Eastern Michigan University

DigitalCommons@EMU

Senior Honors Theses & Projects   Honors College

2016

The intersectionalities of identity in young adult fiction with biracial protagonists

Tiffany Nicole Browne

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.emich.edu/honors

The intersectionalities of identity in young adult fiction with biracial protagonists

Abstract

In recent years, a notable increase of diverse texts, including those written about non- White characters, has entered the field of children's literature helping to represent a racially comprehensive audience. One area that does not garner as much attention in the field, even in multicultural children's literature, is biracial children's literature, with little emphasis falling on novels with biracial protagonists. With the growing number of families in the United States identifying as biracial or multi-racial, it is important to examine the representations of biracial characters encountered by youth in books. The young adult novels, Sarah Jamila Stevenson's *The Latte Rebellion* (2011), Joan Steinau Lester's *Black, White, Other* (2011), Sandra Forrester's *Dust from Old Bones* (1999), Matt de la Pella's *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008), and Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2008), work against the idea of people (and characters) having to choose an identity that alienates part of themselves. Characters navigate through the channels of biraciality while developing a sense of what Lourdes India Ivory calls "biracial competency" and "biracial efficacy" allowing them to function successfully within both racial groups (Ivory 2010). In addition, these novels highlight the various intersectional forces that can potentially stand in the way of a character's ability to successfully develop in relation to Ivory's concepts specifically in regard to their basic psychological, emotional, and safety needs. This research analyzes the different forces that impact character identity development and how each of these forces contributes to a character's overall ability to become comfortable as a biracial individual.

Degree Type

Open Access Senior Honors Thesis

Department

English Language and Literature

First Advisor

Dr. Ramona Caponegro

Keywords

Children's literature, young adult literature, biracial, identity, biracial competency, biracial efficacy

THE INTERSECTIONALITIES OF IDENTITY IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION WITH BIRACIAL PROTAGONISTS

By

Tiffany Nicole Browne

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

Honors College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

with Honors in Children's Literature, Department of English Language and Literature

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date ___March 31, 2016___

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

In recent years, a notable increase of diverse texts, including those written about non-White characters, has entered the field of children's literature helping to represent a racially comprehensive audience. One area that does not garner as much attention in the field, even in multicultural children's literature, is biracial children's literature, with little emphasis falling on novels with biracial protagonists. With the growing number of families in the United States identifying as biracial or multi-racial, it is important to examine the representations of biracial characters encountered by youth in books. The young adult novels, Sarah Jamila Stevenson's *The Latte Rebellion* (2011), Joan Steinau Lester's *Black, White, Other* (2011), Sandra Forrester's *Dust from Old Bones* (1999), Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008), and Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2008), work against the idea of people (and characters) having to choose an identity that alienates part of themselves. Characters navigate through the channels of biraciality while developing a sense of what Lourdes India Ivory calls "biracial competency" and "biracial efficacy" allowing them to function successfully within both racial groups (Ivory 2010). In addition, these novels highlight the various intersectional forces that can potentially stand in the way of a character's ability to successfully develop in relation to Ivory's concepts specifically in regard to their basic psychological, emotional, and safety needs. This research analyzes the different forces that impact character identity development and how each of these forces contributes to a character's overall ability to become comfortable as a biracial individual.

INTRODUCTION

Reaching adolescence brings about many opportunities for self-discovery, and one of the most crucial and often overlooked aspects of this self-discovery revolves around racial identity. The struggle for racial identity faced by biracial individuals in the United States, the demographic focus of this paper, sets them apart from their uni-racial counterparts. One of the first places that adolescents are introduced to reflections on the struggles of identity crises is in literature. The presence of biracial characters in young adult fiction can provide a mirror into the lives of characters going through the same issues as those reading the texts, allowing the authors of these texts to potentially influence the perceptions of their biracial readers through their depictions of characters with similar attributes. William S.C. Poston writes, "The notion of racial identity is considered important in terms of shaping attitudes towards oneself, towards others in one's racial group, and towards other racial groups, including majority and minority groups" (Referenced by Nuttgens 356). Thus, the depictions of biracial identity that are discussed in young adult fiction can be essential to the development of readers' own identities. By analyzing the biracial protagonists of different young adult fictional texts, primarily Sarah Jamila Stevenson's *The Latte Rebellion* (2011), Joan Steinau Lester's *Black, White, Other* (2011), Sandra Forrester's *Dust from Old Bones* (1999), Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008), and Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2008), patterns of representation emerge. The patterns found in these novels serve to demonstrate that the aspects that influence the way a character feels about their biraciality range from their family's attitudes toward their biracial make-up, and interactions with other characters in school environments, to responses toward the character's identity from members of their community. Due to the limited amount of research conducted on such an essential topic in the field of children's literature, much of this paper will draw from the disciplines of education and psychology, in addition to multicultural children's literature.

