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# Portrayal of Latinos in young adult fiction

Jennifer Cole  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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# Portrayal of Latinos in young adult fiction

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to establish criteria for rating Latino literature for cultural and literary quality and the existence of Latino stereotypes. This study determined the themes found in the young adult fiction selected and if those themes reflected positive character and cultural traits. The criteria gained through research can be used by teacher librarians to support and enhance the Latin collection in the Storm Lake Middle School library and others by creating guidelines literature should match. The questions asked in the study were: 1. What examples of Latino stereotyping are found in the Storm Lake collection and the Middle and Junior High School Core Collection? 2. What criteria should be used to identify quality Latino literature? A qualitative analysis of content was conducted. The researcher used the Middle and Junior High School Core Collection to locate 16 books within the Storm Lake Middle School collection to read for this study. The books were read and themes were recorded. The 14 themes were grouped together into five final themes: Authenticity of Culture, Engaging Reader, Positive Portrayal of Characters, Negative Portrayal of Characters, and Negative Portrayal of Main Character. The study found that some young adult fiction does contain male Latinos viewed in stereotypical roles. Nine of the 16 young adult novels showed males with stereotypical characteristics. Seven themes portray positive characteristics which should guide library selection decisions: Authentic Cultural Setting, Authentic Language, Rich Characterization, Positive Portrayal of Character, Positive Portrayal of Family, and Main Character Seen as a Survivor. Seven themes portrayed stereotypical characteristics that should be avoided in library selections: Fatherless Families, Low Income Families, Negative Portrayal of Father, Negative Portrayal of Mother, Main Character Member of a Gang, Main Character Abuses Drugs and/or Alcohol, and Main Character Poor in Academics.

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Date

PORTRAYAL OF LATINOS IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION

A Graduate Research Paper  
Submitted to the  
Division of School Library Studies  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by  
Jennifer Cole  
May 2013

This Research Paper by: Jennifer Cole

Titled: Portrayal of Latinos in Young Adult Fiction

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish criteria for rating Latino literature for cultural and literary quality and the existence of Latino stereotypes. This study determined the themes found in the young adult fiction selected and if those themes reflected positive character and cultural traits. The criteria gained through research can be used by teacher librarians to support and enhance the Latin collection in the Storm Lake Middle School library and others by creating guidelines literature should match. The questions asked in the study were:

1. What examples of Latino stereotyping are found in the Storm Lake collection and the *Middle and Junior High School Core Collection*?
2. What criteria should be used to identify quality Latino literature?

A qualitative analysis of content was conducted. The researcher used the *Middle and Junior High School Core Collection* to locate 16 books within the Storm Lake Middle School collection to read for this study. The books were read and themes were recorded. The 14 themes were grouped together into five final themes: Authenticity of Culture, Engaging Reader, Positive Portrayal of Characters, Negative Portrayal of Characters, and Negative Portrayal of Main Character.

The study found that some young adult fiction does contain male Latinos viewed in stereotypical roles. Nine of the 16 young adult novels showed males with stereotypical characteristics. Seven themes portray positive characteristics which should guide library selection decisions: Authentic Cultural Setting, Authentic Language, Rich Characterization, Positive Portrayal of Character, Positive Portrayal of Family, and Main Character Seen as a Survivor. Seven themes portrayed stereotypical characteristics that

should be avoided in library selections: Fatherless Families, Low Income Families, Negative Portrayal of Father, Negative Portrayal of Mother, Main Character Member of a Gang, Main Character Abuses Drugs and/or Alcohol, and Main Character Poor in Academics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ..... i

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION ..... 1

    Research Problem ..... 2

    Research study purpose..... 5

    Assumptions..... 5

    Limitations ..... 5

    Research questions..... 6

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 7

    Motivating Latinos to Succeed in School ..... 7

    Effects of Stereotypes on all Students ..... 13

    Effects of Latino Stereotypes on Latino Students..... 17

    Multicultural Education and Literature to Motivate Students ..... 21

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY ..... 26

    Research Design..... 26

    Limitations ..... 26

    Assumptions..... 27

    Procedure ..... 27

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS ..... 30

    Findings..... 30

    Authenticity of Culture ..... 31

    Engaging Reader ..... 32

    Positive Portrayal of Characters..... 34

    Negative Portrayal of Characters ..... 37



Negative Portrayal of Main Character .....	40
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	42
Problem .....	42
Conclusions .....	42
Combat Stereotypes .....	43
Recommendations .....	45
REFERENCES .....	47
APPENDIX A: FINAL CODING SHEET .....	50
APPENDIX B: LIST OF BOOK TITLES .....	54

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1 Preliminary Coding Sheet .....	28
2 Final Coding Sheet .....	28

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

According to Merton (1948), “The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come *true* (Tauber, 1997, p. 9). Self-fulfilling prophecy is a topic that brings back many memories of an educator’s early collegiate courses. Throughout our careers as teachers we hear reference to this real phenomenon. Could stereotypes be a cause of self-fulfilling prophecy? In regard to stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecy, Weinstein (2002) stated, “Judgments about capability often apply stereotypes about social groups such as about race and gender, reflect myths about development and behavior, confuse what is with what could be, and put too much weight on test scores rather than daily performance as evidence of ability” (p. 4). Stereotypes exist in all aspects of culture, in television, movies, on the street, and in literature. When stereotypes are existent and persistent, they begin to become believable. Sadly, students come to school and expect to break away from stereotypes, but do they really? In our libraries do we stock up on stereotypes in our literature that embed themselves in our students’ minds?

In 2008, the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, at University of Wisconsin-Madison reported that 20 percent of the country’s students are Latino; however, only about two percent of all books reviewed by CCBD had significant Latino content (Perkins, 2009). This statistic alone alerts librarians of the need to strengthen their Latino collection. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 8.1 million Latino tweens and teens (ages 10-19) reside in the United States. It is inappropriate to generalize

this group's characteristics as with any cultural group. However, according to the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington D.C., Latino youth have a higher risk of becoming high school dropouts and are more likely to live in poverty compared to other groups (Naidoo & Vargas, 2011). The U.S. Bureau of the Census found that approximately 28 percent of Latino families live in poverty, compared to 9.2 percent of non-Latino families (Spradlin, 2012). Many Latinos feel as if they aren't sure where they fit in; they don't quite fit in with the culture of their parents or grandparents who may have come from other countries, and they don't quite fit in with the U.S. culture of youth.

In order to welcome this group, show value to the Latin culture, and celebrate contributions, several library programs have been developed around the United States. Naidoo and Vargas (2011) give several examples, including one in Burton Barr Central Library in downtown Phoenix. The goal of that program has been to provide high-energy, fun activities with hopes the teens will develop a desire for more traditional-based book clubs, after they see the collections that are available to them. The hope is also that these collections are a fair representation of a Latino culture that is complex and ever-evolving. Barry (1998) described the importance of a well-rounded collection, "Multiethnic literature increases minority children's self-esteem. Secondly, it encourages the development of respect across cultures" (p. 632).

### **Research Problem**

Too often in young adult literature Latino characters are stereotyped. Examples of stereotypes include Latino males who fail, drink, abandon their family, use drugs and gang bang (Hasse, 2002). Other examples include Latinos in general who are poor, slow, lazy, the laborers of society with low end jobs (Tauber, 1997, p. 7). Specifically, this

study will focus on novels with Latino characters, books written for fifth to eighth grade students. This study will examine books in the collection at Storm Lake (Iowa) Middle School as well as those books listed in the *Middle and Junior High School Core Collection*.

Storm Lake has seen a high amount of immigrant influx due to the meat-packing industry and its facilities in the community. Community Liaison from Tyson Foods, Irma Ardon (personal communication, October 1, 2012) indicated that from the total Tyson Storm Lake population of 1,850, 41.4% are Hispanic. This has created a degree of discomfort particularly among Storm Lake's older population. As a college student, the researcher and native Storm Laker recalls one class when a student raised his hand and said, "We had a diverse high school, we had one black boy." At that time the population of Storm Lake was creeping toward 40% non-Caucasian. The researcher's experiences living in San Antonio, Texas provided further insight into a more diverse community. Befriending a woman of Latin descent whose parents were successful elementary school principals destroyed any stereotype that may have been held.

While meat packing plant jobs have attracted many Latino residents, native Iowans need to see examples of Latinos at all positions of the social pyramid. The library book collection is one way to introduce non-stereotypic examples to them.

Librarians in Storm Lake want to see novels with diverse characters, particularly Latin characters for the student population which consists of 54.4% Latino, according to Superintendent Carl Turner (personal communication, October 1, 2012). However, it defeats the purpose to see these characters strictly in stereotypical roles, particularly the parents in books who are portrayed as lacking higher education and working in low-

paying jobs and characters who are involved in gang activity. According to Barry (1998), “class, language, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, and geography must all be taken into account when books are chosen for a particular group” (p. 636). Adults at the middle school have heard the Latino students say they don’t want to “act white.” Such statements have come from nonwhite students in regard to making the honor roll, as an example. Again, fiction can provide role models to counter these perspectives. According to Gopalakrishnan (2011), multicultural literature opens the door for students to see themselves and their differences, and it also shines a light on the abundance of similarities they share across ethnicities, gender, ability levels, and so on. “Doing this not only creates a more cohesive space for everyone to be themselves but also opens the door to all students as they share their lives and experiences” (p. 177). Ultimately, multicultural literature can be used to fight stereotyping and misunderstandings often associated with prejudice.

Students may not even notice these injustices exist when reading the text. Also, they may read and relate to the characters in the books. They may see their own family in the character’s family. That may be a great motivator for them to keep reading if they see relevance in the text. It would also be a great motivator to see Latino parents who are doctors, as an example. Morgan (2009) stated, “good multicultural children’s books for students at this age level show people of different cultural backgrounds in more prestigious positions such as doctors, lawyers , accountants, or bankers rather than in a stereotypical way” (p. 5). Hasse (2002) suggests children read literature that represents excellence of their culture, shows accomplishments of people from their same background, and shows reasons to be proud of their race.

