happy ending with hope for the future. From the beginning of the book, Victor’s friend Rico and later Victor, talk about moving to the U.S. and the possibility of the U.S. government changing the laws so that undocumented immigrants can become citizens. Although they have made it across the border without sustaining major injuries and have gotten well-paying jobs, Rico decides that he misses his family and wants to return to Mexico to go to school and take care of his parents. Rico returns to Mexico, not because he was having a hard time making a living, but because he missed being at home. Victor is able to send money home for food and clothing for his family and he has hope that his sisters will be able to attend school.

In one novel, the loved one of a protagonist hopes to gain U.S. citizenship while the protagonist plans to return home. *Until I find Julian* includes a happy-ending with family reunification and hope for the future. Mateo finds his brother Julian who is both employed and in good health. Julian has decided to continue to work in the United States as an undocumented immigrant. He hopes to obtain legal permanent resident status and then United States citizenship. Julian will continue to work and send money home. However, Mateo has no desire to remain in the United States. He plans to take Julian’s

sketch book and the news of Julian's well-being across the border to Mexico to their family. By presenting the United States- Mexico border as line to be crossed and re-crossed of the characters' own volition in the absence of deportation, Giff is showing that happiness can be found on both sides of the border.

In *Heat*, Michael and his brother Carlos express a desire to "live happily ever after in America, the way Papi promised," however gaining legal immigration status or U.S. citizenship is not expressly mentioned (p. 39). The fact that Michael and his brother Carlos are undocumented is presented as a routine problem. Michael and Carlos do not want Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to know that their father has died because they do not want to be sent to foster homes and they do not want to be sent back to Cuba. However, throughout the story, the brothers fear being placed in foster homes more than they fear being deported. When Mr. Gibbs, a representative of ACS, schedules a visit at their apartment to do a welfare check, the brothers, along with Michael's friend Manny, have arranged for Manny's uncle to pretend to be their father.

One novel, *Dream Things True*, presents the U.S. legal system as unaccommodating to the undocumented immigrants who have built lives and raised families here. In the novel, the climate of Gilberton changes from hospitable to inhospitable. Local law enforcement begins to arrest and imprison undocumented immigrants on minor violations of state law and then notify United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) so that ICE will apprehend them. Alma's father successfully passes through a driver's license checkpoint but is later apprehended because his taillight is out. Raúl, her brother, is stopped shortly thereafter and apprehended for not having a driver's license and charged with a misdemeanor for having

the machete, a “concealed weapon,” in the truck (pp. 175-176). Alma’s father and brother are eventually deported to Mexico.

However, due to connections, one member of Alma’s network of family and friends who are undocumented or legal permanent residents gets placed on the fast track to United States citizenship. The only reason why Manny, Alma’s wayward cousin, gets to maintain his legal permanent resident status and is allowed an “expedited...citizenship process” is because Sexton Prentiss, a United States Senator for Georgia, does not want it made public knowledge that the father of the baby that Manny’s fiancée has given birth to is possibly his son Whit. Whit has vowed to go public with the information unless Prentiss paves the way for Manny to receive United States citizenship. Whit actually worked outside the law to get that particular, lawful result. Even Alma, one of the main protagonists does not remain in the United States. She decides to return to Mexico before her eighteenth birthday so that she will not be banned from entering the United States legally. This decision leaves the door open for her return to the United States as an international student to attend college.

In one novel, *Star in the Forest*, the focus is not on the desire of the undocumented immigrants’ to change their immigration status as much as the focus is on how they have built productive lives and are raising a family. Zitlally’s father works in construction and her mother works at IHOP and Denny’s to provide for the family. The focus of the novel is the family’s hope that Papá will return safely to the United States despite the fact that he is undocumented.

The peril inherent in the journey to the United States.

In eight of the 12 novels under consideration, the peril inherent in the journey to the United States plays a major role. For example, the first leg of Hannah's trip to the United States is a bus ride from Moldova to Romania. During this portion of the journey, a girl named Ina offers Hannah a job as a dancer at a hotel. Hannah declines the job, but later on, "started to get more nervous about Ina" (p. 72). Once in Romania, Hannah rides in a taxi to the airport with an agent named Volva and she notes that, "Something felt wrong" (pp. 76-77). Under duress Hannah gives him her Moldovan passport and the cash that one of her uncles has given her. Before letting her out of the taxi to board the airplane, Volva rapes her. When passing through customs at the Los Angeles International Airport, Hannah feels intimidated by the "grim immigration officers" (p. 2). She keeps the advice of the agents who prepared her for the trip in mind and her concerns about being sent to an "interrogation room" are allayed after an immigration officer allows her to pass through (pp. 5-9). Although Volva, the agent who facilitates Hannah's trip to the airport technically is not a coyote, his behavior mirrors that of unscrupulous coyotes written about in the research regarding undocumented migration between the United States-Mexico border and mentioned in the literature review above.

In addition to the aforementioned threats of violence from the coyote and the truck driver in the novel *Illegal*, Nora and her mother also face thirst and a lack of fresh air during the journey to the United States. It is dark in the truck and so hot that the heat is suffocating. The voice of Nora's mother becomes raspy and Nora notices that her mother has not drunk any water throughout the entire trip. They are so thirsty, that once they get to a restaurant in Houston, they gladly drink the water offered by the waitress.

The protagonists of *La Línea*, learn how to be prepared for dangers that they may face during the journey. For her own protection from assailants, Javier directs Elena to cut off her hair so that she will appear as a boy and tells Miguel to write “Tengo SIDA”⁸ across Elena’s chest to deter would-be rapists (pp. 65-66). Sometimes the trains derail and people riding on the trains die. During their journey, Javier, Elena, and Miguel read newspaper articles about a train that derailed, killing many of its riders as a result. They wonder if it was the train that they were riding before they took the truck into the border town. Miguel thinks, “Elena and I had cheated death again” (p. 86). Thus, the journey to the United States is presented as one fraught with danger.

As Miguel, Elena, Javier, and Moisés cross the desert, they face challenges such as heat, thirst, injury, and armed vigilantes who are looking for undocumented immigrants. Moisés is shot and driven away by these vigilantes, yet he allows his backpack with his water bottle to drop out of the truck so Elena, Miguel, and Javier can have access to it. Later on, Javier cannot walk as fast as Elena and Miguel due to his injured ankle and he disappears, yet leaves his water bottle for Elena and Miguel. Elena and Miguel are able to make the journey without suffering an incapacitating injury, being apprehended by vigilantes or Border Patrol, or dying of dehydration. Such a safe passage could be considered a sanitization of the harsh experiences that many migrants face when entering the United States illegally.

In *Crossing the Wire*, aside from the aforementioned dangers to migrants that come from gangs and drug smugglers, there is the danger of getting caught by the Border Patrol and the local police which is a focal point of the storyline. To get to the United States, Victor travels by bus, train, and on foot in the desert. On Victor’s first bus ride,

Mexican police check passengers for their immigration documents. The Mexican police are searching for people who are not Mexican citizens so that they can deport them. Although Victor is from Mexico, he does not have any documents that prove that fact, therefore the police remove him from the bus with the intention of deporting him to Guatemala. Victor's newfound friend, Miguel, tells Victor that the Mexican police search the buses for people who are not Mexican citizens at the behest of the United States government. Victor escapes from the police and is not deported to Guatemala.