There is very limited recent research specifically dealing with biraciality in children's literature. Much of the discussion in the field surrounds multicultural literature and the inclusion of texts that are not "all White." In a groundbreaking article published in 1965 by *The Saturday Review*, Nancy Larrick brought the issue of "The All White World of Children's Books" to the general public. This article specifically dealt with the omission of African American characters from texts; at that time only 6.7 percent of the 5,206 books published for children in 1964 had at least one depiction of a non-White character (Larrick 2). This statistic does not include any characters with a biracial background, as research regarding this demographic was nonexistent at the time of this study. As of February 24, 2015, researchers at the University of Wisconsin—Madison did a random sampling of 3,500 texts out of the estimated 5,000 children's books that were published in the year 2014. They discovered that their sample revealed a meager 396 texts written about non-White characters, with no specific distinction given to texts written by and about biracial individuals (Horning 2015). This number is an increase from the texts published about non-White characters in the year 2013, with that number hovering at 253 books (Horning 2015), but it still reveals the limited progress that has been made in publishing racially diverse books for a young audience.

The statistics on the number of racially diverse texts, and the exclusion of biracial representation as a category within these statistics, become even more alarming in light of the 2010 U.S. Census, which reported a record number of individuals declaring more than one racial/ethnic background, with the number of citizens reporting belonging to two or more races as over nine million (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). The extremely small number of texts dealing with biracial characters is deeply disproportionate to the number of people self-defining as biracial. With that being the case, it is noteworthy that the University of Wisconsin—Madison does not include a

"biracial" identity category in their study of children's texts, alongside other established categories for minority racial identities.

When texts are created about this group of people, they often include inaccurate or problematic depictions of biracial characters. It is essential for readers to feel there is an aspect of connection with the texts they engage with. Finding a relationship between oneself and a character has self-affirming attributes, which often lead to young readers seeking out texts with characters similar to themselves (Sims-Bishop 1990). Problems arise for biracial individuals seeking characters similar to themselves, because there is a very limited number of texts with authentic depictions of biracial characters. Motoko Rich writes in his 2014 *New York Times* article, "For Young Latino Readers, an Image Is Missing," that without a mirror reflecting characteristics of the readers in a text, the readers have less of an opportunity to "build [reading] stamina and deepen their understanding of story elements" (Rich). Biracial children have to work harder to find some aspect of character identification than many other readers. Rudine Sims Bishop states in her article "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom," "[W]hen children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (Sims-Bishop 1990). The incorporation of diverse characters in texts, including biracial characters, helps readers from diverse backgrounds not only to appreciate the texts, but to feel better about themselves. The notion of the only type of biraciality that exists in the United States is that of Black and White often persists in society today, and books representing all types of biraciality are needed, though it is not always necessary to have a racial match for the reader to identity with a biracial character. Featuring more biracial characters representing any two races would be a positive development.

This analysis will be divided into three separate sections, all relating to one another in terms of narrative content and the devices that are used by characters to come to terms with their biracial identity. The first section deals solely with female biracial protagonists and their journeys through self-discovery, focusing on the novels *The Latte Rebellion, Black, White, Other,* and *Dust from Old Bones.* The second section focuses solely on male biracial protagonists and their attempts at negotiating their biracial identities, emphasizing the texts *Mexican Whiteboy* and *The Death of Jayson Porter.* The final section serves as a comparison between the factors that influence these particular biracial female characters and biracial male characters in their quests for becoming comfortable with their biracial identity. However, specific focus is also given to the additional factors outside of race that contribute to characters' identity navigation and their place on the "identity spectrum," which ranges from characters being comfortable with their racial identity to still being in the negotiation phases of coming to terms with their racial identity.