Ultimately, the benefit in the study would be aimed towards the students. Students need to explore cultures in other locations where diversity is seen in income levels, education, and race. Also, this study can benefit present and future librarians by providing suggestions for literature to add to the library collection and by providing criteria for selecting further literature.

### **Research study purpose**

The purpose of this study is to establish criteria for rating Latino literature for cultural and literary quality and the existence of Latino stereotypes. I will then use set criteria gained through research to support and enhance the Latin collection in the Storm Lake Middle School library by creating guidelines literature should match. The population for this study will include the collection in Storm Lake Middle School's library, as well as the *Middle and Junior High School Core Collection*. I will examine texts to find the existence of stereotypes and match texts to set quality criteria. The criteria that I develop will serve as a resource for future librarians when selecting Latino texts.

### **Assumptions**

One assumption is that Latino characters in middle school level fiction have limited variety in their diverse socioeconomic levels and stereotypes are too prevalent in the books provided for grades 5 to 8.

### **Limitations**

One limitation I have is location and access to books. Storm Lake Middle School has approximately 600 students and 3,703 fiction books.

### **Research questions**

1. What examples of Latino stereotyping are found in the Storm Lake collection and the *Middle and Junior High School Core Collection*?
2. What criteria should be used to identify quality Latino literature?



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Stereotypes occur in many aspects of culture. Young adult literature may possess stereotypes about Latin Americans that go unnoticed by librarians and teachers. A study on the library collection is necessary to determine the prevalence and frequency of stereotypes in the library fiction collection. The purpose of this study is to critique the literature to locate the stereotypes of characters from Latin descent within the novels in the Storm Lake Middle School collection and compare that to the *Middle School and Junior High Core Collection* and other standards in middle level literature featuring Latino culture and characters to develop set criteria for examining quality in Latino literature.

The research pertaining to the present study and can be grouped into four categories: Latino motivation and success in school, the effects of stereotypes on all students, the effects of Latino stereotypes on Latino students, and the impact multicultural education and literature has on young adults.

#### **Motivating Latinos to Succeed in School**

Latino students make up 23.9% of the country's student body (Fry & Lopez, 2012). This group is the fastest growing cultural group in the United States. Gatto (2008) noted growth from 1992 to 2002: "the K-12 'English Language Learner' (ELL) population grew 85%. Most of these ELL students (80%) are from Spanish-speaking families." (p. 245). The problem is that only 52% leave high school with a diploma and

of those that graduate only 16% are ‘college ready’” (p. 245). Gatto (Program Coordinator Senior) studied the reasons why this is occurring and what can be done.

Gatto’s (2008) action-research focused on the issue of Latino educational underperformance. The hypothesis was that Latino students possess powerful and underutilized linguistic and cultural skills that, when accessed through translation and interpretation training, both increase the motivation and the abilities necessary to pursue a college education. A three week summer institute was given for high school juniors and seniors. Gatto found great success as a result of the training, students took pre-tests and post tests and many gains were made in writing skills, language proficiency, reading complex texts, and increased confidence. The goal of the institute was to strengthen the students’ native language as well as their English skills, show value to their cultural heritage, and show they possess talents as bilingual people. Gatto summarized that, “Contrary to the view that Latino students are *disadvantaged*, others argue that bilinguals should be seen and supported as *gifted*” (p. 245).

Like Gatto, Ma’ayan (2010) studied ways to motivate Latino students. However, instead of focusing on a large population of students, she focused her study on a small group of middle school girls and wrote her results based on one student in particular, Erika. Erika (pseudonym) was like many girls in her group, a Latina who sat silent in class, failed many classes, and received low scores on her standardized tests. Ma’ayan questioned what motivated these students, what were their literacy practices and how can they be strengthened? Ma’ayan examined the girls’ backgrounds and literacy practices in life. She conducted small group discussions and interviews where voices came alive, particularly Erika’s. Although Erika was a failing student, she loved reading and

historical fiction was one of her favorites. She expressed her love of writing and showed her strong computer skills. She also showed strong verbal and presentation skills as she talked to her group about her life experiences with birth control and gang fights between her family and other families.

At the conclusion of her study Ma'ayan (2010) wrote recommendations for students like Erika. First, Ma'ayan calls for open discussion in the classroom, even when topics get tough, "Making room for Erika's voice, her literacies, and her lived experiences is the first step in breaking down the hegemonic privileging of white, middle class voices and shifting schools to be successful learning spaces for all students" (p. 653). Secondly, Ma'ayan calls for culturally relevant texts to be available in the classroom. She found students often chose characters that reflected their own culture and race. She stated that Erika's teacher did a good job of providing an array of protagonists that represent diverse races, cultures, and gender. Lastly, Ma'ayan suggests the opposite of age-appropriate texts. Instead of age-appropriate, she recommended that teachers provide more culture-appropriate texts, "Erika needed texts that addressed issues that she faced in her life, including issues such as violence and sexuality" (p. 650).

Unlike Ma'ayan's qualitative study, Ibanez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, and Perilla (2004) administered questionnaires to survey the motivational perceptions of one hundred and twenty-nine students. The students' ages ranged from 14 to 19, 64% were female and 74% were immigrants. The goal was to "learn more about perceived school experiences linked to achievement motivation within a sample of immigrant and U.S. born Latino students across language acculturation levels and generational status" (p. 560). Questions were categorized into three areas: (1) sense of academic competence, (2) sense of school

belonging, and (3) parental involvement in school. A 4-point Likert scale was used with answers ranging from 1 = *not at all* and 4 = *very true*. Small groups completed the questionnaires together with translation available to meet needs of students.

The findings showed that although academic aspirations were high, the same students' academic expectations were lower:

Twenty percent aspired to graduating from a university, 14% to obtaining a master's degree, and almost one-third of Latino youth aspired to a doctoral degree (31%). Educational expectations were more modest and evenly distributed. Sixteen percent expected to graduate from high school, 21% expected some college, 24% expected a 2-year college degree, and 23% expected to graduate from a university. Only 5% expected to obtain a master's or a doctoral degree. (Ibanez et al., 2004, p. 563)

Ibanez et al. (2004) concluded that developing relationships to create ties to family and a sense of belonging was the strongest factor for motivating Latino students. They may have goals but their expectations of themselves led them to believe their goals were not attainable. They suggested that adults should develop trusting relationships to persuade Latino students they can reach their aspirations.

Waxman, Huang, and Padron (1997) also completed a study using a questionnaire. They questioned why some at-risk Latino students are resilient and others are not? Resilient is defined in the study as students "who succeed in school despite the presence of adverse conditions" (p. 137). The purpose of the study was to "compare resilient and nonresilient Latino students' motivation and classroom learning environment in mathematics" (p. 138). Five middle schools from one district in southern central United States were selected to participate in the study. This district was selected because it has equal representations of ethnic groups, the Latino population represented an unsuccessful group with standardized tests scores much lower than other groups, and it

was also selected due to the fact that there was no tracking of students within mathematics classes (that means all classes contained both resilient and nonresilient students). The majority of the Latino students were born in other countries and came from working-class families. They also entered elementary speaking Spanish and received instruction in English, with limited ELL support. The entire population of Latino students received the questionnaire that took 40 minutes to complete and asked questions to rate student academic involvement, affiliation, satisfaction, and parental involvement. They were also rated on background items such as grades, aspirations, attendance, and time spent on homework. Lastly, their math achievement was measured using the Hoffman Four-Step Problem-Solving Test.

After the questionnaire was administered to all Latino students, “a sample of 60 resilient and 60 nonresilient Latino students were randomly selected to be included in the present study” (Waxman et al., 1997, p. 141). In order to be considered resilient the students had to (a) score on or above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile on the district’s standardized math test and (b) be reported as receiving A’s or B’s in math over a two year time period. In order to be considered nonresilient the students had to (a) score on or below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile on the district’s standardized math test and (b) reported receiving C’s, D’s, or F’s in math this year and the previous year.

The results showed that the resilient students were significantly more likely to indicate they planned on graduating high school and college, they had better attendance, and they spent more time on homework. Resilient students also showed they had more involvement (active participation) in math class and a better self-concept. Interestingly, there was not much difference between the two groups when it came to affiliation

(getting along with classmates in math class) and parental involvement. This study supports other studies that found “that language factors are not significant predictors and do not hinder Latino secondary students’ academic achievement” (Waxman et al., 1997, p. 143). The results also show that students who come from similar backgrounds as failing students can take the high road if they set goals for the future, find success in academics, and share their voice in the classroom.

The opposite of participation in the classroom is removal from the classroom. Loza (2003) showed that many services provided to help Latino students actually end up neglecting the group. Loza’s hypothesis was that due to the rigidity of outreach programs’ selection criteria, “they exclude many, if not most, Latino high school students who exhibit the most need” (p. 44). He also believed that if the programs continue to leave out Latino students, the academic success gap will never be closed. The study compared the selection criteria of three outreach programs, (a) Avid, (b) Upward Bound, and (c) The University of California Early Academic Outreach Program, to the characteristics of Latino high school students and found “that many underachieving/at-risk Latino students in middle and high schools are not being served” (p. 50). These outreach programs did not allow student to participate if they had (a) behavioral problems, (b) were chronically truant, (c) had low grade-point averages, and/or (d) had gang-affiliation.

Loza (2003) suggested that, in order to serve the Latinos who need it the most, alternative programs need to be in place that match the outreach programs’ strategies. Many strategies have been recognized as being successful with underachieving Latino students. “For example, such strategies as adult and peer mentoring, academic

advisement, parent workshops, field trips to college campuses, and personal counseling” (p. 51). Instead of implementing these effective strategies students are merely placed in alternative educational programs that simply remove them from the school setting. This, in turn, shows them there is no place for them in an educational environment, leading to future academic failure and failure in life.