In *Crossing the Wire*, the Border Patrol's strategies and equipment are highlighted. In some places, the United States-Mexico border is marked only by "a fence with seven strands of barbed wire" (p. 85). In some places, the Border Patrol has more sophisticated devices to mark off the border and detect who is crossing. For example, in Nogales, there is a wall separating the United States from Mexico. In other areas of the desert, the Border Patrol agents wear night vision goggles and have placed motion sensors and hidden cameras throughout the desert to aid in the capture of migrants. There is even what the characters refer to as a "Migra blimp" (p. 163). There is also the "Migra machine" a tower near the road from which Border Patrol agents watch the desert (p. 194). At one point, Victor is caught by the Border Patrol. After being held in a detention facility, he is released at the border wall and regroups in order to start his journey north again.

The peril in the journey to the United States is a major theme in *Dream Things True*. Alma is concerned that something bad will happen to her brother who plans to cross illegally into the United States after he is deported to Mexico. She tells him, "Crossing. The desert. The border. It's all too dangerous" (p. 296). Throughout the

novel, Alma has recurring nightmares about Border Patrol. In one nightmare, men wearing uniforms and carrying guns are approaching her. Alma knows that her mother died in the Sonora Desert of dehydration while attempting to cross into the United States, however, it is only until later in the novel when her brother tells her that the two of them actually walked across the desert with their mother and would have died of dehydration as well had she not breastfed them that Alma connects the nightmares to the real-life experience that she had forgotten.

In *Until I Find Julian*, Mateo grows up hearing the stories of relatives and friends who met disaster on their way to the United States. During his journey, he thinks about the neighbor who was murdered by a coyote and his mother who lost her way near the border and was deported. At one point on Julian's journey, he is walking through the desert with a group of people and when a woman cannot keep pace with the group due to having to take care of her baby, the coyote tells her, "Leave the baby...or I'll leave you here and you'll both die" (p. 15). This callousness of the coyote shows that the migrants also face danger from their guides in addition to facing danger from the Border Patrol and the elements in the desert.

In *Star in the Forest*, the actual journey to the United States from Mexico of Zitlally and her family is not presented. However, what Zitlally's father tells her to prepare for the journey is presented. When Zitlally tells her father that she wants to go to the United States, her father tells her that she has to prepare to do a lot of walking in a desert that will be hot during the day and cold at night. He also tells her that she will have to be quiet and follow his directions to hide from Border Patrol. Thus, dangers caused by the weather and the authorities are alluded to but not detailed.

In *Heat*, Michael, Carlos, and their father's journey to the United States is not presented as especially perilous, however, their journey is contrasted with the journey of the family of El Grande, a famous baseball player for the New York Yankees. Carlos notes that he, Michael and Papi were in a boat in the ocean on their own, however, El Grande's family were escorted by the U.S. Government,

That wasn't a high-speed chase on the high seas... That was a police escort... They must have been tipped that they had the wife and kids of a star Yankee pitcher on board... I'm surprised they didn't let that boat go all the way to the Harlem River and drop everybody off a few blocks from the ball park... We should have told them the night we came that we had the famous pitcher Miguel Arroyo on board. (pp. 27-28)

While the hardships that Carlos and his family endured during the journey are not detailed, Carlos notes that the authorities could have made his family's journey easier.

The silence maintained over undocumented status.

In 10 of the 12 novels under consideration, the protagonists' silence over their undocumented status (in all novels except for *La Línea* and *Illegal*), is featured. In keeping with the real-life movement of undocumented youth overcoming obstacles through speaking out about their immigration status and challenges, the novels under consideration often show that the silence of the protagonists will be broken through the protagonists' ability to find their voices and speak up for themselves.

In *Trafficked*, Lillian, one of Hannah's captors, instills in Hannah a sense of fear over being "illegal." During a routine trip to a local store, Hannah remembers Lillian's advice "not to talk to anyone, because... she could be arrested if anyone suspected she was illegal" (p. 133). Lillian even tells Hannah that INS can apprehend her "anywhere" (p. 140). Lillian tells Hannah that undocumented Russian women "fall under the same category [as terrorists]" (p. 179). Thus, Lillian's warnings have the effect of placing

Hannah in a constant state of fear until Hannah is finally able to break away from her captors.

Due to this fear, on more than one occasion, Hannah dodges the police when telling them about her problems could help her. One night when Hannah goes to mail her letters, she runs from the police when she sees them and when a police officer asks her what she is doing, she gives an evasive answer. On another occasion, when she and Lillian get into an argument outside Maggie's school, Lillian slaps Hannah. Hannah tells the police officer that Lillian did not slap her even though she thinks "maybe he could really help her" (pp. 312-313). Hannah finally breaks her silence on Christmas morning when she awakens badly bruised and aching from Lillian's beating. Paavo has arrived at the house to take Hannah away and Hannah runs for her life. She runs into her next door neighbor Colin's house and lets them know that Paavo has a gun. Colin's mother, Liz calls the police. In the aftermath, when the police arrive to ask questions and take statements, Colin notes, "I definitely didn't think they were making her work for free" (p. 368). The fact that Hannah's captivity was hiding in plain sight makes her story all the more harrowing.

In *Ask Me No Questions*, Nadira notes that her father tells her, "The most important thing... was not to stick out. Don't let them see you" (p. 58). In addition, Nadira notes that she and her sister, as immigrants from Bangladesh, blend in at school because the school's population is diverse,

We're not the only illegals at our school. We're everywhere. You just have to look. A lot of the kids here were born elsewhere –Korea, China, India, the Dominican Republic. You can't tell which ones aren't legal. We try to get lost in the landscape of backpacks and book reports. To find us you have to pick up the signals. It might be in class when a teacher asks a personal question, and a kid

gets this funny, pinched look in his eyes. Or some girl doesn't want to give her address to the counselor. We all agree not to notice. (p. 29).

Thus, Nadira and her sister are not the only students who maintain silence over their undocumented status at school. Nadira maintains this silence under difficult circumstances. At one point, Mr. Friedlander and Mrs. Roble call Nadira out of class to question her about her sister Aisha's skipping of classes and not showing up for the Barnard interview, yet Nadira refuses to tell them what is going on. Moreover, Nadira and her sister are silent about their immigration status until they realize their teachers at school may be able to help them. Nadira suggests that they talk to Mr. Friedlander, the college counselor that scheduled Aisha's interview with Barnard College.

In *The Secret Side of Empty*, only at the request of her own mother does M.T. tell the principal of Goretti that she and her mother are undocumented immigrants. When the National Honor Society is planning its trip to England and Ireland, M.T. does not tell Ms. North that she cannot freely leave and return to the United States because she is undocumented. Instead she just says, "I can't go" (p. 118). M.T.'s silence is encouraged and reinforced by her father. After her father picks her up from the clinic where she was placed on suicide watch, He tells her, "You better watch your step. Keep your mouth shut. These people in this country are not your friends" (p. 279). This silence is so ingrained in M.T. that she does not inform her best friend, Chelsea, that she is undocumented until the very end of the novel.

In *Sofi Mendoza's Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico*, Sofi's silence about her undocumented status stems not from her desire to hide, but from her lack of knowledge about it. Sofi believes that she resides legally in the United States until one of the immigration agents at the Mexico-United States Border reveals her green card as

fraudulent. Even still Sofi believes there is some mistake and she is a legal resident until Rico tells her that her parents hid the truth from her for her own protection. Sofi also has no problem telling her new friend Andres that she is an undocumented immigrant to the United States.

Once the truth is out, Sofi does not try to hide the fact that she is undocumented with the exception of a few times. In another instance, Sofi tells a man who helps her dial the correct numbers to make an international telephone call to the United States that she is American. On another occasion, Sofi remains silent but nods her head as if to say yes when Rico tells police officers who have arrested Sofi for trying to bribe them that she is American. Because Sofi's exposure as an undocumented immigrant is public, at the border and with her friends Taylor and Olivia, the story is not about her hiding her status from the people at home. Taylor and Olivia have told their friends at school and Taylor has created buttons with the message: "No More Borders! Free Sofi!" (p. 245). The support that Sofi receives from her friends is probably a reason why she does not feel as if she needs to be silent regarding her status as an undocumented immigrant.