CHAPTER ONE: FEMALE BIRACIAL PROTAGONISTS

I. You Can't Have Just One

Although the number of books containing biracial characters is strikingly low, it is even more curious that, within published texts, the majority of these stories contain more than one biracial character. It seems as though the biracial individual is unable to stand alone on her journey, and as a result always has an additional biracial sidekick, or foil. For example, in Sarah Jamila Stevenson's *The Latte Rebellion* (2011), the biracial protagonist of the story, Asha, is "foiled" by her best friend and fellow biracial female character, Carey, as Carey's skepticism about joining and following through with the plan to bring racial issues into focus at their school contrasts with Asha's can-do spirit and willingness to undertake the cause. Carey and Asha also differ when it comes to handling the adversity surrounding their rebellion, as Carey succumbs to the communal

and familial pressures that develop, and loses hope in the Latte Rebellion, whereas Asha disregards the backlash and continues to fight for what she believes is right. Additionally, Asha and Carey are joined by many other biracial, or "latte" colored compatriots, from a variety of different biracial identities, over the course of their story. Despite the lack of representation of biraciality in the field, books that do incorporate these characters seem to make it a point to include the stories of many different biracial characters in their narratives. It is typical in many stories to have supporting characters, but quite often there are stark differences between the primary and supporting characters, often including differences in physical appearances and backgrounds, particularly when at least one of the primary characters is from a minority racial background.

Joan Steinau Lester's *Black, White, Other* (2011) also features characters with a biracial make-up, but in this case the characters are siblings. Nina Armstrong and her brother, Jimi, were forced to "choose" between their racial identities when their parents split up. The Armstrong siblings' father is Black, and their mother is White. When their parents divorced, the brother and sister chose where their allegiances with their parents lay, against the backdrop of racial tensions in their native city of Oakland, California. The racial tensions in the city and family force the siblings, Nina in particular, to examine the differences in the different cultures that make up their backgrounds. A key difference that Nina experiences is in the way that White people want to go about handling the city's racial protests. Her friend Claudette's father, who is White, calls the protesters "looters," as opposed to Nina's father, who is Black, calling them "protesters." This forces Nina to see that there are different cultural cues that come from being a part of a specific racial group. Additionally, when Nina interacts with some of her black girl friends at school, she must deal with the binary system that her biracial identity challenges, both wanting to fit in and be proud of *both* cultures. For example, when Nina's friend Demetre says, "White girls. You can't

trust 'em. . . I'm gonna keep my eye on you! You might turn *all* white. We got to watch out"

(Lester 114), Nina is immediately put on the defensive, responding, "I'm part white!'. . . Funny

how now I feel like defending the white part of me, the white part of my family" (Lester 114). This

example illustrates the potential for biracial individuals to experience distrust from full members

of the minority group as these members see the possibility for the biracial individual to abandon

minority identification in favor of majority privilege. Reflecting on Demetre's comment, Nina

struggles with "biracial efficacy," which Lourdes India Ivory defines as "an individual's belief or

confidence in his or her ability to live effectively and satisfactorily within two cultural groups

without having to compromise his or her sense of cultural identity" (141). Making an effort not to

choose one cultural group over another, and instead fully embracing both racial identities,

illustrates Ivory's claim of the need to develop biracial competency, or the ability to respond to

the different social cues, personality traits and intricacies of living in two different cultures (141).

The practice of including additional biracial characters in novels with a biracial protagonist

can possibly be attributed to the idea that, during adolescence, young people will begin to

demonstrate "the basic social need to communicate, as young people seek to belong, to form

affiliations" (Hadaway 40). During adolescence, many individuals want to feel that someone

understands who they are; thus, being able to relate to others who may share a similar background

is comforting, and helps them become comfortable with their new sense of identity (41). These

peer-to-peer interactions "reflect peer power and relationships, as language is used to position

individuals negatively or positively" (43). This allows biracial individuals to navigate between the

two identities that their backgrounds provide them, through conversations with other individuals

who are of a similar background. The relationships that biracial individuals create with their peers

help them frame themselves positively within society, through the inclusive language and social behavior these novels demonstrate.

One such situation takes place in Sandra Forrester's *Dust from Old Bones* (1999), in which multiple biracial characters are paired together, and serve to represent differences in character perceptions of biraciality. A difference that occurs in this text is that the characters in this novel are, in fact, cousins. Simone and Claire-Marie are both biracial teens, though different in practically all other respects, even down to the color of their skin. Simone is much darker than her cousin, who could pass for White, resulting in some revelatory social interactions between the two cousins and their families. For example, Simone's mother and father consistently encourage her to help with the household tasks to keep the family running smoothly, a family-oriented Afrocentric value, whereas Claire-Marie's mother insists on having their two black servants do a majority of the housework leaving little for Claire-Marie to do, other than making her bed in the morning, a more individualistic, Eurocentric value. Additionally, at various points throughout the text, much more of an emphasis is placed on Simone's Black background, and how it comes into play with her White background, as opposed to Claire-Marie's seemingly "White" focused identity. For example, Claire-Marie has six brand new dresses made out of the fabric from Paris that all of the girls in school fawn over. When Simone mentions her new dresses being made out of American fabrics, her classmates respond with a lackluster "How nice" before returning their attention to Claire-Marie (27). These examples show how the emphasis placed on social status, influenced by race and socioeconomic class, have a profound impact on the way the characters live.