In summary, these studies support the need to have a collection of books that speak to the Latino population of students, to show the Latin culture has a place in schools. Texts also must show the strengths of the culture and talented, aspiring Latinos who are the heroes of the texts. To show we value their culture and contributions, relationships are a must between student and teacher; this will strengthen the students’ sense of belonging. Students also must be active learners in the classroom, participating and contributing. This can be nurtured by teachers who provide literature that encourages and values the students’ voices.

### **Effects of Stereotypes on all Students**

Stereotypes are defined in Webster’s Dictionary as “a standardized mental picture held in common by members of a group and representing an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment” (p. 2239). Examples of stereotypes toward Latinos include those aimed at males who are viewed as failures, drinkers, abandoners of their families, drug users and gang-bangers (Hasse, 2002). Other examples include Latinos in general who are poor, slow, lazy, the laborers of society with low end jobs (Tauber, 1997, p. 7). As seen in studies done by Loza (2003), Waxman et al. (1997), and Ma’ayan (2010) a common theme needed to ensure Latino motivation in school is to

establish a sense of belonging within the educational setting. Effects of stereotypes can damage students' sense of belonging which will then diminish academic achievement.

Armenta (2010) looked to test the effects of stereotypes by testing the hypothesis, "when a stereotyped group identity and the associated group stereotypes are made salient, performance tend to shift in the direction of the stereotype" (p. 94). In other words, if the stereotypes are acknowledged and identified beforehand then the performance will show that stereotype to be true. Armenta (2010) questioned whether ethnic identification, the strong sense of belonging to a group, would protect Latinos from the *stereotype threat effect*, which suggests gaps in standardized test scores are due to stereotypes. The participants included 106 Asian and Latin American undergraduate students from Southern California. Two groups were evaluated on a math exam in two sessions. The first group was the control condition and their set of test information was different than the experimental condition, the second group. The control condition's directions stated that test procedures were assessing computer methods, simply identifying the computer directions to take the test and nothing else. However, the experimental condition's test information measured an "individuals' true intellectual ability, which historically have shown differences based on ethnic heritage" (p. 95).

The results of Armenta's (2010) study showed that "Asian Americans performed better and Latinos performed worse on a math exam when a cue implicating their ethnicity and associated ethnic group stereotypes was present" (p. 97). Within the experimental group, those who strongly identified with their ethnic group performed worse than those who didn't. This conclusion supported the hypothesis that performance tended to shift in the direction of the stereotype.



Like Armenta (2010), Jones (2009) studied the effects of stereotypes on students. However, she wanted to know how stereotypes affected students' perceptions of others, not the effects on academic performance. Jones (2009) hypothesized that "if Black children's judgments of the actors reflected the traditional racial stereotypes of student achievement, then racial stereotypic influence would be suggested by judgments that attributed positive academic achievement behaviors, motivation, and outcomes to White actors more than to Black actors" (p. 56). Specifically, the belief was that the students would think the White actors would need less effort and have more ability to complete a difficult task than the Black actors. The students selected for the study consisted of 72 Black American first, second, and third graders, equal numbers of girls and boys. The students examined four scenarios of fictional characters with brief descriptions of them engaged in a task at school. Each scenario consisted of an illustration and short summary of (a) what skill the actor is learning, (b) the application of the skill, and (c) ended stating the actor's goal for success in the task. The students were questioned to access their evaluation of the "story character's ability, effort, experience of task difficulty, and likelihood of task success" (p. 57).

Jones (2009) found a positive result after the data was gathered:  
Participants in our all Black sample tended to favor Black actors, when their judgments of the academic competence of story characters differed. We found that Black actors were judged to be higher in competence and to need less effort than White actors with respect to the academic school tasks actors were described as undertaking. (Jones, 2009, p. 63)

If there was any racial bias in the study then that would amount to positive in-group bias, although the sample did not express negative bias against White character's academic performance. While the results show positive self-perceptions of Black students, the study fails to obtain samples of students across various socioeconomic levels. For

example, socioeconomic status difference among black children might influence their perception of achievement, motivation, judgment, and behavior of others. It would be interesting to see if stereotypes affect students differently across various socioeconomic levels.

Past research on *stereotype threat* has suggested gaps in standardized test results are due to stereotypes that censure the intellectual abilities of Black, Latino, and low-income students. Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht (2003) hypothesized that applying an intervention that tackled either the derogatory explanations for academic difficulty, or the maladaptive ideas about the nature of intelligence that stereotypes foster, could reduce the gaps in standardized test performance. They questioned if teaching junior high students about different perspectives on school success could reduce their susceptibility to stereotype threat and cause standardized test scores to go up. The 138 students selected for the six month study came from Texas and were largely low-income, 63% were Latino, 15% Black, and 22% White. Four experimental conditions were developed: (a) incremental condition, where students learned about the nature of intelligence; (b) attribution condition, students learned about students overcoming difficulty in learning; (c) combination condition, student learned both incremental and attribution; and (d) the antidrug condition, in this group students learned about the effects of drug abuse. At the end of the year the students took the state standardized test.

The results showed what the researchers had believed would happen; the anti-drug group did perform worse than all the other conditions on the standardized test. The belief is that the students were able to combat the anxieties brought on by stereotype

threat due to their new learning about intelligence, and they were able to improve their learning attitudes therefore scoring higher than their classmates.

In conclusion, research evidence indicates that stereotypes can cause students to perform according to their self-perception and not according to their academic ability. Even with positive in-group bias, test anxieties and judgments from others can cause students to obtain mediocre scores on tests. With this happening, the gap between ethnic groups is still wide and continues to recreate new stereotypes about capabilities of certain cultural groups. It is important, as educators, to follow the research done by Good et al. (2003) and continue to strengthen student's knowledge on how intelligence is gained and with those interventions hopefully the achievement gap can close.

### **Effects of Latino Stereotypes on Latino Students**

Research shows that people who are targets of a negative ability stereotype hold risks of performing according to that stereotype in school, specifically on assessments. Three studies show how Latino students in particular respond to negative ability stereotypes.

Gonzales, Blanton, and Williams (2002) wanted to study the effects of stereotypes on a sample of Latino and White men and women who were currently enrolled in college. The purpose of the study was to “determine if negative stereotypes about the intellectual ability of Latinos and women interact to influence performance” (p. 660). They predicted that both double-minority effects would occur. To test the hypothesis, 60 Latino students and 60 White students were randomly assigned to two groups. They were told they would be completing a math test that would take 12 minutes and after they would answer a few questions about their experiences with the task. In the diagnostic condition, “participants

were told that the study was investigating personal factors involved in performance” (p. 662). In the nondiagnostic condition, no reference to ability was made. After the math test, students were asked to respond to questions regarding their thoughts during the exam, for example, “I thought about how poorly I was doing” (p. 662). They were also given three measures to assess (a) stereotype-threat concerns, (b) effort exerted, and (c) self-perceived task competence scale.

With four groups tested, two White (diagnostic and nondiagnostic) and two Latino (diagnostic and nondiagnostic), the results showed that the Latino diagnostic group performed significantly lower than the other three groups. To add to that, Latino women scored lower than all other participants involved in the study. The importance of the study is great, “this is the first published demonstration of stereotype threat among Latinos” (p. 666). Aronson and Salinas’s study (as cited in Gonzales et al., 2002) was very similar to this one, they found “Mexican Americans showed a drop in their test performance on a verbal Graduate Record Examination (GRE) test if they were reminded of the possibility that the test they were taking might be biased against minorities” (p. 666). The current study goes on to support that not only do stereotypes affect Latino performance, but there is also a double-minority effect on Latino women’s performance on educational assessments.

The effects of stereotypes can create test anxieties which then cause students to perform less than their ability. This researcher wonders if discrimination due to stereotypes causes more than just assessment anxieties, does it also cause students to lose their sense of belonging and motivation to achieve. A study done by Perreira, Fuligni, and Potochnick (2010) addressed this question. The purpose of their study was to assess

the values and beliefs that encourage the “academic achievement of Latino youth and contrast the school experiences of Latino youth in an emerging Latino community, North Carolina, with those of youth living in a traditional settlement community, Los Angeles” (p. 132). According to the researchers, many North Carolinians had negative feelings about the influx of Latinos. The North Carolinians believed the Latinos brought gangs, crime, and a lack of value for education. Perreira et al. (2010) cited research done in 2001 by Schmader et al. which suggested that “discriminatory experiences toward Latino youth reduce their academic motivation” (p. 133). Los Angeles Latino adolescents (318 students) and North Carolina Latino adolescents (239 students) were recruited and interviewed for this study. They were given a 45-minute, in-school survey regarding their mental health, cultural identification, educational attitudes, and family relationships/histories. Finally, students wrote in a diary every day for two weeks. They wrote about negative events and stressors; time spent on school, work, and family activities; academic commitment; and role fulfillment.

Perreira et al. (2010) concluded with a very positive finding; Latino youth in North Carolina “had a stronger belief in the usefulness of education and reported more intrinsic interest in academics” (p. 141). However, “at the same time that students reported higher academic motivations in North Carolina relative to LA, they were also more likely to report being treated poorly because of their race or ethnicity” (p. 141). These Latino kids were also more concerned or worried about discrimination in their communities. Perreira et al. (2010) suggested that if discrimination ceased, students in North Carolina would have had even higher educational motivations.