Crossing the Wire focuses primarily on Victor's journey to the United States in which most people around him, other travelers and the Border Patrol know that he is an undocumented immigrant. Initially, Victor's silence is not a factor in hiding his undocumented status. However, once Victor and Rico are across the border, they meet a passerby who drives a truck. They do not disclose that they are undocumented, however they ask for a ride to Tucson which the driver grants. Once in Tucson, Victor does feel fearful that other drivers will call Border Patrol when they see him and Rico.

In *Return to Sender*, Mari is silent over her status as an undocumented immigrant until the end when she tells Ms. Ramírez and an agent from the Department of Homeland Security. Mari's silence stems from not wanting herself or her family members to be deported. Although Mari was born in Mexico, her younger sisters, Ofie (7-years-old) and Luby (5-years-old) were born in Durham, North Carolina, therefore they are United States citizens. Early on, Mari's father explains to her that part of the family does not reside in the United States legally and he tells her not to mail the letters that she writes because a Spanish name on an envelope could attract the attention of the United States Government. When Tyler comes over to introduce himself, Mari puts her hand over Ofie's mouth in an attempt to keep her from revealing that Mari was born in Mexico. At school, Mari does not write about her family being from Mexico "because my classmates might turn us in" (p. 59). On Halloween, when trick-or-treaters ring the doorbell, the entire family hides and does not answer the phone because they think that "la migra" is at the door (p. 101). Mari feels that Ms. Ramírez is the family's madrina or godmother and therefore confides in her. After her parents have been detained by the federal government, Mari tells Ms. Ramírez that she is undocumented.

In *Dream Things True*, Alma is generally silent about her undocumented status except with a few, trusted people until the end of the novel when she makes her speech at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Georgia luncheon. At the beginning of their romantic relationship, Alma tells Evan that she is undocumented that she is undocumented. As they discuss scholarship opportunities, Alma tells Mrs. King that she is undocumented. Alma's disclosures to Evan and Mrs. King happen early in the novel. At the end of the novel, when Alma is making her speech as a finalist for the Youth of the Year

scholarship, she decides to go “off script” and tell the audience of the sorrows and frustrations she experiences due to being undocumented (pp. 248-250). Alma views the speech as her way “to ‘come out,’ to quit being afraid and ashamed” (p. 249). Therefore, Alma not only breaks her silence, she finds her voice and begins to advocate for herself.

In *Star in the Forest*, Zitlally and her family maintain a silence regarding their status as undocumented immigrants with the general public. When a police officer stops her mother for having a broken headlight, instead of revealing that she does not have a driver’s license, Zitlally’s mother says she forgot her driver’s license. The officer lets her go with a warning.

When Crystal suggests that she and Zitlally contact the dog pound about finding Star, Zitlally disagrees with that idea because she fears that if they go to the dog pound, the dog pound will find out that she, her mother, and her older sister are here illegally and turn them over to the authorities who will deport them. Zitlally does not reveal her own status as an undocumented immigrant to her new best friend Crystal, and after her father is deported, she initially tells Crystal that he is in Mexico picking mushrooms. After their dog Star disappears, Zitlally finally tells Crystal the whole truth: her father is an undocumented immigrant who has been deported to Mexico and was kidnapped during his journey back to the United States. Zitlally did not reveal her father’s undocumented status to her former friends, Olivia, Emma, and Morgan who “would think, *Oh my god, your dad is an illegal criminal speeder construction worker immigrant!*” (p. 23).

In *Heat*, silence is a major theme, however, their silence stems from not wanting to be separated from each other and the fear of being deported is secondary. When Michael and Carlos discuss what they will do after their father dies, Carlos says,

There is something where they say they would try to keep siblings together. But they can't guarantee it. If someone finds out about Papi, then we go into Family Court. And after that, little brother? Then it's up to them. The Official Persons. If they can't place us in a foster home, then we could go into a group home. Maybe even back to Cuba... We are going to stay a family, and we are going to live in this apartment until you graduate from high school and the Yankees come and offer you a big bonus contract and then... Then we live happily ever after in America, the way Papi promised. (pp. 38-39)

Thus, the silence begins. Michael is not allowed to answer the telephone or talk to "Official Persons" when Carlos is not present (pp. 14, 55). Furthermore, only three people are entrusted with their secret that their father has died: Mrs. Cora, a neighbor, the superintendent of the apartment building who has a cousin who helps with the burial of Papi, Father Montoya, a priest, and Manny, Michael's best friend. When adults inquire about Papi's whereabouts, Michael tells them that his father is in Florida visiting a sick brother.

Eventually, Mrs. Cora breaks the silence. She notifies ACS of Michael and Carlos' situation after Carlos is arrested. Mr. Gibbs, who works for ACS, agrees to take custody of Michael and Carlos, and agrees to let Carlos and Michael remain in the apartment so long as Carlos takes an internship with ACS and remains in the internship until he turns 18.

In *Until I Find Julian*, Mateo and his newfound friend, Angel, a 12-year-old girl who guides him through the desert and then across the Rio Grande to the United States after Mateo gets separated from the group of migrants he was travelling with are silent about their immigration status because they do not want to be deported. When Mateo first arrives in the United States, he is afraid of being apprehended by the police for being undocumented. In addition, when Mateo and Angel first begin to search for Julian at a construction site, instead of speaking with police, they run as the police approach because

they do not want to be discovered as undocumented immigrants and then deported. Furthermore, Angel constantly reminds him that although they need food, as children they should not go shopping during school hours because people may become suspicious of them. In order to get food, Mateo takes a job with a shopkeeper named Sal who pays him in both food and money. Mateo's suspicion that Sal may know he is illegal becomes a certainty and later Mateo thinks, "He must know that I'm illegal, and a word Angel said this morning: *undocumented* something. But he doesn't seem to mind" (pp. 83, 114). Although Mateo eventually tells Sal that his brother Julian is missing, he does not actually say that he and Julian are undocumented immigrants.

Strong protagonists who demonstrate agency.

In all 12 of the novels under consideration, the protagonists demonstrate agency by acting in their own behalf. Even though the protagonists may be victimized by other people or circumstances, they act on their own behalf to make their situations better. The agency demonstrated ranges from small acts of courage, often done in secret to major acts that help not only the protagonists themselves but their family members as well.

Sometimes the agency takes the form of finding information and people which will allow the protagonists to ameliorate their situation. In *Trafficked*, Hannah hides from her captors the fake passport that Volva gave her to use when entering the United States so that she will have a document she can use to reenter Moldova. She goes inside Sergey's office to do her own investigation regarding her situation and find the plane ticket which would allow her to exit the United States. In *La Línea*, Miguel who has previously followed the directions of his father and Don Clemente on his journey north finds getting out of Mexico difficult after Don Clemente dies. Miguel demonstrates

agency by searching for the coyote that Don Clemente had recommended once he, Elena, and Javier are in the border town. In *Ask Me No Questions*, after her father is detained by the federal government, Nadira launches her own investigation into his case. When examining the family's paperwork after a telephone conversation with her mother, Nadira thinks, "It's like a map that suddenly becomes clear –lines start feeding into each other, connecting the parts. I pull out the new fax, look again. I've got it, I think. I've got a way to get Abba out" (p. 117). Ultimately, Nadira's work gets her father released from detention.