The presence of multiple biracial characters in a text allows the protagonist to analyze and validate her own ideas about identity, particularly as they relate to racial identity. Lisa Scherff notes that character identities, much like reader identities, are greatly influenced by the social and

cultural factors that surround them, including but not limited to family, friends, and peers (Scherff 3). Taking this idea into account, it makes sense that biracial characters benefit from being able to see and interact with others who are biracial. This reinforces Bishop's claim that children benefit from seeing themselves reflected in the texts that they read (356), just as the biracial characters in these texts benefit from the reflection of themselves in the other biracial characters with whom they interact. Shared experiences and identities are transmitted from character to character within these books, as well as from the books to their readers.

II. Familial Influences on Identity

The development of character identity in the novels is very much affected by familial factors. Simone Racine, in Forrester's *Dust from Old Bones*, lives in a world in which her identity is greatly influenced by her older cousin, Claire-Marie. Growing up in Louisiana in 1838, Simone's dark skin and long, curly black hair are constantly compared to her cousin's "skin [that] is creamy white and her hair [that] falls as straight and shiny as raw silk down her back" (Forrester 4). Whispers from the community lead Simone to take a more critical look at the way her cousin lives as she is told all her life that Claire-Marie could "pass" for White, even though she is biracial, like Simone. Throughout the text, the two cousins have very contrasting ideas of what it means to be a person of color. Simone often has to weigh her cousin's opinions against her own, as well as those of her other family members. In the following passage, Simone gives background information on her friend, Lucien, and the ways that two of her family members perceive him:

> Claire-Marie does not approve of Lucien, because his skin is dark and he wears no
>
> shoes, and because he has little schooling and works as a stable boy. She says he
>
> smells of horse droppings and swamp water. Maman agrees. But Papa — who is
>
> dark himself, and worked at many lowly jobs while learning his trade — calls

Lucien "remarkable." How many boys of thirteen work six days a week, Papa says, and hunt on the seventh to support their families? I have told Claire-Marie that Lucien will not always be a stable boy, that he plans to have a stable of his own one day, but Claire-Marie says he will still smell of horse droppings. (Forrester 13)

Simone must rationalize her opinion of Lucien, after hearing the ways in which her family members perceive the boy. Claire-Marie's opinion of Lucien has the potential to lead Simone to question her own racial identity, as she does not want to be identified by the same stereotypes in which her cousin places her friend.

Dealing with the stereotypes that others attribute to biracial individuals is a constant struggle for characters with biracial identities; "on a daily basis they must navigate a world where other people are making assumptions about who they are and what they can achieve based on their skin color" (Hughes-Hassell 218). If Claire-Marie believes those things about Lucien because of his skin color, it becomes unsettling to Simone to think about what her cousin may think about her, and her dark skin, as well. Lucien's lower social class status also influences Claire-Marie's perceptions, as the harsh social structures of slavery automatically place Black people into a lower social class than those with lighter skin. Even though Lucien is not a slave, his darker skin color and working class status contribute to the disapproval that Claire-Marie feels toward him. In the same respect, a balance exists for Simone with her family. Because her father is dark skinned, and understands what the implications of his skin color can mean to others, his favorable perspective of Lucien serves to give her a positive perspective on Lucien, as well as on the darker skin that is a part of her own identity. When it comes to developing her views about herself, these two perspectives about Lucien have a great impact on Simone's eventual decision to embrace both parts of her biracial background by gaining an understanding of each of her individual identities.

Parents can be a driving force behind issues of identity confusion and possible pressures to "pick" one race over another. This problem is illustrated in Stevenson's text, *The Latte Rebellion* (2011), by Asha's parents. Not only do some of Asha's father's comments deter her from embracing the fullness of her racial identity as she tries to embrace her "latteness," but they also reinforce some of the commonly held stereotypes about people of Asian descent. Asha is a biracial girl with a Chinese and White background. She is stereotyped, like many Asians as being very smart, always at the top of her class, and striving to gain acceptance to Ivy League schools. When issues arise regarding the treatment of biracial students at her school, and Asha and her friends begin their movement to embrace biraciality, she begins to lose focus on her schoolwork and receives subsequent backlash from her parents. Although her parents are unaware of the full extent of her involvement with the cause, they begin to see her once exceptional grades slipping, her loss of motivation when it comes to applying for college, and tensions within her friend group as a result of the rebellion. Her parents think she has strayed from their dreams of their daughter's future. Asha's father often makes comments regarding her grades in school, such as, "I don't want you to get distracted" (108), and "That's an improvement; you were down at eighth [in class rank] after a disappointing fall semester" (244).