Similar to the study done by Perreira et al. (2010), Wayman (2002) studied the motivation of Latino students in relation to stereotypical bias they experienced in school. Specifically, Wayman (2002) wanted to address the issues with dropout rates. He questioned if dropout rates were higher among Mexican American students because they felt they were treated differently from other students. The data were gathered as part of a longitudinal project planned to learn about correlates of dropouts among Mexican American and White youth. The participants were from three cities in southwestern United States: (a) a city with 400,000 people, (b) a mid-sized city with 90,000 people, and (c) a small community with 30,000 people. The sample of 2,409 participants were from grades 7-12 and included dropouts, students at risk for dropping out, and a control group. The students were asked to complete a survey that took approximately one and a half hours to complete. The survey was provided in English and Spanish, although less than 1% took the Spanish version. The survey asked questions about psychosocial, school, family, and peer items. A four-point Likert scale was used to answer the questions.

The results of Wayman's (2002) study showed that "ethnic background is the strongest factor influencing perception of bias" (p. 31). Mexican American male participants perceived bias in higher numbers, when compared to the White participants and Mexican American females. Also, dropouts saw more bias from teachers at school than did the students at risk for dropping out. In conclusion, Wayman (2002) stated:

An alarming finding revealed that over a quarter of the participants felt teachers liked students of non-Latino white descent better than students of Mexican American descent. Schools must address this issue, because correct or not, perceptions of teacher ethnic bias are real for these students, and are very possibly a hindrance to academic achievement.

Amy Hackney (2005) interviewed Susan Fiske, a professor of psychology at Princeton University, who has spent much time studying the effects of stereotypes in regard to discrimination and bias. Fiske states, “Discrimination is illegal; biased thoughts and feelings are not. However, if you put both stereotypes and emotional prejudices in the equation, it’s the emotions that predict discrimination the most strongly” (p. 197). The strong emotions people exhibit can be due to the stereotypes they are conditioned to believe in regard to the stereotyped groups. If students believe they are discriminated against or have biased teachers, they are more likely to lose that sense of belonging that is essential for continued schooling and academic achievement, these studies show evidence to that effect.

### **Multicultural Education and Literature to Motivate Students**

Multicultural education and literature can create that sense of belonging that is so crucial for academic success and combating stereotypes that may be established in a community. De León (2002) states, “literature of different cultures can be important when it shows achievements, lifestyles and values of these groups because it will give students a better understanding of who they are and what they can contribute to this country” (p. 51).

Casas (2006) established specific objectives for her study, she wanted to determine if (a) a multicultural curriculum could motivate alternative education students to learn, and (b) if the students became engaged in learning, would their reading abilities improve. She chose to focus on 52 7<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in the alternative education program in Texas and used the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test to rate the success of the study. Students chosen for the study were in the alternative

program due to behaviors including fighting, truancy, and criminal infractions. Some students were in the program for six weeks, others for a longer time period. The researcher taught the students two days a week, for one year. Casas (2006) designed her curriculum to focus primarily on Mexican culture, but she added African-American, American Indian, Anglo, and Asian cultures, as well. Authors were a mixture of Anglo and Latino and books were below the 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading level to match the needs of the students. Over 80% of this new curriculum involved writing and reading. Discussions were documented and books selected opened up discussions about racism and prejudice; students shared personal concerns about discrimination against Latinos. One of Casas's (2006) goals was to link curriculum to real-life experiences (problems and challenges) of the students.

Casas (2006) looked at the TAKS test at the end of the year and concluded that “85 percent of the students showed improvement in reading” (p. 28). In personal interviews with students after the study, they indicated they had a strengthened desire to read due to the fact the books chosen made them proud because it was about their culture. Casas (2006) believed students were more willing to read and write by the end of their stay and “there were fewer groans when they were given such assignments” (p. 30). She also believed reading stories about characters that come from the same cultural backgrounds as the students persuades them to recognize that their background is being validated in the schools.

Similar to Casas (2006), Brown (2002) wanted to study the effects of a multicultural curriculum. She developed a study surrounding the teaching practices of Mrs. Boyd, a 25 year veteran 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. She questioned what multicultural



teaching strategies were used to nurture academic excellence in a classroom. Several observations were done by the researcher on Mrs. Boyd's class of 24 students, 13 Black, 9 White, 1 Asian, and 1 biracial. Students showed diversity in socioeconomic levels, 5 eligible for free and reduced lunches, 16 middle class, and 3 upper class. Five main themes were observed in the classroom, (a) classroom management, (b) instruction, (c) assessment, (d) student/teacher interaction, and (d) parent/teacher communication. Observations occurred six times and lasted for 70 minutes. Informal interviews took place immediately after the observations.

After interpreting the findings, Brown (2002) found that due to the wide variety of multicultural literature used for lessons students were able to visualize themselves in the classroom which the researcher believed lessened the classroom management and behavior problems in the class. The students saw themselves in not only the literature but also in the instruction and community, with examples Mrs. Boyd shared of contributions several cultural figures provided to society. In doing this students were more likely to be actively engaged in the reading and discussion. "Mrs. Boyd helps her students link their primary culture with that of the mainstream" (p. 136). She did this by coaching them to value what they already know and she showed them how to use this awareness as a tool for additional learning.

Camp and Oesterreich (2010) also studied the effect of a teacher on her students by implementing multicultural curriculum. This study is different in that this teacher challenges the teach-to-the-test curriculum many schools follow in the aftermath of No Child Left Behind. Camp and Oesterreich (2010) hypothesize that many schools fail to meet the needs of the diverse students due to the fact that they follow "run-off premade

worksheets of standardized curricula” (p. 20). Rae, the center of the study, was a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who resisted curriculum driven by high-stakes testing. The authors chose this particular teacher “based on her apparent commitment to uncommon teaching within a school culture that otherwise employs the commonsense of standardized, test-driven curriculum as its official policy” (p. 21). Rae is a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher in an elementary in southwest United States, she teaches 85 percent Latino, 12 percent White, 2 percent Black, and 1 percent Asian. Her goal is to create learning experiences that relate to the students’ interests and experiences. To collect data for the study, two interviews took place for 40 minutes each and daily informal observations took place that lasted five to 20 minutes.

Three themes emerged from Rae’s teaching after the data was collected and studied: (a) negotiation of power, (b) democracy, and (c) value for multiculturalism. For the third theme of multiculturalism, Rae was strong in her belief that multicultural teaching is more than about teaching about other cultures. “It is also about respecting and valuing the ‘diverse funds of knowledge’ all students bring to the classroom” (p. 25). She made sure she connected the curriculum to the students’ lives, she also identified social inequalities and explored problem-solution scenerios to ensure students became knowledgeable citizens in a democratic society. The environment Rae created in her classroom fostered her belief about providing students with opportunities to make personal and cultural connections with their schooling. For example, “the reading center is full of hundreds of books, newspapers, and magazines, all representing a variety of cultures, languages, and genres” (p. 25).

All these studies support the need for a multicultural curriculum to enhance the learning of Latino students, who in the past may have lacked motivation due to pressures from community bias and stereotypes. The achievement gap is wide but Latino aspirations have been found to be high. To close the gap it requires the professional knowledge, understanding, and efforts of educators to create an environment that is welcoming of a diverse group of highly skilled students. Many of these students do not come from academically supportive backgrounds. However, research cited above suggests that the cycle can be broken when these students are shown the past means nothing and the future is wide open with possibilities for all. The study this researcher proposes looks at the multicultural collection and questions how this collection supports the needs of the Latino population of students. The collection must be authentic to Latino students and mirror their lives and it also must point them in the direction of where they could end up in the future, with countless opportunities for various career paths all connected to the values of the Latino population.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

With the Latino population growing at great rates, it is important to carry a collection that relates to this group. Research shows that current drop-out rates and academic failure are concerns for this group. There must be a collection available that speaks to Latino students and offers support as well as academic encouragement. The purpose of this research is to establish set criteria for rating Latino literature to check for quality and the existence of Latino stereotypes.

#### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative analysis of content. The qualitative approach is necessary because “this process uses inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher’s careful examination and constant comparison” (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 309). In this research themes of Latino representation have been discovered and critiqued. The hope is that new discoveries in themes meet the criteria set by professionals, such as Naidoo (2011). The coding involved writing quotes, phrases, and paraphrases from the books to exemplify and support the themes.

#### **Limitations**

The fact that this researcher was the only coder limits the study in that the judgments and inferences made are at risk for being biased. That is one limitation of the qualitative process. Another limitation is that although the *Middle and Junior High*

*School Core Collection* was used to select the texts, this researcher limited reading to the ones available in Storm Lake Middle School's library of 3,703 fiction books.

### **Assumptions**

The fiction Latino novels examined in this study will be representative of similar literature available at other schools for grades 5 to 8. Latino stereotypes exist in this literature and overlook the positive character traits which should be the focus for this population of students.

### **Procedure**

The first step in the data collection piece was searching through the *Middle and Junior High School Core Collection* to locate books with characters of Latin descent, using the keywords Mexican American, Latino, Central American, Chicano, Spanish, and Hispanic. To narrow search results "Core Collection" was selected under Recommendation Level, published dates was limited to the years 2000 to 2012, and grade levels 4 to 8 was selected, the category of fiction was also selected. The total number of books in the core that fit these criteria was 45 books. Next, the researcher used Storm Lake Middle School's library catalog to locate books from the list. The goal was to obtain 15 to 20 books from the fiction collection. Sixteen books were available in the Storm Lake Middle School collection. The final list of 16 book titles is Appendix B. The third step was the reading of the novels, which resulted in coding of the novels. The novels were read twice to allow for constant comparison. Constant comparison is "the systematic comparison of each text assigned to a category with each of those already assigned to that category, to fully understand the theoretical properties of the category" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 311). When new themes emerged with a new text, the researcher





## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The researcher conducted a qualitative analysis of content by looking at themes that emerged in the titles read. The list of books chosen is in Appendix B. The final themes identified were Authentic Cultural Setting, Authentic Language, Engaging Plot, Rich Characterization, Positive Portrayal of Character, Positive Portrayal of Family, Fatherless Families, Low Income Families, Negative Portrayal of Mother, Negative Portrayal of Father, Main Character Member of a Gang, Main Character Abuses Drugs and/or Alcohol, Main Character Poor in academics, and Main Character Seen as a Survivor.