Sometimes the agency is demonstrated through protagonists acting in their defense and in defense of their friends. In *The Secret Side of Empty*, M.T. refuses to be a victim of circumstance and when she turns 18, she leaves home to escape her abusive father. After her father beats her, she goes to a neighbor's house to call the police. A police officer arrives to escort her away from her house to Chelsea's house. This demonstration of agency paves the way for her to become more independent.

In *Illegal*, Nora demonstrates agency by not only defending herself but also her friend. For example, one day at the pool, Nora punches a Hispanic girl who tells Keisha, Nora's African-American friend, that she is not welcome at the swimming pool. When Nora is pulled into a moving car by teenage boys who think she is Tessa, her boss' long-lost niece who joined a gang, she bites the heel of one of them and kicks in order to get out of the car.

At other times the agency is demonstrated through the protagonists' ability to build relationships with people who can help them. In *Sofi Mendoza's Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico*, Sofi reaches out to and befriends her estranged, paternal grandmother,

Abuela Benita, whom other family members call crazy and callous. Sofi's cousin Yesenia notes that the family does not visit her. Sofi demonstrates agency by going against the grain and visiting Abuela Benita on her own. Sofi's first attempt to have a conversation with Abuela Benita is unsuccessful as Abuela Benita tells Sofi to leave. However, Sofi continues to take the initiative and on her third try, she is successful in getting her grandmother to talk to her. It is Sofi's initiation of the relationship with her grandmother that paves the way for her grandmother's restored fellowship with the family. In *Crossing the Wire*, Victor is not a victim of circumstance. Victor's concern for his mother, sisters, and little brother and what will happen to them if they move to the tourist town of Guanajuato causes him to make the decision to travel to the United States alone to look for work. During Victor's journey to the United States, he knows how to make the right friends who will help him. Victor knows that traveling alone is hard so he looks for someone who can help him during the journey. He spots Miguel at a bus station and notes that, "Experience lay heavy on him, like a tree much carved upon" which makes him someone that Victor wants to follow into the United States (pp. 33-34). Victor takes the initiative in befriending him by taking a seat next to him on the bus and starting a conversation with him. Later in Victor's journey, he meets up with Miguel again and persists in following him even though Miguel tells him to stop. Victor has chosen a mentor who gives him advice on how to make a safe journey. The advice includes avoiding trains and perceiving which direction is north by the sun's position and the time of day. Miguel had also provided Victor with a map that displays dirt roads, wells, and springs, however the map is later confiscated by a Border Patrol agent. At

another point during the journey, Victor befriends a migrant boy named Julio who warns him of gangs and defends him against a cholo who tries to rob them.

Other protagonists demonstrate agency by determining the direction of their lives; whether that means going to the United States or returning to the nation of origin. In *Until I Find Julian*, Mateo demonstrates agency by deciding of his own accord to go to the United States to find Julian. Mateo thinks, “I have to find him, save him, the way he saved me once” (p. 7). Even after Mateo makes the decision, he does not ask for his mother’s permission to leave. He leaves her a note underneath her plate which says only, “I’ve gone to find Julian” (p. 10). By taking on a grown-up characteristic of leaving when he wants to, Mateo is demonstrating agency.

In *Dream Things True*, Alma demonstrates agency by making her own decisions about the direction of her future. Given the climate of anti-immigrant sentiment and her lawyer’s advice that Alma will be banned from reentering the United States legally if she stays beyond the age of 18 and a half, Alma decides to return to Mexico. Although romantically involved with Evan, she does not accept his proposal of marriage, a marriage which could possibly allow her to remain in the United States and gain not only legal permanent resident status, but also United States citizenship. Alma asserts, “But always can’t start like this, not as a half-truth. And *not* here” (p. 344). Thus Alma demonstrates agency by directing the plans for her own future.

Other protagonists exercise agency by speaking up not only for themselves, but for those they love. In *Star in the Forest*, Zitlally becomes withdrawn after her father is deported, however she learns to be assertive throughout the book. When Zitlally’s and Crystal’s favorite dog, Star, disappears they go from house to house in their trailer park

inquiring about him. At first Zitlally hangs back and does not say much except to people who only speak Spanish. But when Zitlally starts to advocate for Star's medical treatment at a veterinarian's clinic, she is assertive and eloquent, surprising her friend Crystal. In *Return to Sender*, Mari demonstrates agency by deciding to talk to "la migra" or the Department of Homeland Security. No one else gives Mari this idea, however, the family lawyer, Caleb Calhoun, Ms. Ramírez, Barry (the boyfriend of Ms. Ramírez), and Tyler support her decision and travel with her to the satellite office of DHS. In *Heat*, after hurting Ellie's feelings, Michael decides to find a way to apologize to her when he does not know her home address or phone number and she stops visiting him during baseball practice. Because Ellie's father is the famous baseball player El Grande, who is also from Cuba, Michael gets his attention just before a baseball game by singing a Cuban children's song about Misifuz, a cat. As El Grande shakes his hand, Michael slips him the note with his apology written on it and his plan works.

The protagonists (or friends of the protagonists) express a desire to go to school.

In ten of the 12 novels under consideration, either the primary protagonist or a friend of the protagonist desire to go to school. In five of the books, the desire to get an education encompasses the hope of attending college one day either through a stated goal or the enrollment in college preparation courses. In *Trafficked*, Hannah views the United States as a land of opportunity. From the very beginning, her intentions are to go to the United States, finish high school, enroll in medical school, and become a physician. In fact, Hannah is named after the American physician who delivered her. While Hannah is held captive, she seeks to take English classes which are free. Before leaving Moldova,

Hannah tells her best friend, “I don’t have anything. If I don’t do this, I’m stuck here. I’ll be nothing” (p. 19). Hannah’s desire to get an education in the United States is actually one of the qualities that helps Hannah to persevere when she is held captive. Similarly, the desire for an education plays an important role in *Ask Me No Questions*. When Nadira accompanies Aisha to an interview at Barnard College, Nadira observes the students and begins to imagine herself as a college student on a college campus. After Aisha drops out of high school, Nadira even encourages her sister to return.

In *The Secret Side of Empty*, M.T. desires to go to college, which requires finishing high school. When M.T. visits Chelsea’s cousin Siobhan, in college, M.T. feels envious and is concerned that college is out of reach for herself. M.T.’s mother desires an education for M.T. as well. M.T.’s mother tells her,

I didn’t finish high school, even though I always promised my mother when she was alive that I would go back one day. I didn’t keep that promise. But I promise you this, and this one I *will* keep: *you’re* going to finish high school. And I have a feeling you’re going to do much more than that, too. Can you please remember this? Even when things seem most hopeless, there is always a way out” (p. 133).

Once again, the desire for an education is presented as a driving force that can help one overcome problems. M.T.’s mother knows that getting an education is challenging, however she notes that obstacles can be overcome.

In *Sofi Mendoza’s Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico*, Sofi looks forward to going to college not only for an education, but also to get away from home. Sofi thinks, “UCLA was supposed to be her big escape from an overprotective hell” (p. 12). Even after Sofi is not allowed back into the United States, she holds on to her dream of attending UCLA and proudly tells Andres and his friend Huero who drive her to her

aunt's house that she will attend UCLA. Even while in Mexico, Sofi thinks of the exams for which she needs to study.

In *Dream Things True*, Alma has a desire for a good education and she wants to be an anthropologist). Alma dreads returning to Gilberton to go to Gilberton High School (GHS) whose curriculum is not as rigorous as that of North Atlanta High School. At GHS, Alma has to prove to her advisor that she is qualified to be in Advanced Placement and honors classes by showing her the transcript of her coursework from North Atlanta High School. In keeping with her interests, Alma reads anthropological works such as *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Upon her return to Mexico, Alma will enroll in an academy in Mexico City and she has also found anthropology classes offered by another educational institution that she may enroll in once she returns to Mexico.