Familial pressures cause Asha to feel the need to choose between focusing on her grades or leading the rebellion that she creates to raise awareness about the challenges faced by biracial individuals. Ivory suggests that Asha's acts are a way of increasing her "biracial efficacy" by becoming more competent about biraciality, and fully embracing her biracial identity, standing up for what she believes in, and making a concerted effort to learn about and live effectively within both cultures (Ivory 142). Her family's pressure to ignore what she becomes so passionate about affects Asha's confidence in pushing forward with her movement. Once Asha's parents find out

that her school status becomes jeopardized because of her cause, she begins to fear that she has failed them. It would be easy to say that the tense interactions between Asha and her parents are not related to Asha's biracial status, but the following comment from Asha to her father suggests otherwise: "I — we — think this is an important issue, but maybe you wouldn't understand. I thought for sure you'd understand because you're half-and-half, too, but I guess you're really just. . ." (Stevenson 285). Asha's efforts to get her father to take notice of the cause for which she is in trouble, and not to focus only on the possible consequences, leads to the idea that, like the characters in the other novels, she is still struggling to come to terms with her family not fully acknowledging the challenges of her biracial identity. This tension is common to all three novels discussed in this chapter, as, similarly, the families of both Nina and Simone also struggle to understand the identities of their biracial daughters.

Acknowledging that two different backgrounds make up a biracial individual is quite difficult to avoid confronting head on in Lester's *Black, White, Other* (2011). Nina must face the two cultures that contribute to her biraciality each time she is shuffled from one parent's house to the other and she can clearly see the two different aspects of her racial make-up reflected back to her in her parents' separate identities. An added dynamic of familial pressure is placed on Nina as, due to her parents' divorce, she has to choose a parent to live with, ultimately deciding between her cultures, since she is directly affected by a different culture in each of her living situations. Nina also faces the issue of *neither* parent completely understanding what it is like to be biracial in a city where racism is always a controversial issue. After regularly confiding in her mother, Nina begins to see that there are some stark differences between the two of them, noting, "My feelings about my mom are so mixed up I'm gonna explode. . . It seems like she's standing across a wall from me—this wall called race—and suddenly I'm on the other side" (Lester 92). She also

must deal with the fact that her younger brother, who is darker in complexion than she is, has chosen to live with her father, which leads to feelings of abandonment from the Black side of her family, and her lack of ability to claim any membership in that culture. Nina often negotiates her feelings by saying that her own father doesn't even want her (Lester 10), that he chose her brother over her (Lester 10), and that she can't feel fully connected to either culture because she lacks an African American cultural influence (Lester 12).

Despite Nina's feelings, it is apparent that both sides of Nina's family care about her upbringing. At several point in the story, Nina's mother says, "Race doesn't matter" (Lester 94). She also says, "Claim every bit of who you are" (Lester 94), giving Nina permission to embrace both parts of her racial identity. Mary Cipriani-Price, Ben K. Lim, and Donna J. Alberici note some of the possible repercussions of raising a biracial child to exclusively relate to one race over another, observing, "This has the potential to alienate the children from their other heritage and possibly cause ambivalence toward that race as well as a sense of a fractured loyalty to the parent of the other ethnicity" (Cipriani-Price 156). This long-term response is what Nina's parents are trying to avoid in her upbringing, by allowing Nina to be exposed to both cultures. As she grows up, her father frequently asks her to come and stay with him so that she will not lose their relationship and her ties to Black culture. Nina's father is able to provide her with a new perspective on the differences that belonging to a minority group bring, starting with dealing with the negative attention that comes to Blacks because of the riots in Oakland (Lester 13). Nina's mother is able to provide her with a White opinion regarding the tensions in the city, while making efforts to show Nina that she is more than one race, and that is perfectly acceptable. Although it is difficult for Nina's parents to understand what she deals with in her everyday life as a biracial individual, their efforts to expose her to both cultures, and to provide her with both viewpoints,

make her navigation between the two cultures, along with her relationship with each parent, less difficult.