#### Findings

Each book was examined through a thematic lens to answer the research questions for this study:

1. What examples of Latino stereotyping are found in the Storm Lake collection and the *Middle and Junior High School Core Collection*?
2. What criteria should be used to identify quality Latino literature?

Using evidence gathered from the reading, quotes and paraphrasing, the researcher coded the books using an emerging list of themes (see Appendix A) and provided an explanation of each of the themes represented, and answered the research questions to conclude how stereotyping was portrayed, if at all, and what criteria should be in place for selecting Latino literature in the future.



## **Authenticity of Culture**

### **Authentic Cultural Setting**

Most of the books read had suburban or urban settings (14 out of 16) and 15 of the 16 books had settings that took place in the southwest. The only one not in that region of the United States was *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy* which took place in New York City. The southwestern states that were represented included Texas (6 books), Arizona (1 book), and California (8 books).

The cultural descriptions of the books' settings tied in with the other theme of Low Income Families. The settings in the following books were described as rundown, full of graffiti, with schools that needed repair: *The Afterlife*, *Mexican Whiteboy*, *Fighting for Dontae*, and *Accidental Love*. *Chicken Foot Farm* and *Esperanza Rising* differed from the other books in the group because they were historical fiction, and the settings were of rural farms in Texas and California during the 30's and 40's.

### **Authentic Language**

In most of the books read, 14 out of 16, the main character spoke less Spanish than his/her parents. Some characters could understand more than others. For example, in *Esperanza Rising*, Esperanza spoke Spanish as well as her parents. However, in *Mexican Whiteboy*, Danny could not speak any Spanish, and he wondered why he was never taught by his father. Danny concluded that his father was ashamed of his culture and wanted a better life for Danny, so Spanish was not seen as necessary for him to learn. Likewise, in *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, Carlos could not even translate Spanish when he heard others making fun of him, and he wondered why he never learned how to

speak it. It was not something that bothered him as much as Danny because Danny really wanted to fit in with his Mexican aunts, uncles, and cousins.

All books featured Spanish words throughout the contents. Four of the books had glossaries to translate phrases and words. Sometimes, the reader needed context clues to decipher the meaning of a word, but most times the meaning was translated for the reader within the sentence or in the following sentence.

### **Engaging Reader**

#### **Engaging Plot and Rich Characterization**

All plots included engaging elements where characters wanted to escape family drama and/or they wanted better lives for themselves than the ones they were living. For example in the books *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, *Fighting for Dontae*, *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez*, *What Can't Wait*, *Sizzle*, *Accidental Love*, and *Esperanza Rising*, all protagonists wanted to get out of the poverty-ridden lives they led to either work hard or gain an education for better futures. Family drama led characters from *Body Slammed*, *Chicken Foot Farm*, *Suckerpunch*, *So Hard to Say*, *Benito Runs*, *Mexican Whiteboy*, and *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume* looking for an escape route to a “whole new life,” to quote Chela, *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume* (Martinez, 2008, p. 105).

Female characters in the books *What Can't Wait* and *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez* wanted to escape the stereotypical roles Latina women held. Marisa from *What Can't Wait* was told by her father to “leave the math for the men,” and none of her report cards were ever viewed by her parents. Marisa struggled with fitting in with her culture and trying to make her parents realize she deserved more and that improving herself didn't mean she was neglecting her siblings, parents, and niece. She was torn

between doing homework or babysitting and cooking for her family. Sonia from *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez* wanted to be a part of the “new generation of Latina women” who weren’t weak and inferior to men. “I don’t care if we leave all the macho men in the dust” (Sitomer, 2010, p. 33).

Male characters also struggled to fit in with their traditional cultural roles. In *Chicken Foot Farm*, Alejandro, as the only male son left, needed to prove to his father he was able to work hard enough to take over the family farm. Manual labor was not something his older brother was interested in so Alejandro felt the need to prove he could do it. Many of the males in the books had jobs in manual labor; only in *Suckerpunch*, *Confetti Girl*, and *Body Slammed* did the male fathers not perform some type of manual labor.

In *Suckerpunch*, Marcus’s dad ruled the home with an iron fist, and Marcus believed his older brother was following the same abusive path as their father. Marcus knew Latino men led the family but he himself could not see that for his future; he thought roles should be equal. Also, in *Fighting for Dontae*, Javier’s father was streetwise and involved in illegal activities to earn a living. However, Javier saw himself possibly becoming an educator someday, yet, he would not dare tell his father those thoughts. Finally, in *Mexican Whiteboy* Danny was embarrassed about his academic success when he was around his Mexican family members. They sought him for help, for example his uncle would have him write love letters. This made Danny feel out of place with the family, many of whom never finished high school, and none of whom went on to college or training after high school.

Although motivated by the same means, goals, and aspirations, each character was unique in personality and ability. Character traits showed strength, powerful talents, and determination. Marisa in *Accidental Love* wanted to improve herself by losing weight, controlling her temper, and getting her grades up. She transferred schools to get a fresh start, and in doing so she found a new love in another person and a new talent. She chose a role in the school's play *Romeo and Juliet* to showcase her ability to stand in front of a crowd and sing. Her grades improved, and with this new self esteem, she finally saw herself as one day becoming a high school graduate.

In *Sizzle*, Linda uses her unique skills as a cook to attract new friends and excel in her class project. Although lonely for her home, friends, and family in Arizona she uses her passion for food to create a blog that ends up receiving recognition and winning "Site of the Week" credits. She used her love of cooking with fresh foods to revitalize her foster mother's failing television show and revamped it with Linda's distinctive cooking ideas.

Based on the collection studied these novels point characters in the direction that included goals of higher education and success in academics as well as success in career and ultimately financial stability.

### **Positive Portrayal of Characters**

The characters in all the books showed traits of holding their head up high, knowing right from wrong, being good helpers in the family, loving family through thick and thin, and working hard to help or to prove their worth. Of all those traits the one that was seen most often was the trait of hard work. *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, *Benito Runs*, *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume*, *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez*, *What Can't*

*Wait, Sizzle, Body Slammed, Chicken Foot Farm, and Esperanza Rising* all showed characters who worked very hard in school and at jobs to support family and show their potential.

In *Body Slammed*, Jesse was convinced he would never physically compare to his professional wrestler father. He worked hard on the football field and developed a friendship with another professional wrestler, T.J. who trained him in the weight room to add bulk to his small frame. In this relationship his ethics were tested as he witnessed T.J.'s reckless and illegal behavior with starting fights and drag racing. He had to choose to remain a friend and participate or take the road that led away from his new friend, T.J. In the end Jesse made the best choice for himself by distancing himself from this person because he knew these illegal activities would not lead to good consequences for him.

In *The Afterlife*, Chuy is able to see his murderer as his spirit leaves his body in the beginning of the book. He is also able to visit friends and family and fulfill his final wishes before his body completely vanishes and he either disappears or reaches the Afterlife. In his final visits, he sees his mother pushing his cousin to commit murder by seeking revenge against Chuy's murderer. Chuy knows right from wrong and takes it upon himself to stop this from happening. He knows revenge isn't the answer, even though he understands his mother's anger and sadness.

### **Positive Portrayal of Family**

There were many examples of positive family portrayal. Family members were hard workers, especially the fathers and mothers, as seen in 14 of the 16 books read. Other positive examples were family cohesion, as seen in *What Can't Wait* and *Chicken Foot Farm*; family spending quality time together, as seen in *Benito Runs* and *Confetti*

*Girl*; family being very protective of each other, as seen in *So Hard to Say* and *Sizzle*; and family with strong religious beliefs as seen in *Fighting for Dontae*, *The Afterlife*, and *Smell of Old Lady Perfume*.

Characters felt loyal to their family members, and many times looked for approval and acceptance even when family members did not approve of goals to progress or to move and/or seek education. Examples of this can be seen in *What Can't Wait*, *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, *Chicken Foot Farm*, and *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez*.

### **Main Character a Survivor**

In every one of the 16 books the characters are shown as survivors who have been dealt a tough hand but continue to aspire and look to the future with goals set high.

Although the reader doesn't know if they achieve these goals the reader connects and admires the characters for being so positive amidst adversity. For example, in *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume* the main character Chela deals with the death of her father and the loss of her best friend all during her sixth grade school year, however, at the end she is able to obtain the highest of honors, she is named the "Outstanding Student in Reading" and also she received the award for "All-School Girl".

In the book *Sizzle*, the main character Linda is torn from her aunt, the only family she knows, to live with an unknown family across the country. This is due to the aunt's financial and health distress. Instead of being angry and resentful she "takes action" to make herself at home, fit in, and be friendly with her new family. In the end she is able to find success in school, make new friends, and help her foster mother rebuild her business.

In *Esperanza Rising*, Esperanza suffers the shocking murder of her father and consequently the loss of her home in Mexico. She and her mother are forced to escape

illegally to America to find work as servant farmers. This extremely contrasts the lifestyle she is used to in Mexico, where she is accustomed to having servants fulfill her own requests as her father was a wealthy farmer. She is ambitious to learn how to perform chores and learn manual labor. She also learns that she is equal to the people she once thought were so different from her, for example, poor farm boy and friend Miguel.