In the other five books in which the desire for an education is featured, education deals with primary and secondary school and is more of an immediate concern. In *Illegal*, the school has closed down in Nora's hometown of Cedula. During the journey to the United States, Nora thinks of what she hopes for. Along with reunification with her father and money, she dreams of getting an education. Once in Houston, Nora looks through the windows of a school that is closed for the summer. When looking at the books, computers, and writing utensils in the classroom, Nora thinks, "There was more in this room than what had been bought in three years by the nuns. I felt like I was staring into an oasis of education" (p. 172). Nora even thinks about all the things she does not know because she is not in school. When Nora is registering for school and the school official requests documents from Nora that Nora's grandmother knows she doesn't have,

her Grandmother tells her that she does not have to register for school today, however Nora replies with, “It is important. I need to do this” (p. 245).

In *La Línea*, both Elena and Miguel desire to get an education and this desire is encouraged by their parents. Miguel’s father named him after writers that he admired and his father was determined that Miguel “would have a good, important job, one where [he] didn’t have to break [his] back to put a few frijoles y tortillas on the table” (p. 2). Elena plans to be the first woman to graduate from school and Miguel plans to be the first man to graduate from school in the family and they keep to this plan even though both of their parents are now working in the United States and they will have to go to the United States to complete school.

In *Return to Sender*, Mari has a desire to go to school and does not tell her father about boys at school who mock her due to her status as an undocumented immigrant because she fears that her father will remove her and her sisters from school due to the name-calling.

In *Star in the Forest*, Zitlally’s grades begin to slip after Papá is deported and she stops speaking at school. When her mother threatens to send her to Mexico if she does not do better in school, Zitlally applies herself and her grades improve. At one point, Zitlally misses her father so much that she considers neglecting her studies so that her mother will send her to Mexico to be with him, however, something does not seem right to Zitlally about that idea and she continues to do well in school.

In *Until I Find Julian*, Mateo’s desire to get an education is not as prominent as that of his friend Angel. In fact, when Mateo is thinking about his life, he remembers a time when he skipped school to go fishing. However, Angel, does not know how to read

and wants to go to school even though she is behind in her studies and has bad memories of being placed in a class with children much younger than she was who made fun of her. At the end of the novel, Angel has a dream that she is in Mexico and is attending school.

The protagonists receive assistance in getting an education.

Another common theme in the portrayals of the experiences of undocumented youth in the novels is the fact that getting an education may be more difficult due to their undocumented status and friends, school officials, and other adults are likely to offer assistance in this regard. Of the 12 novels under consideration, nine present situations in which an undocumented immigrant receives assistance from friends, school officials, and other adults in getting an education. Five of the nine books feature situations in which receiving assistance in getting an education plays a major role in the storyline. Unlike the young people in the study that Enriquez conducted, the protagonists in the novels under consideration received educational assistance from school officials or adults instead of their similarly situated undocumented peers.

In *Ask Me No Questions*, Nadira's sister, Aisha drops out of school due to feeling overwhelmed about her lack of legal immigration status. However, once teachers learn of her situation, they work with her and she graduates as valedictorian. One teacher, Mr. Friedlander, even calls a reporter to write a story on Nadira and Aisha's situation in hopes of turning public opinion in favor of Nadira's family.

In *The Secret Side of Empty*, M.T.'s father does not want her enrolled in a public school because she is undocumented and he believes that attempting to enroll in school will expose the entire family as undocumented. M.T.'s mother finds a private school run by nuns, Goretti, that will enroll her. Even when money becomes tight for the family, the

principal allows M.T.'s mother to work for Goretti in order to pay for M.T.'s tuition. Once M.T. graduates from high school, she receives assistance from Chelsea's mother in getting accepted to a college in Connecticut. Through the support of her mother, the principal, and a friend of the family, M.T. is able to continue her education.

In *Illegal*, Nora is concerned that she will not be able to attend school because she does not have identification, a Social Security number, and other items required for school registration, however, Nora's completion of forms for migrant workers will allow her to enroll in school.

In *Sofi Mendoza's Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico*, despite the challenges stemming from her immigration status and her three weeks absence from school, the school administration allows Sofi to take final exams and graduate.

In *Dream Things True*, Alma receives assistance in getting an education from Mrs. King, her middle school guidance counselor. Mrs. King sees Alma's potential and helps her to get enrolled in North Atlanta High School which is known for its academic excellence and rigorous curriculum. When Alma's father requires her to return to Gilberton to attend Gilberton High School so that Alma will be in the area to help take care of her younger cousins, Mrs. King continues to contact Alma and continues to let her know of scholarship opportunities. When Alma feels discouraged about her prospects for college, Mrs. King tells her, "Stop talking such nonsense. I already knew –or I figured, at least –that you were undocumented. That doesn't mean we quit trying, child" (p. 64). Even when Alma lost heart and had not submitted the required teacher recommendations for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Georgia Youth of the Year scholarship, Mrs. King

submitted the recommendations for her and as a consequence, Alma was considered a finalist.

In four of the nine novels in which protagonists receive assistance in getting an education, the assistance received in getting an education is considered a matter of course and not a major part of the storyline. In *Return to Sender*, once Tyler finds out that the three daughters of one of the Mexican worker's on his family's farm will be attending the same school that he attends, he asks his mother how they will be allowed to attend school. Tyler knows that people who are not United States citizens are not allowed to vote and he questions where non-citizens may attend school. His mother replies with, "Of course they can go to school. In fact, I already checked with Mrs. Stevens and she said any child who wants to learn is welcome at Bridgeport" (p. 41). Similarly, in *Heat*, there is never any question that Michael will attend school. Going to school is just one of the activities that Michael participates in such as baseball and spending time with his friends.

In *Trafficked*, Stephanie, a case worker assigned to Hannah after Hannah has been rescued from her captors, lets Hannah know that she will be able to attend school. At the end of *La Línea*, Miguel is 25 years old and has a degree in English, however he is still undocumented. The narrative does not explain the assistance he received in enrolling in college and getting his degree.

The protagonists develop or display a hybrid identity.

In 10 of the 12 novels under consideration, the protagonists either display or develop a hybrid identity. This hybrid identity includes elements of American culture. Gloria Anzaldúa's consciousness of the new mestiza provides a framework in which to analyze the formation of a hybrid identity. When discussing the mestiza's development of

a new identity, Anzaldúa noted that the new mestiza “learns to juggle cultures”

(Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 101). Furthermore, she noted,

In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness –a *mestiza* consciousness –and thought it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (Anzaldúa, 2012, pp. 101-102)

It is this juggling of cultures and “mestiza consciousness” that helps to form the hybrid identity. The idea of a hybrid identity can be extended to the YA and middle grades novels in this study.

In seven of the ten novels that include the theme of a hybrid identity, the protagonists experience a psychological borderland as they develop a hybrid identity. For example, in the beginning of *Trafficked*, Hannah seems solidly Moldovan. Her ethnic origins are Russian and Romanian. She speaks, Russian, Romanian, and English as many people in her country do. She even tries to look American (as one of the agents instructed her to do) when she arrives at Los Angeles International Airport and is going through customs. Not only does Hannah know that she is not American, she knows that she does not look American and she attributes not looking American to her appearance – the blouse and “the too-blue slacks” she is wearing and “her crooked top teeth” (pp. 1, 5). For Hannah, trying to look American is the beginning of her hybrid identity. Hannah’s desire to learn English and remain in the United States further establish the beginnings of a hybrid identity.