III. Community Pressures

Like families, the communities in which biracial characters are placed also have an impact on their thoughts and feelings about biraciality. In Lester's *Black, White, Other* (2011), Nina's struggle is complicated by the area in which she lives. Since her parents chose to raise their children in an area of Oakland, California, that has influences of both the Black and White cultures that make up their children, there are often issues of race that impact Nina differently from the rest of her friends at school. While a majority of the other children place their allegiance with the group representing their racial background when racial tensions arise, Nina struggles with deciding where to place her support. Her parents' support leads Nina to examine both parts of her identity as she is not pushed to choose one racial identification over another. Yet this comparatively open approach to racial identity causes Nina more confusion; when describing the racial tensions at her school, she says, "It's all about race at school. You have to be one or the other. You don't understand at all" (94). Biracial children are often labeled as "different" by their peers, and have to answer questions along the lines of "what are you?" or "are you mixed?" as opposed to operating under a sense that simply *being* is enough (Cipariani-Price 157). Nina experiences a problem common to many biracial individuals: discrimination from *both* ethnic groups within her community (Cipariani-Price 157). Nina is alienated at school, where no one will talk to her because she doesn't fit into either racial category, in the eyes of her classmates. Both her White and Black classmates challenge her sense of identity by trying to force her to "pick a side" when it comes to lunchtime seating arrangements. Such pressures lead Nina to observe, "Nobody [at school] talks to me anymore, because of who I am, a black girl or a white girl?" (78). The racial tensions in

Oakland that are described in the book pose a unique struggle shared by many biracial individuals, who question both sides of their racial make-up, as well as efforts to try and force them to select one part of their identity over the other, one culture over another culture.

Although Simone, in Forrester's *Dust From Old Bones* (1999) is living a "free" life, the implications of American slavery are still present in her surrounding community as she grows up in 1830s Louisiana. When Simone's background comes into question by the surrounding community, she is forced to examine what makes her unique. Talks of a slave rebellion in the south lead Simone to question the rights of the African American people, the people whose blood also runs through her veins. Gaining the right to marry whomever she chooses, like her cousin Claire-Marie, inspires Simone to emulate her Aunt Madelon from Paris, France, a woman who takes social justice issues to heart throughout most of the novel. The community that surrounds Simone is responsible for the way she perceives herself in a society that perpetuates the belief that people of color are of a lower class, a reality that witnessing a live slave auction in the city drives home to Simone (69). Feeling as though it is the community, and not her own willpower that dictates her life choices, leads Simone to act out in ways she feels will allow her not only to stand up for what is right, but also to become more contented with her identity as a whole.

Asha also struggles with community pressures and influences in Stevenson's *The Latte Rebellion* (2011). As she enters her senior year of high school, Asha is reminded of the ignorance of some of her classmates, who refer to her as a "towel head" (1), even though she is partially Asian as opposed to Arab, and is regularly reminded of her status as a biracial individual by other characters, such as her main antagonist, Roger Yee. In this case, the community's prejudice motivates Asha to make a difference for herself and others like her. By starting a movement for the recognition and appreciation of peoples with biracial backgrounds, Asha engages a new,

biracial community, which rallies around the need for acknowledgement of their identities. However, positive support and encouragement from this community to keep the movement going lead to other problems for Asha. While she is able to become more comfortable with herself as a biracial individual, and gains self-confidence through her involvement with this movement, her involvement also alienates some of her friends, disappoints her parents, and results in legal issues with her school district. During this process Asha experiences Walker S.C. Poston's stage of "choice of group categorization," and the "alienation and crisis identity phase." Beth Kleinman-Fleisher also notes that the social support provided by her community allows her to more fully engage with her biracial identity (Kleinman-Fleischer 162). These positive pressures encourage Asha to invest in her movement, which leads to creative tensions within her school community. Asha must choose between saving face, keeping her reputation and good standing within her school district (i.e. alienation and crisis identity), and deciding to stand up for what she believes in, even though it may jeopardize her chances of getting into an Ivy League school (i.e. choice of group categorization). In this way, readers can see that individuals have a choice in how they wish to define themselves based on their feelings about their identity as a whole. Conflicts such as this one, and the similar conflicts faced by the characters in the other novels, lead readers to a fuller self-examination of the characters' backgrounds and a realization that one's identity is larger and more complex than mere skin color.