### **Negative Portrayal of Characters**

#### **Fatherless Families**

Of the 16 books, six contained families that were missing a father. *Sizzle*, *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, *Fighting for Dontae*, *Suckerpunch*, *So Hard to Say*, and *Mexican Whiteboy* all had fathers who walked out on the family when some of the characters were very young, and for some it was just a few years prior to the book's setting. If reasons were given, they were related to abusive or criminal activities that resulted in the men being put behind bars. Sonia made reference to fatherless families in the book *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriquez*, "I really wish someone would explain to me why Latino men have no problem providing the baby batter, but when it comes to everything else, so many young girls get *nada más*? No love. No support" (p. 33).

In *So Hard to Say* the main character, Xio, associated with five other friends, and out of the six Latina girls only one had a father present at home with the family. Maria's father was in and out of the home, leaving the family after each lost job, "He was a mess. I couldn't imagine living with someone like that" (p. 66). The fact that dads were so confusing was often a favorite topic amongst the girls during their late night sleepovers. "Like I said, our dads gave us endless conversation" (p. 66).

In *Mexican Whiteboy*, Danny had not been in contact with his father for three years. He was told his father went back to Mexico, but in a case plot twist, it turned out his father was sent to prison for reasons unknown to the reader. The reader could infer that it was due to drug activity or violence because Danny's father had past experiences with both, and physical violence towards Danny's mother was the reason why they split up.

### **Low Income Families**

The theme of low income families was consistent throughout the reading of all 16 books and led the reader to determine the reasoning behind the motivations for majority of the characters. The only three books that dealt very little with family's income were *Body Slammed*, *So Hard to Say*, and *Confetti Girl*. In those three books, the parents held jobs as professional wrestler, sales manager, and high school teacher. Possibly only one of those jobs required additional education after high school. In the other 13 books that referenced socioeconomic level often the parents held jobs mostly in farming, manual labor, or customer service. None of those jobs required education after high school.

Many characters living in a low income household had aspirations to get out, get an education, move ahead, and obtain better jobs. None of the books ended with characters gaining those aspirations successfully; they all left the reader wondering if the jobs of their dreams and financial stability were going to happen for the characters. In *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, Carlos dreams of one day becoming a makeup artist to the stars but after almost losing his part time job at a department store's makeup counter for stealing, he wonders if those dreams will actually come true. He knows he'll have to prove himself to keep his job. In another example, Marisa, from *What Can't Wait*, knows



her house in infested with roaches and each month her family struggles to pay the bills, but rather than working more hours at a convenience store she chooses to spend Saturdays getting more help with Calculus. This causes conflict between her and her father, he doesn't value education but values the children's monetary contributions to the family income.

### **Negative Portrayal of Fathers and Mothers**

In 14 of the books there were negative aspects seen for both mothers and fathers of the main characters. For example, fathers were described as violent with bad tempers and abusing drugs and/or alcohol frequently. In *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, *Fighting for Dontae*, *So Hard to Say*, *Mexican Whiteboy*, and *What Can't Wait* the fathers all abused drugs and alcohol. In *Mexican Whiteboy* and *Fighting for Dontae* that repeated abuse led to stints in jail for alcohol or drug related arrests. In *Fighting for Dontae*, *Suckerpunch*, *Body Slammed*, *Benito Runs*, and *Mexican Whiteboy* all books contained fathers that were violent, either physically, emotionally, or both. Another negative example that was seen in *Chicken Foot Farm* and *Confetti Girl* was that even with a father present and living with the family, the father was distant and did not converse with the children often.

These young Latinos want better lives for themselves and don't want to make the same mistakes their parents may have in *Fighting for Dontae*, *Suckerpunch*, *So Hard to Say*, *Accidental Love*, *Mexican Whiteboy*, and *Body Slammed*.

For the mothers of the main characters it was seen by the reader that they had traits that hurt their relationships with their children, as well. For example Latina mothers were seen as immature and timid or weak. In *Benito Runs* and *Fighting for Dontae* both

boys thought their mothers had them too young and Benito even remarked that when watching his mother with his sister they looked liked sisters more so than mother and daughter. In *Fighting for Dontae*, Javier's mother struggled with a drug problem. Javier thought the stress of being a young mother and working full time without a husband around to help may have led to her drug abuse. In *Suckerpunch*, *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriquez*, and *What Can't Wait* the characters all criticized their mothers for being weak and timid and not able to stand up to the men in the family. Sonia recognizes it as a cultural trait when she saw her mother stand by without interfering as Sonia's uncle took the family's money for alcohol and physically abused her younger brother. She compared it to other Latina women and vowed that wouldn't be her.

### **Negative Portrayal of Main Character**

While characters were portrayed positively in some aspects, four of 16 books showed other characteristics that portrayed a negative reputation. For example, students failed academically, experienced and/or participated in gang activity, experimented with drugs and /or alcohol, and committed thefts.

### **Gangs and Drug or Alcohol Abuse**

In *Fighting for Donate*, Javier knew he didn't belong in the lifestyle he had chosen, but saw no other options in the neighborhood in which he grew up. He was a gang member since 7<sup>th</sup> grade, committed thefts of shoes and books, did poorly in school, and experimented a little with smoking marijuana and drinking since his friends did so often (although he did not like the effects). Danny from *Mexican Whiteboy* also tried drinking but was not a big fan. However, he still continued to drink when in company with his Mexican cousins. In *The Afterlife*, Chuy was not a gang member but saw many

boys take that road in his neighborhood; this character was actually murdered by a gang member in the first chapter.

Although gang activity was not prevalent in *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy* and *Suckerpunch*, both of those books had characters who participated in theft or drug experimentation. In *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, Carlos did not have the money to afford the fashion and accessories he valued so he considered it ok to “borrow” and pay later. As a result, it almost cost him his job and did affect his reputation at his place of employment. In *Suckerpunch*, Marcus wanted to escape the drama of his home life by experimenting with drugs and alcohol. He tried acid, marijuana, and even pain killers, without hesitation.

### **Academics**

Not only did the main character from *Fighting for Dontae* receive low grades in school, but the characters from *Benito Runs*, *Confetti Girl*, and *Accidental Love* had struggles in school academically. In *Benito Runs*, Benito struggled with family drama and his teacher recommended writing in a journal to get his thoughts out, but he hated writing and was never good at it. However, he found this a successful outlet for himself and he managed to improve in class and dreamed of one day becoming a professional writer. In *Confetti Girl*, Lina was a daughter of an English teacher but she was not a fan of reading or writing and she ended up failing her English class. Like Benito, in the end she was able to improve and raise her grade.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Problem**

This study sought to discover how Latinos are portrayed in young adult fiction. The concern was that stereotypes are present in Latino literature aimed towards students in grades 5-8. Latinos are the fastest growing cultural group in the United States and it is important that we have a quality collection that is a fair representation of this diverse group. There must be criteria in place for teacher librarians to use to evaluate the collections they are adding to the libraries available for students at this impressionable age.

#### **Conclusions**

The researcher found that some young adult fiction contains male Latinos viewed in stereotypical roles. Nine of the 16 young adult novels showed males with stereotypical characteristics. Others show males in powerful, positive roles as family leaders and hard workers looking to find success in the future.

This research asked what criteria should be used to identify quality Latino literature. Themes identified throughout the 16 novels analyzed for this study provide guidance in criteria of quality literature. Seven themes portray positive characteristics which should guide library selection decisions: Authentic Cultural Setting, Authentic Language, Engaging Plot, Rich Characterization, Positive Portrayal of Character, Positive Portrayal of Family, and Main Character Seen as a Survivor. Seven themes portrayed stereotypical characteristics that should be avoided in library selections: Fatherless Families, Low

Income Families, Negative Portrayal of Father, Negative Portrayal of Mother, Main Character Member of a Gang, Main Character Abuses Drugs and/or Alcohol, and Main Character Poor in Academics.

### **Combat Stereotypes**

This study looked at Latino literature to see if stereotypes were present in the books containing characters of Latino descent. Of the seven themes identified that portray positive characteristics, three overarching themes may help guide library selections: Authenticity, Positive Families and Positive Main Characters. The problem with stereotypes is that if they are consistent, they begin to become believable. In the future librarians should watch for diverse settings that might include the midwest. Of the 16 books, six books contained families where the father was absent. Fortunately, the other books contained fathers and a few were positive supporters of the main characters. This study sought to track the stereotypes of Latino men to see if they are seen as failures, drinkers, abandoners of their family, drugs users, and gang members. The books *Putting Makeup on the Fat Boy*, *Fighting for Dontae*, *So Hard to Say*, *Suckerpunch*, *Mexican Whiteboy*, *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez*, *What Can't Wait*, *The Afterlife*, and *Sizzle* did have male characters that did display one or more of those stereotypical characteristics. That is 56% of the books read for this study. While these were books recommended in professional reviews, it is important to make sure books like these don't make up 100% of the Latino collection of a school library.

Of the 16 books reviewed, only one had a parent with a career that required higher education. In *Confetti Girl*, Lina's father was a high school English teacher. In all other

books the parents either didn't work or had jobs in manual labor, like farming. Other parents worked in customer service as a waitress or a clerk at a dry cleaner, for example.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census found that approximately 28 percent of Latino families live in poverty (Spradlin, 2012). In the books read for this study over 80% of the families lived in low income households. It is important that books selected for libraries mirror the statistics and a majority of books should represent characters living in middle class families, like the characters from *Confetti Girl* and *So Hard to Say*.

The main characters of the books *Mexican Whiteboy*, *Fighting for Dontae*, and *Suckerpunch* engaged in risky behavior with drugs and/or alcohol to fit in with their peers, also to escape their lives. However, Javier from *Fighting for Dontae* was able to turn down requests from his peers to participate and he eventually became more of an observer of this activity. The characters from *Body Slammed*, *What Can't Wait*, and *Accidental Love* similarly had characters that were able to stand strong and show no interest to others for engaging in this activity. These characters should be sought out when selecting materials for the library. They are great role models for the Latino population of students.