In *The Secret Side of Empty*, M.T. or Monserrat Thalia, was named after both of her grandmothers in Argentina. After eighth grade, Monserrat Thalia chooses to be called by her initials, “M.T.” because it is an Americanized version of her name that is

easier for Americans to pronounce (pp. 10, 134). M.T. does not remember Argentina because she was brought to the United States as a baby by her parents, however, she speaks Spanish, the language of Argentina, and she is always aware of her roots in Argentina. M.T. identifies with the Spanish-speaking maids, nannies, and groundskeepers employed by the families of the children whom she tutors, yet does not look like them:

But these guys and the women who keep the inside of their houses spotless and their kids' diapers changed are their first thought when "Spanish" comes up. Not me, who comes over to help their kids with math and is in contention for valedictorian. Not Greek-, French-, Russian-faced me. (p. 18).

Even still, M.T. does not feel comfortable with the part of her identity that is South American. After providing Mackenzie's instructions in Spanish to the Spanish-speaking maid, the maid asks about M.T.'s background. Feeling uncomfortable, M.T. abruptly leaves Mackenzie's house. In addition, M.T. notes,

I will always be a stranger everywhere. With my parents, I am too American. With Americans, I am a spectator with my nose pressed against their windowpanes, watching their weird rituals and rites of passage, never quite understanding them completely. A little chunk of me will always be a stranger everywhere, different chunks of stranger in different situations. (p. 98).

Interestingly, M.T.'s hybrid identity does not allow her to fully belong anywhere.

In *Ask Me No Questions*, the protagonist Nadira and her sister Aisha are Americanized. Their hybrid identity includes more elements of American culture than Bengali culture. Instead of wearing traditional dress and speaking Bangla, they wear American clothes and speak English. Their choice of friends plays a large role in their development of a hybrid identity. Nadira notes that upon her family's initial arrival in the United States, she and Nadira spent time with other Bengali children, however later on, her sister begins to dress and speak like the American youth and also chooses American

friends. Nadira and Aisha have American identities and in the melting pot of their school, they blend in, as their father instructed them. Part of their blending in at their diverse school and asserting their Americanized identity is their array of friends who do not have Bengali names. Nadira's best friend is Lily Yee. Aisha's friends are Rose Chu, Kavita Menon, and Risa Sharansky. These names reflect a diversity of ethnicities.

In *Illegal*, Nora who was born in Mexico and has lived there her entire life until she moves to Texas, seems fully Mexican, however she is becoming Americanized and developing a hybrid identity. She is learning English from people she meets while working at her job at the food stand near the swimming pool. Nora's transformation happens almost without Nora realizing it. After Nora defends Keisha against one of the chulo girls and Keisha expresses surprise that Nora spoke in English, Nora thinks, "I didn't know how the words came out. Something boiled in my stomach and the words wanted to flow like lava" (p. 168). Although Nora continues to speak Spanish and works at a Mexican restaurant, by the end of the novel, Nora has adopted more American ways. Instead of the quinceañera that she had looked forward to, she has a sweet sixteen birthday party and her mother refers to her as "my American girl" (p. 250).

In *Sofi Mendoza's Guide to Getting Lost in Mexico*, Sofi evolves from feeling American, yet somehow different, to feeling unsure of her identity. Finally Sofi embraces a hybrid identity that encompasses both her Mexican origin and her life as an American in the United States. Although Sofi feels American at the beginning of the novel, questions from her friends about Mexico "made Sofi feel different, and that wasn't cool" (pp. 2, 6). Once Sofi crosses the border into Mexico with her friends, the feeling of being different returns and she thinks, "What a weird feeling, to be a stranger in her

birthplace” (p. 20). This alienation from Mexico was actually encouraged by Sofi’s parents who “bragged about her crappy Spanish verb conjugations as if it were a sign of their assimilation” (p. 40).

Being turned away at the Mexico-United States border causes Sofi to begin to have doubts about her own cultural identity. After being turned away at the border, Sofi cannot give a definitive answer as to her identity and when Andres asks if she is Mexican, she replies, “Well, yes, and no” (p. 81). Although she initially feels “infinitely more American than she was Mexican” (p. 92) and declares that she is American to a bystander who questions her identity, Sofi recognizes that within her concept of who she is, there is room for both her Mexican and American identities. Sofi progresses from being “caught in a web of two cultures, two languages, and one scary border (p. 137) to realizing that people in the migrant camp “*are Mexican like me*” (p. 154) and although attending a quinceañera uninvited, “For the first time, Sofi felt like she belonged” (p. 171). Through experiencing life in Mexico, Sofi has “found a piece of her that was missing” (p. 268) and merged her American and Mexican identities into one:

Sofi was a border girl. Not fully American or Mexican. She was both, a bridge between cultures, the best of both worlds...Despite all the craziness of the border, Sofi felt strong with the knowledge that she’d always belong to both sides of the fence. Her life was now tied to the imaginary line that separated two nations. (p. 276).

Thus, Sofi expressly acknowledges her new hybrid identity which allows her to be equally American and equally Mexican.

In *Return to Sender*, Mari is 11-years-old and although she was born in Mexico, she has lived in the United States since she was four-years-old. Mari notes,

I am not like my sisters, who are little American girls as they were born here and don’t know anything else. I was born in México, but I don’t feel Mexican, not

like Papá and my uncles with all their memories and stories and missing it all the time (p. 21)

Even though Mari does not feel Mexican, she is aware that other people see her as Mexican. In a letter to her family in Las Margaritas, she notes that, “this state is full of white people, so Mexicans stand out and that makes it easy for *la migra* to catch us” (p. 201). Throughout the novel, Mari speaks in Spanish with her relatives, even acting as an interpreter for her father, however, Mari speaks English at school. Interestingly, by the end of the novel, Mari’s relationship with Tyler has affected her identity. She notes,

I used to feel so alone, neither Mexican nor American. But now that I have a special friend, I feel like I don’t have to be one thing or another. Friendship is a country everyone can belong to no matter where you are from. (p. 202).

Mari seems to have found a hybrid identity that is able to encompass both Mexican and American cultures.

Alma, in *Dream Things True*, is another character that has embraced a hybrid identity that fuses what she has learned and internalized from both the American and Mexican cultures. When Alma is listening to Ms. Chen, her family’s immigration lawyer, Mrs. King, and Mrs. King’s son (also a lawyer) discuss her options, she thinks, “And none of it mattered. None of it mattered because she was, as she had always known, one of the kids stuck in between” (p. 241). Alma begins to embrace being “stuck in between.” During her speech to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Georgia, she states, “We are bilingual and bicultural” when describing herself and her brother (p. 250). Alma’s thoughts regarding her situation reveals her decision to embrace both cultures instead of denying one to accept the other. Although Alma embraces both cultures to form a hybrid identity, she actually views remaining in the United States as an undocumented immigrant as an act with the potential to destroy identity. She tells her brother Raúl,

And even if you don't get caught, even if you live here until the day you die, you'll never have a real job, never finish school. You'll have to build your life around lies. You'll never be able to tell the truth, to be honest about who you are. You will have to put together a false life with fake papers or, worse yet, no papers at all. You will be without identity. (p. 293)

It's interesting that Alma views remaining in the United States as an undocumented immigrant as an act that could cause one to lose his or her identity. Alma's ideas about identity undergird her own decision to return to Mexico and she knows that she will be able to maintain her hybrid identity better there than in the United States.

In three of the ten novels that include the theme of a hybrid identity, the protagonists display characteristics of a hybrid identity although the development of identity is not a major focus of the storyline. In *Star in the Forest*, Zitlally becomes comfortable in both her Mexican culture and her new American culture. While out shopping, she knows how to request items and she also knows the English pronunciation rules when her father does not know such things. At an English-Spanish bilingual veterinarian's clinic, Zitlally feels comfortable speaking in Spanish to tell the receptionist how Star came into her possession and what Star needed.