IV. Making Amends and Making Change

According to Bernice Pescosolido, Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa Milkie, people in minority groups often have more complex relationships between conflict and culture, due to a lack of understanding from members of majority groups (446). Conflict, and the subsequent reaction to the conflict that comes from being a member of the biracial community, are also central features

in the three novels discussed in this chapter. When it comes to conflict management, researchers Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann crafted five main styles of leadership that take place (Referenced by Miller 162): (1) *competing*, (2) *collaborating*, (3) *accommodating*, (4) *avoiding*, and (5) *compromising*. The texts discussed in this chapter suggest that the collaborative approach is most effective in allowing individuals to take in both sides of the conflict, rationalize them, and make decisions based on satisfying each party involved. This takes into account a concern for the self, as well as a concern for others, when deciding how to respond to conflict. One could suggest that conflict is ever present for biracial individuals, as they are forced to live with the two different parts of their identities on a daily basis. The biracial individual must "collaborate" racial backgrounds in order to achieve biracial competency and efficacy.

As discussed above, Asha and her friends respond to conflict by creating a rebellion of mixed race individuals in Stevenson's *The Latte Rebellion*. In order to change the culture surrounding biracial people in her community and beyond (and also to raise money for an after graduation trip), Asha and her friends begin the Latte Rebellion to show that biracial people are "more than the sum of [their] parts" (14). This concept takes off, and members of the Latte Rebellion begin to face more resistance than ever before, once the community gets wind of their cause. The girls who founded the Latte Rebellion seem to handle the challenges in different ways. As the group strives for more equality and faces the struggle to "[redistribute] the social power" (Pescosolido, Grauerholz, Milkie 447) among all the members of their biracial community, their friendships disintegrate as a result of their different choices.

Using the Thomas-Kilmann conflict management model (Miller 162), one of Asha's friends, Bridget, demonstrates a conflict *avoidance*, and low concern for others, as she backs out of the rebellion to focus on other, less controversial aspects of her life as a student. Citing the

following incident as the final straw, Bridget states, ". . . A guy actually grabbed my shirt and said something stupid like 'Hey, I thought that Latte thing was full of racial radicals.' I couldn't deal with it. I got the hell out of there" (Stevenson 137). Remaining involved with the rebellion for longer than Bridget, Carey illustrates Thomas-Kilmann's conflict management style of *accommodation* (Miller 162) by abandoning the cause after working with Asha to start the rebellion, write the manifesto, create the website, and sell the shirts. She accommodates to what Asha wants from her for a certain period time when it comes to the rebellion in order to keep the peace and remain close to her friend and to the cause. Carey later informs Asha, "I put just as much effort into this as you did. . . but this isn't what I signed up for" (148). Carey backs away from the rebellion when legal issues begin to arise, also noting at this critical moment that she is "too busy" to dedicate so much of her time to the rebellion (148).

Because Asha is on a mission of self-discovery and personal growth, she stands by the Latte Rebellion until the end. Demonstrating Thomas-Kilmann's conflict management style of *collaboration* (Miller 162), which results in high concern for others, along with high concern for oneself, Asha risks her entire future for what she values. Asha is expelled from school, pending a disciplinary hearing; she demonstrates the biracial child's "basic social need to communicate . . . to form affiliations" (Hardaway 5), by drawing on the support of her biracial peers as she goes through her disciplinary hearing, and waits to learn her academic fate. Even as Asha is forced to take a step back from the center of the Latte Rebellion, her beliefs and her efforts are carried on by her classmates, who organize a rally to talk about their different experiences as a part of the biracial community. At the rally, several students talk about how being biracial has affected them and how "reality is more than black and white" (Stevenson 259-267). Asha chooses to embrace all sides of her biraciality, and utilizes this framework to make her community a better environment

for biracial individuals. She manages the conflicts that arise by never backing down, continuing to seek what she believes in, and relying on the support of those around her who support her cause.

Simone's character in Forrester's *Dust From Old Bones* demonstrates that coming to terms with one's identity as a biracial individual is not always such an easy task, especially when issues of family are part of the conflict. When Simone's uncle leaves her cousin and aunt, the whole family is forced to examine their backgrounds, their talents, and what has helped them to survive. Simone is able to see the privilege that being biracial grants her over those who are fully of a minority race. As her aunt, Tante Vivienne, prepares to sell one of her two slaves Simone goes to her father to help to save this woman, stating that she "only wants to help Paulette and Eulalie" (113). Simone feels a connection to the two enslaved women, and hopes her father, who has supported her efforts in exploring her connection to her Black culture, will support her efforts to try and save them from the auction block. Even though her father supports her desire to save Paulette and Eulalie, he is unable to assist the women, causing Simone to assist her Aunt Madelon in moving the women to safety. Simone practices the conflict management style of *collaboration* (162) as she makes efforts to involve other members of her family and to help determine right from wrong, from her position as a biracial individual. She appears to see, even as a child, how it is wrong to keep and sell slaves, and these attitudes are reinforced by Aunt Madelon, who helps Paulette and Eulalie escape (119). Understanding that each part of her background plays a role in who she is as a person, and respecting each part as it makes up her whole, allows Simone to strive toward the achievement of biracial efficacy both as she navigates the channels of her biraciality, and resolves never to demean those who are minorities. She understands that doing so would demean a part of herself (Ivory 141).