The characters from *Accidental Love*, *Fighting for Dontae*, and *Benito Runs* academically lack motivation and interest. Because of his gang membership, Javier from *Fighting for Dontae* cannot ruin his reputation by admitting his love of reading and achieving high grades. Benito from *Benito Runs* lack focus due to family drama and *Accidental Love* character Marisa similarly lacks interest. However, Marisa has goals throughout the book to change this trait and increase her success in academics. Young adult fiction should model this motivation and books such as *What Can't Wait*, *Mexican*

*Whiteboy*, and *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez* have main characters who strive to better themselves through academics because they know this will lead to better futures.

### **Recommendations**

This study focused on young adult novels that concentrated on Latino characters and families. The books that were chosen were published in the United States between the years 2000 and 2012. For future study, a researcher may choose to widen the selection to books published in the 90's. This will widen the view to see if stereotypes are more consistent than this study can advise. The positive criteria developed from the themes present in the coding sheet can be used by teacher librarians when selecting Latino literature for fiction collections. Diversity in race, socioeconomic level, gender, and ability level in the collection is a must, and if a teacher librarian is unsure as to if a character is displayed positively enough to give the culture a optimistic perspective, then professional resources more specific to the culture should be sought.

Engaging the reader is always the first concern when selecting materials for a middle level library. Students need to be able to relate to the characters, also, they must be able to learn from the characters and see opportunities for themselves within the text. We want the students to be lifelong readers; fiction books are learning tools for students to take lessons and combine them with their own real life experiences. If characters are seen in positive roles, then those roles can be mirrored by the readers.

This study can be used by teacher librarians to review the collection for this cultural group to make sure there is diversity in characters. The collection should have both positive and negative characteristics, traditional family dilemmas and American family dilemmas for a group that is growing in the American population. In 2008, the

Cooperative Children's Book Center, at University of Wisconsin-Madison reported that 20 percent of the country's students are Latino. Students have family members that are graduating high school and attending college. They are not all living in low income households. Also, many males are finding success in careers outside of manual labor. This study reinforced the idea that students need to see their lives reflected in the literature to know their Latino American cultures are validated in the schools. They also need to see similarities across cultures to combat prejudice that can occur if misunderstandings and stereotypes are seen.



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## APPENDIX A

## FINAL CODING SHEET

	Authenticity		Engaging Reader		Positive characters			Negative Family				Negative Main Character		
	Authentic Cultural Setting	Authentic Language	Engaging Plot	Rich Characterization	Positive Portrayal of character	Positive portrayal of family	Main Character a survivor	Father-less	Low income	Father-negative	Mother-negative	Member of gang	Poor academics	Abuses drugs &/or alcohol
Title- <u>Putting Makeup on Fat Boy</u> Author- Wright	New York City	Character spoke no Spanish, also could not translate, pg. 35	Carlos is searching for the perfect job, working at a department store makeup counter, struggles with school, money, family, and his sexuality make it difficult to follow dream	Carlos is searching for success as makeup artist although he's discriminated against due to sexuality	Positive self esteem even when discriminated against, "held head up high"	Mother a single mom and very hard worker at dry cleaners	Carlos doesn't give up and doesn't back down to taunts committed by sister's boyfriend and his friends, "holds head up high"	Pg. 8 father left when children were the ages of 2 and 5	Pg. 7 "neither of us could afford"	Pg. 8 – drug addict and drunk	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Title- <u>Fighting for Dontaë</u> Author- Castan	Pg. 52- suburban, rundown neighborhood in CA	No Spanish pgs. 94-95 "mijo, abuelo's, cholos"	Javier is searching for way out of bad neighborhood and gang lifestyle	Pgs. 52, 93- torn between right and wrong "A part of me was relieved they were locked up. That way, I didn't have to worry about them..."	Pgs. 5, 17, 18, 46, 93, 125 "To me, getting locked up seemed like the poor, stupid people thing to do."	Mother attends church group to escape her demons, pg. 135	Knows he won't follow in footsteps of friends and father. Goals set for future and an outlook towards getting into education and becoming a teacher himself	Pg. 4 "he was always on his way to, or coming from, jail."	Pg. 7 "what really sucked was that we were poor too"	Pg. 4-5 – always sent to jail on violence and drug charges	Pg. 6- "tweaker" mother trying to get off speed	Pg. 2 "It was impossible to be a guy in my town and not belong to a gang, so we joined one."	Pgs. 16,17, 120- cannot focus gets C's and D's	Javier doesn't but his close friends smoke marijuana
Title- <u>Suckerpunch</u> Author- Hernandez	Urban setting	Some Spanish "Mijo", "no mas"	Marcus's hatred of dad reaches boiling point as him and his brother find a way to make sure he doesn't return	Talented artist torn between the love of his father and wanting to protect brother from father's abuse. peacemaker, nonviolent	negative except for the fact he helps his mom pg. 9 He does all the grocery shopping for her. Hopes to help brother deal with depression	Pg. 12- dad and architect Pg. 37- mom works hard	Knows not to follow in father and brother's footsteps as having a temper and using fists to solve a problem	Pg. 1 "he finally turned his back on us early one morning and drove off..."	Dad must send checks or else family couldn't survive on waitress mother's salary	Very abusive- pg. 8- knocked three teeth out of younger brother, Enrique	Mild, timid, won't stand up to abusive father	N/A	N/A	Pg. 3 – abuses drugs (acid, valium) and alcohol
Title <u>So Hard to Say</u> Author- Sanchez	Pg. 78- descriptions of food	Pg. 231 – Glossary of Spanish translations	Pg. 30 Xio's mother is dating again Pg. 47 – on pursuit of "Dream Date" Pg. 84 – questioning sexuality of crush Pg. 207 – questions the reasons why her father	Pg. 1 – describes herself as generous, fun, and openhearted Pg. 207 – questioned father's sexuality, is that why he left?	Pg. 31 and 137 – love for family in Mexico "I bawl like a baby" when leaving from a visit. Shows love for friends and mother, happy to see mother happy with new boyfriend	Pg. 2 "Mami's strong, in a quiet way" Mother is hard worker, a sales manager Pg. 51 – Mother is protective, must keep door open when boy is in Xio's room	Although father left long ago she knows she cannot dwell and knows love it out there for herself and her mother. Her relationship failed with Fredrick but she will continue to be a good friend to him and keep his secret safe.	Pg. 2 – single mother, dad left when Xio was young . Of Xio's six friends only one has a dad at home	Mother is a sales manager	Pg. 4 - No visits Pg. 206 – "His drinking became heavier"	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

			deserted family				Pg. 225 & 230							
Title <u>Benito Runs</u> Author - Fontes	Texas	Very few words: Pg. 8 – nickname “zapatos feos” Pg. 17 – “hijos”	Benito plans to run away to escape father who is making life unbearable Pg. 61 “My mind was miles ahead, at the bus station, buying a ticket for Dallas.”	Dad suffers from PTSD Pg. 49 – has flashbacks, “Would he go crazy from all the noise and attention?”	Benito is man of house when dad was in Iraq Pg. 47- has aspirations for college Pg. 48- great soccer player “The way you’ve been training lately, you’re sure to score a bunch of points for the squad.”	Family is all together, mother, father, sister, brother. Pg. 8 - Spend quality time together before dad is sent to fight in Iraq, they love to go bowling as a family activity	Used writing to escape pain and embarrassment from family drama used that to excel in class and eventually daydream about becoming a professional writer, pg. 98	Father is present, only away when serving overseas	Pg. 19 – “Since the factory where he used to work closed, Dad had plenty of time to stress. We were surviving on Mom’s salary,”	Dad is different after returning from war Pg. 17- “He didn’t sing, and he didn’t talk much. He stared into space a lot. And he yelled.”	Pg. 9 – mom was only three years older than Benito when she married father. Acts immature at times, “she and Armi were giggling together they almost looked like sisters.”	N/A	Hates writing but teacher recommended a journal to express thoughts.	N/A
Title <u>Mexican Whiteboy</u> Author - De La Pena	National City, suburb of San Diego – run down Pgs. 93, 97, 175	Danny speaks no Spanish but his father’s family does Pg. 1, 91	Danny faces an identity crisis being half white, half Mexican, isn’t sure where he fits in - Pg. 90 Wants to make the baseball team but gets nervous under pressure –Pg. 42	Pg. 40, 188- Depressed and abuses himself by cutting his arm with own nails till he bleeds. Doesn’t talk but cares for all and wants to meet friends and make Liberty his girl	College motivated, quiet, supportive of father even though he has a bad temper. Loves his Mexican family and wants to fit in more	Pg. 188- Father’s family is very protective and supportive of Danny, proud of his accomplishments and wants him to go far in life	Danny gets over his stagefright and his fear of seeing father in prison. He puts on a show for the coach and may even get on the team, “Coach’ll call you” pg. 239	Pg. 5 - Dad has been gone for three years with no contact, Danny believes he’s in Mexico but he’s actually in prison	Danny attends private school but only is able to do so due to the fact that mom is dating new rich, white guy Pgs. 93 & 97	Pg. 5 – drinks Pg. 45 – physical fighting Pg. 119 – smoking a joint in front of Danny, makes Danny feel funny Pgs. 124, 195, 207 - Dad hits mom, she leaves family and dad is in prison	Pg. 40- mom suffers from Depression	N/A	Pg. 46 – Good grades	Only drank three times in entire life. Not use to the taste, doesn’t enjoy it pg. 177
Title <u>The Smell of Old Lady Perfume</u> Author - Martinez	El Florido El Paso, TX	Very little Spanish 46, 61, 76, 87, 98	Chela’s dad becomes very sick as she awaits her first day of 6 <sup>th</sup> grade pgs. 25 & 63, to top it off her best friend dumps her and she is without anyone pg. 74	pg. 45 Chela feels hopeless but she turns to prayer to help her and her father survive pg. 50. Loves to read to escape problems pg. 95	“Want to be able to talk to anyone and give advice” pg. 12, strives to be the best in academics	Can talk to dad about anything pg. 18, dad is a hard worker in construction, came from nothing and started his own business pg. 41	Pg. 249 Chela knows her father will always be with her and he is proud of her accomplishments she’s achieved even with the rough school year she’s been through	Dad is with family but dies toward end of book pg. 194	Pg. 12 small allowance, cannot afford new clothes, mother doesn’t drive pg. 37	N/A	N/A	N/A	Pg. 213, 237 & 241 is awarded “Outstanding Student” and “All School” Girl for highest scores in 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	N/A
Title <u>The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez</u> Author - Sitomer	El Norte, CA	Consistent throughout with phrases and words, no glossary	Sonia considers her only ticket to freedom from her life is a high school diploma pg. 34, mother sends to her experience life in Mexico since she is too focused on school	Sonia knows boys are trouble and only interested in one thing pg. 33, she learns to value her family’s culture but wants a better life for herself and for all next generation American Latinas	Pg 11 wants to be the first to graduate high school in family, never does anything “half assed” pg. 165	In Latino culture family sticks together pg. 6, Sonia recognizes this as good and bad, her father works so hard and recognizes and supports Sonia’s goals in education	Pg. 195 Sonia knows she must leave Mexico and work hard in school to make something of herself after witnessing the pain and poverty in Mexico, be a “second generation Latina” pg. 35	Father is with family	Father works three jobs pg. 11, family constantly has late bills pg. 21	Pg. 1 dad is illegal, allows uncle to spend his hard earned money on booze, women, and gambling	Pg. 20 watches TV all day, pg. 24 weak, won’t stand up to abusive uncle, doesn’t support school, wants Sonia to work around house	N/A	Goal is to always complete homework in school, against copying from friends pg. 16	N/A