In *Heat*, Michael, who came to the United States when he was 10-years-old and is now 12-years-old embraces both his Cuban and American cultures. He notes that they speak both Spanish and English at home,

In the small, rundown apartment, their conversation was always a combination of Spanish and English. Their old life and their new one. It was only here, when it was just the two of them, that Carlos would ever call his little brother by his birth name –Miguel. To everyone else, it was always Michael. Michael still thought of Havana as home, because he was born there. And he had been Miguel Arroyo there. (pp. 8-9).

Michael's hybrid identity is expressed linguistically in the confines of his home.

Although Michael still considers Havana, Cuba home, he has no intention of returning to Cuba and tells his brother that he wants to stay in the apartment in the South Bronx.

In *Until I Find Julian*, Mateo and Angel are keenly aware that they do not look like they belong in the community of Downsville, Arkansas. When they set up shop in an empty house, Mateo thinks, "We're far from the border now. We don't look as if we belong. And we certainly don't belong in this house" (p. 49). Later, Mateo thinks, "People may look at me and think *Immigrant. Illegal immigrant. Wetback*" (p. 62). That is how Mateo views himself through the eyes of other people. However, as Mateo adapts to life in the United States, he recognizes that he is changing. To his future boss, he introduces himself as "Matty," his "northern name" (p. 81). Mateo's adoption of a northern name is a display of his hybrid identity.

A sense of belonging is also an important part of developing an identity. When Mateo is trying to convince Angel to stay in the United States and not return to Mexico so soon, she tells him, "I don't belong here" (p. 104). Mateo agrees that he does not belong in the United States either, however, he notes that a sense of belonging is not tied to geographical location but "Maybe it has to do with belonging to people" (p. 105). Similar to Mari who noted that, "Friendship is a country everyone can belong to no matter where you are from in *Return to Sender* (Alvarez, 2009, p. 202), Mateo has noted the importance fitting in with the people who matter to him in his various environments. Therefore, Mateo can feel comfortable with who he is because of the friends that he has around him.

Although the protagonists of *Star in the Forest*, *Heat*, and *Until I Find Julian* display characteristics of a hybrid identity which include speaking in two languages, they gain their sense of belonging from being with their family. Such a sense of belonging is expressed when Zitlally's father returns from Mexico and the family has a new birthday cake for her. This belonging is expressed when brothers Michael and Carlos decide that they will stay together in their apartment in the South Bronx and when Mateo finds his brother Julian in Downsville and they enjoy a dinner with their newfound friends. Although the protagonists have developed a hybrid identity, it is ultimately the protagonists' sense of belonging with their loved ones that gives them a sense of wholeness.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

As stated earlier, in the 12 YA and middle grades novels under consideration, the portrayals of the experiences of the undocumented protagonists are for the most part, realistic, yet sanitized. The novels do not shy away from tales of protagonists entering the United States illegally in order to obtain work which will provide money for their families to be fed at home. With the exception of the novel *Trafficked*, the protagonists themselves do not experience brutal violence as the result of being undocumented (such as beatings or being raped). The violence that they see happens to someone else, usually a loved one or another migrant. In other novels, the threat of violence is further mitigated by the protagonists being able successfully to defend themselves or being rescued from a bad situation.

All 12 novels present happy endings and for the most part, present protagonists from nations and in situations which are true-to-life. However, a happy-ending was not always synonymous with gaining legal status or remaining in the United States. In novels such as *Until I Find Julian*, *Return to Sender*, and *Dream Things True*, the happy-ending included family reunification and a return to the country of origin. In keeping with the statistics of the Department of Homeland Security on unauthorized immigrants which show that most undocumented immigrants are from Mexico, in the majority of the novels (eight of the 12) under consideration, the undocumented protagonists are from Mexico.

In addition to universal happy endings, and the theme of being realistic yet sanitized, other common themes emerged from reading the novels. These themes included the peril inherent in the journey to the United States, the silence that the undocumented immigrants maintain about their status, the agency protagonists demonstrate in spite of facing obstacles, the desire of the protagonists to go to school, the assistance protagonists receive in obtaining an education, and how the protagonists develop or display an Americanized identity.

Implications

Use these novels to begin exploring undocumented immigration and related issues.

This study shows that the day-to-day problems of undocumented youth are being portrayed in novels even if from a hopeful standpoint. As stated earlier in the literature review, research shows that very few undocumented immigrant youth go on to attend college, however in the novels in which the desire for an education and assistance in

getting an education are major themes, the undocumented protagonists are college bound. Furthermore, in presenting the realities of traveling between borders, the dangers of the journey are often toned down. Only one novel, *Trafficked*, presents a protagonist who suffers bodily harm on her way to the United States. In the other novels, the protagonists are able to hide from, defend themselves against, or otherwise elude attackers. Most often, the protagonists hear of the violence that loved ones suffered due to being an undocumented immigrant. There may be two reasons for the presentation of such a hopeful outlook in these novels. First, these are novels for young people and harsh realities may not be considered appropriate for young audiences. Second, with their hopeful outlook, the novels can be used as inspirational tools for the undocumented immigrant youth who read them and other youth who may know undocumented, immigrant youth.

Despite the happy endings and hopeful outlook of these novels, authors are willing to portray the experiences of undocumented protagonists in realistic ways. The authors do not shy away from describing the poverty that the families experience. By presenting characters who go hungry to presenting characters who cannot pay their utility bills, the authors are showing how poverty affects people. Even when the authors present situations of sanitized violence, the presentation of such situations may be introducing readers who had not thought about the dangers prevalent in the borderlands between nations to the hardships that undocumented immigrants face when travelling. Such introductions do not have to be graphic or comprehensive to be effective. School librarians and classroom teachers can use these books as a way to begin exploring issues and themes relevant to undocumented immigration. A school librarian could host a book club for

students in which one or several of these novels are read and the students discuss how what they read in the novels relates to their real-life experiences and what they see in the media. A social studies teacher could assign one or more of these novels as part of a unit on immigration and how laws and policies affect both immigrants and undocumented immigrants.

The importance of this research.

The content analysis of these 12 novels is important because publishers are producing more books about undocumented, immigrant youth. Of the 12 books in this study, half were published within the last five years. Furthermore, this study will be of interest to school librarians and classroom teachers who are interested in including books about undocumented immigrants in their collections and curricula and want to know what messages these books are conveying. Novels that feature young, undocumented immigrants and that tell their stories in a thoughtful and realistic way, as novels in this study do, are important because these novels allow undocumented youth to see their lived experiences affirmed. Reading about someone who faces similar challenges yet overcomes them may give undocumented youth hope for the future. In addition, reading about the experiences of undocumented youth may make both other youth and teachers sensitive to and aware of the challenges and opportunities that undocumented youth face.

As noted in the literature review above, earlier research regarding immigration in juvenile literature has focused on including juvenile literature about immigration in teacher education courses to prepare teachers to teach students who are immigrants. Additional research has focused on language and identity in juvenile literature about immigration as well as the use of immigration stories in book clubs.

Amy Cummins' study specifically focused on the portrayal of migration of undocumented immigrants from Mexico to the United States in YA literature (2013), however, I have chosen to focus on the experiences of undocumented immigrant protagonists in YA and middle grades novels regardless of their country of origin. Moreover, while Cummins focused on whether characters exhibited agency in deciding to travel to the United States, I have taken a broader view of agency and focus on the agency that the protagonists display when they act in their own behalf, regardless of the situation. This current study of themes in YA and middle grades novels that feature undocumented immigrants as protagonists adds to the body of research regarding the issue of immigration in juvenile literature.

Avenues for Further Research

Picture books about undocumented immigrants.

There are many avenues for future research. While there have been studies of picture books that portray immigrants, scholars may also want to study picture books that portray undocumented immigrants. *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*, written and illustrated by Duncan Tonatiuh is the story of a young rabbit who travels to the United States when his father, a migrant worker does not return to Mexico at the expected time. The story of being an undocumented immigrant who faces economic hardship and a perilous journey to the United States is told using animals who in the words of Tonatiuh, "convey the *human* emotions and side of the story" (Author's Note, 2013). Portraying the human experience lived out by animals may be problematic for some readers, however the story does address issues such as unscrupulous coyotes and the sacrifices made by migrants in order to take care of their families. Another book, *Hannah is My*

Name, written and illustrated by Belle Yang, tells the story of an undocumented family from Taiwan who live in fear of immigration raids at the father's workplace until they obtain green cards. These picture books provide avenues for teaching young readers about the plight of undocumented immigrants. In the semi-autobiographical story, *La Mariposa* (1998), Francisco Jiménez writes about Francisco, the young son of a migrant farm worker. Francisco is in first grade and begins to learn English and make new friends. Although being an undocumented immigrant is not expressly mentioned, issues related to the migration between countries such as making a new home, learning a new language, and working to support one's family are prominent themes in the picture book.

Children's literature published outside the United States.

Along these lines, scholars may also want to study the portrayal of undocumented immigrants in children's middle grades, and YA literature published outside the United States. Given the current state of world affairs, it may be interesting to compare how the experiences of undocumented immigrants are portrayed in the United States with how these experiences are portrayed in other nations. In *Illegally Blonde*, a YA novel published in Canada, seventeen-year-old Lucinda do Amaral returns home from a visit to the salon in which she has had her hair dyed blonde and finds that there is a somber tone in the house. Lucinda's brother Pedro breaks the news to her that her family immigrated to Canada illegally and is now being deported to Portugal by the Canadian Government (2010). Examining what themes authors of YA and middle grades novels published in Canada and other nations display with regard to undocumented immigration would be interesting.

Sanctuary cities.

Sanctuary cities are jurisdictions that have either formal or informal laws, rules, or policies that they will not assist the federal government in enforcing immigration laws. The term “sanctuary city” is a colloquial term and not a legal term (Garcia, 2009). Of the 12 novels in this study, five are set in well-known sanctuary cities. In *Crossing the Wire*, Victor and Rico aim to reach Tucson, Arizona. In *Illegal*, Nora and her mother settle in Houston, Texas after leaving Mexico. *Heat* and *Ask Me No Questions* are both set in New York City while *Trafficked* is set in Los Angeles, California. There is some controversy over whether Tucson, Arizona is a sanctuary city (ADI News Services, 2015). A Tucson city council member and members of state government seemed to disagree on the issue (ADI News Services, 2015). Even still, Tucson has had a reputation as being a sanctuary city at least with the Ohio Jobs & Justice PAC (ADI News Services, 2015). New York, Los Angeles, and Houston are all well-known sanctuary cities (AMERICA et al, 2015; Alfonso, 2015; Ross, 2015). Further research would be needed to determine the authors’ motivations for including these settings and to see if there is a trend in setting children’s literature about undocumented immigrants in sanctuary cities.

The other extreme: diplomatic immunity.

Or, one may choose to go to the opposite extreme and analyze children’s middle grades, and YA literature about protagonists who are not United States citizens, yet they are somehow privileged, for example by possessing diplomatic immunity. One YA novel that alludes to the diplomatic immunity of a character is *Love is the Drug* (2014) by Alaya Dawn Johnson. In *Love is the Drug*, Emily (Bird), befriends Alonso (Coffee) who is the son of a Brazilian diplomat. Initially, Emily views Alonso as privileged and thinks

that Alonso will not have to worry about going to prison if he is caught dealing drugs, however, the plot thickens and even Alonso ends up running from the United States Government.

When the desire to obtain legal status is not expressly mentioned.

In the novels *Heat* and *Star in the Forest*, although the protagonists convey the desire to remain together as a family in their current place of residence, they do not expressly mention the desire to obtain United States citizenship or legal permanent resident status. More research is needed to determine if the authors avoided mentioning immigration laws as a way to present the plight of undocumented immigrants yet avoid the thorny political issues surrounding immigration. Additional research is needed to determine if novelists can write about the subject matter of undocumented immigration and remain neutral. In her study of 11 YA novels about undocumented immigration from Mexico to the United States, Amy Cummins suggested that at the very least, these stories can be told without taking sides politically by asserting that YA novels are “not political treatises” (2013, p. 66).

Final thoughts.

Just as Cummins found that no novel in her study presented undocumented immigrants in a negative light, I also found that the protagonists in the novels that I examined are not presented in a negative light. The 12 novels in this study sympathetically present the hard choices and the hard circumstances that undocumented immigrants face. The protagonists’ stories are presented in a way that gives hope. Such a presentation suggests that undocumented immigrants who have built lives in this country should have hope for the future.

Notes

¹ Incidentally, Chris Weitz has recently authored a dystopian YA novel entitled *The Young World* (Kellogg, 2014).

² For a more detailed account of YA novels with immigration as a major theme see *Immigration Narratives in Young Adult Literature: Crossing Borders* (2011) by Joanne Brown.

³ Secure Fence Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-367, 120 Stat. 2638 (codified in 8 U.S.C. § 1701 note).

⁴ Journalist Sonia Nazario maintains a blog about Enrique and his family's current activities at <http://www.enriquesjourney.com/about-the-family/update-2/>

⁵ A signal is defined as a phone call, online tip report, or email regarding human trafficking (NHTRC, 2015, p. 1).

⁶ *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 57, 210-230 (1982).

⁷ Social capital is defined as relationships with other people such as teachers, friends, and relatives (Enriquez, 2011, p. 478).

⁸ "I have AIDS."

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Appendix A

Common Themes in Middle Grades and Young Adult Novels That Feature Undocumented Immigrants as Protagonists

Table A1

✓ = The theme is present. ✗ = The theme is not present.

	<i>Ask Me No Questions</i> (2006)	<i>Counting the Wires</i> (2006)	<i>Heart</i> (2006)	<i>En Linca</i> (2006)	<i>Soñ Abundanza</i> (2007)	<i>Return to Sender</i> (2009)	<i>Scar in the Forest</i> (2010)	<i>Blazed</i> (2011)	<i>Trafficked</i> (2012)	<i>Secret Side of Energy</i> (2014)	<i>Dream Things True</i> (2015)	<i>Until I Find Julian</i> (2015)
Protagonist	Nadira	Victor	Michael	Miguel	Soñ	Mari	Zihally	Nona	Hannah	M.T.	Alma	Mateo
Age	14 years	15 years	12 years	15 years	17 years	11 years (turns 12)	11 years	15 years (turns 16)	17 years	17 years (turns 18)	17 years	12 years
Nation	Bangladesh	Mexico	Cuba	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico	Moldova	Argentina	Mexico	Mexico
Destination	NYC, NY	AZ, WA	NYC, NY	CA	San Inocente, CA	NC, VT	CO	TX	Los Angeles, CA	Willow Falls, NJ	Gibberton, GA	TX, Downsville, AK
Realistic Origin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Realistic Violence	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Character Growth or Change in the last	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Hope for the future	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Perilous journey	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Silence	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Agency	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Desire to go to school	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Educational Assistance	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Hybrid Identity	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The year of first publication is given.