			and needs to be more focused on family and hard work pg. 87	pg. 35										
Title <u>What Can't Wait</u> Author - Perez	Houston, TX	Spanish words and phrases on every page, no glossary	Family troubles put college plans on hold for Marisa, family is not supportive of plans to go to school in Austin pgs. 13, 79	Marisa lives with family full of drama, sister's husband is druggie and mom and dad are absent due to work demands, Marisa struggles to support four year old niece, part time job, and school pg. 7	Marisa is hard worker who gives half her paycheck to her parents pg. 121, she is a great aunt pg. 22, 28, she is also a great student	Mom and dad are hard workers working in manual labor pg. 155, they support each other, brother gives her money to support family pg. 154	Pg. 105 "Time to suck it up and get back in gear." Even is she isn't 'accepted to the school she wants she can still go somewhere else and be anything she wants, right now she wants to be an engineer	Dad lives with family	Roache's infest home pg. 25, struggle to pay bills pg. 123	Father is not loving pg. 7, sexist "leave the math to the men" pg. 12, "he tolerates me" pg. 27, doesn't bother to look at report cards pg. 123	Doesn't stand up to father and support children pg. 224, hid her college acceptance papers from her	N/A	Excels academically	N/A
Title <u>Sizzle</u> Author - McClain	Arizona	Few words and phrases pg. 33, 44	Linda's aunt is very sick pg. 9 and she must leave her to live with a distant relative in Pittsburg as soon as the aunt's restaurant closes pg. 18	Linda adores cooking and has a strong sense of smell pg. 62, culturally her new family is very different than her pg. 36	Linda loves her aunt and will stay positive to support her health pg. 6 she takes action to help herself fit in and feel better about her new home pg. 49	Aunt is very affectionate and protective of Linda pg. 8 & 12, Aunt moves to Pittsburg to be closer to Linda in the end pg. 186	Linda lived with new family and learned to get along with them and actually love and respect them although their lifestyle was so greatly different than hers	Father was never part of family, Linda's mom was an unwed mother	Lived in trailer, struggled to make restaurant work pgs. 11 & 15	Not present since before birth	Not present, died soon after birth Pg. 20	N/A	N/A	N/A
Title <u>Confetti Girl</u> Author - Lopez	Corpus Christi, TX pg. 165	Pg. 4 not bilingual pg. 196 Glossary	Lina and Vanessa want to help their parents find love, with each other, according to Vanessa	Lina wants a relationship with her father but every since her mom died he's more interested in books pg. 3	Loves volleyball and really misses her mother pgs. 45 & 63	Dad's a teacher and he wants to participate in Lina's life Pgs. 2 & 44	Lina opens up to father about his absence and begins to understand that she has skills and a passion in writing and is able to write a story to describe her life using fictional characters	Lina lives with father, mother died	N/A	Absent due to dealing with wife's death pgs. 7, 40, 68	N/A	N/A	Likes school especially science but loses focus in English and fails class pgs. 28, 46, 86	N/A
Title <u>Body Slammed</u> Author - Villareal	San Antonio, TX	Jesse speaks no Spanish pg. 23	Physically he doesn't compare to his father pg. 2, his parent's divorce due to his dad's wrestling career has him down pg. 8, Learning from new friend, T.J. that one doesn't always have to follow the rules pg. 84	Dad is a professional wrestler and mom is a high school teacher, Jesse is a normal teen trying to get better at football pg. 105	Jesse loves football and works hard to show he can get off the bench pg. 2, doesn't want to be a quitter, pg. 45, not sure whether to follow bad influences of T.J. pg. 71	Grandparents live with Jesse and his dad, talks to mom often pg. 10	Although his relationship with T.J. got him into some interesting and troublesome situations, Jesse knew he could not follow the same path and chose to part ways with this new friend pg. 191	Lives with dad and grandparents	N/A	Works a lot and travels, not around much pg. 8, doesn't attend Jesse's games pg. 5, has a bad temper pg. 13	Jesse chose to live with dad and not mother, pg. 9	N/A	Ok in school pg. 73	No interested pg. 110
Title	Fresno,	Spanish	Marisa	Marisa is a	Marisa is a great	Father works	Although	Famil	Danger	N/A	Mother is	N/A	Cuts	No pg.

<u>Accidental Love</u> Author - Soto	CA	words and phrases on every page, glossary on page 177	and Rene accidentally exchange cell phones which unknowingly leads into a relationship between the two who are complete opposites pgs. 33, 46, 89	tough girl who suffers from low self esteem due to her weight pgs. 45, 96	friend pg. 7 and wants to succeed in school so she transfers to another in a better neighborhood pg. 35. She also wants to control her temper pgs. 42, 70	very hard in manual labor pgs. 15 & 22, want Marisa to do well pg. 27	Rene's mother tries to keep them apart, Marisa and Rene keep seeing each other and Marisa works hard to become the person she wants to be, control her temper and improve her grades pg. 164, 167	y is together	ous neighborhood, run down school 17, 25		hard on Marisa pg. 88		class and has poor grades pgs. 1, 28, 30	28
<u>Title Chicken Foot Farm</u> Author - Estevis	South Texas	Spanish on every pg. use context clues to guess meaning	Pearl Harbor brings the US into WWII pg. 73. Alejandro's brother dies pg. 83 in action and his other brother leaves the farm leaving him to take over family farm	Alejandro wants to prove to his father that he can be a hard worker/farmer pgs. 112 & 130 to feel accepted and loved as much as older brother pg. 94	Alejandro feels guilt for mistakes and punishment he received as a child pg. 33, he's very honest in confessing his mishaps (gun)	Very religious pg. 13, "someone had tremendous control over my behavior...mama" pg. 18, dad is hard worker of family farm pg. 110	Alejandro strove to work hard and make family proud, esp. dad, and give grandfather something to live for after grandmother died pg. 130	Dad is leader of family of seven	Poor farmers, mama's family didn't think dad was good enough for her	"he never seemed happy when I was around him" pg. 111, seldom talked to Alejandro pg. 7	N/A	N/A	Average student	N/A
<u>Title Afterlife</u> Author - Soto	Urban Setting East Fresno High school, CA pg. 81	Spanish phrases and words mixed in Glossary pg. 159	Chuy is murdered in first chapter, his ghost rises from his body and he is able to fulfill his last wishes before he disappears altogether	Chuy rethinks his high school years and as a ghost is able to meet two other ghosts who have recently died due to very different reasons	Normal, average boy who tried to stay out of trouble and who worked hard to be a track runner pg. 75	Chuy was very close to his parents and his cousins before he passed away	Chuy gets the opportunity to say goodbye in his own way to family and friends before he disappears, he decides although his dreams are long gone he has a piece of them in Crystal a ghost he met and fell in love with	Parents were together pg. 11	Worked in fields, lived in rough neighborhood pg. 81 & 104	N/A	Mother wants revenge, wants cousin to kill Chuy's murderer pg. 73	Chuy was not a gang member but his murderer was	N/A	N/A
<u>Title Esperanza Rising</u> Author - Ryan	Mexico then California in 1930's pg. 12	Few phrases, words on every few pages	Esperanza moves from Mexico to CA after father is murdered and mother cannot afford farm pg. 48	Pg. 38 Esperanza loves father and Mexico and doesn't want to leave. Must learn new lifestyle as servant girl which is difficult because she once had her own servants	Pg. 72 feels guilty about looking down on Miguel who's family works for Esperanza's pg. 117 a hard worker who wants to learn how to do chores in the US	Pg. 4 Esperanza is father's "pride and glory" pg. 13 loves grandmother and doesn't want to leave her in Mexico. Mother is strong, refuses to marry uncle	Esperanza learns to make a new life for herself in America and begins to see others as her equal; she is no longer superior to them. She learns she can be happy again, even without father	Father murdered pg. 22	Farm worker in America, lost everything after father died	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

**APPENDIX B****LIST OF BOOK TITLES**

- Castan, M. (2012). *Fighting for Dontae*. New York: Holiday House.
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