Conflict is also ever present in Nina Armstrong's life throughout Lester's *Black, White,*
Other as she is not only dealing with the conflict within her family, but also that of her community.
Nina takes an interesting approach, one that differs slightly from those of both Asha and Simone,
in order to cope with the challenges surrounding her biraciality; she looks at the past to help her
navigate her future. Nina's father gives her the manuscript of a novel he is writing, based on the
diary of her great-great grandmother, Sarah Armstrong, so she can begin to understand that racial
tensions and navigating the channels of being a part of a minority group have never been easy (31).
As tensions in Oakland rise, Nina takes solace in Sarah's story, using it to escape from the
bifurcated racial world that she lives in, and relating her struggles to those of Sarah. The journal
helps Nina "get lost in her [Sarah's] world for a while and be inspired by her courage [because
she's] going to need it" (136). Having the ability to "get lost" in Sarah's story allows Nina to
develop a better sense of her own identity as she uses the journal to navigate her place within her
own community. Being able to escape into Sarah's world for a time gives more credibility to the
claim that biracial readers can benefit from seeing biracial protagonists in the texts that they read
(Scheff 3). When Nina sees part of her culture reflected back in the journal, she is able to feel a
greater connection to that part of her identity. Even though Nina briefly runs away from all of the
challenges in her life, finding someone to relate to — to form an "affiliation" with, as Ivory puts
it — allows her to make her way back to society and become fully comfortable with all of the parts
that make up who she is (Ivory 141).

All three of the female biracial protagonists utilize conflict in order to strengthen their sense
of who they are as biracial individuals. Their search for information contributes to their
development of "biracial efficacy." The affiliations that are made among members of their
community, members of their family, close friends, and even people from the past, echo the

biracial person's néed to share a likeness with others, and to have a bond with someone like them (Hardaway 5). These efforts to form affiliations directly respond to the development of each character's "biracial competency," which allows them to gain an understanding of the social cues and different behavioral patterns that influence their background and personality development (Ivory 141). These personality developments help each girl as she begins to understand, become more comfortable with, and embrace who she is as a biracial individual.

Several of the factors that influence the identity development of female biracial characters are also seen in books that focus on male biracial protagonists. The impact of seeing one's self in another character, struggling through issues with family dynamics, and coping with the outside pressures of the surrounding community all have an impact on the biracial male character's ability to negotiate identity. These male characters also find themselves dealing with numerous psychological factors that are not manifested in the novels about female biracial protagonists. Each of these factors, in its own right, contributes to the protagonists in *Mexican Whiteboy* and *The Death of Jayson Porter*'s feelings about their biracial backgrounds.

CHAPTER TWO: MALE BIRACIAL PROTAGONISTS

I. You Can't Have Just One

Shifting the focus to texts dealing specifically with male biracial characters, it is again apparent that there are tendencies in novels about biracial individuals to include more than one biracial character in the narrative; Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008) is no exception to this tendency. The story chronicles the life of sixteen-year-old Danny Lopez, a Mexican American boy who lives primarily with his White mother in San Diego, California, but is on a visit to National City to stay with his Mexican father's side of the family for the summer. It is on this trip that Danny begins to question his identity as a biracial individual and meets Uno, another biracial teen with whom Danny forms a bond. Uno operates as a type of foil for Danny allowing him to see a different side of negotiating his biracial identity. The two boys start as foes, Uno skeptical of the new kid on the block and Danny looking for a place to fit in, but they grow into close friends finding they have much more in common than either would have initially thought. Uno is Black and Mexican, with a Mexican mother and a Black father, and he too is attempting to negotiate between his two identities.

Each of the boys in this novel seems to be in search of what Kerry Ann Rockquemore and David L. Brunsma call the "multidimensional model of racial identity" (Rockquemore 86). The two argue it is a mix of both identities, or the formation of a "biracial identity," that is the healthiest for individuals (Rockquemore 86). Through Danny's assertion that he's "a white boy among Mexicans, and a Mexican among white boys," we see his desire to fit in with his Mexican relatives and their customs but we also see that he must consider his life with his mother in San Diego in a predominantly white neighborhood when it comes to his identity development (de la Peña 90). We see Uno going through a similar negotiation in terms of his identity as both Black

and Mexican. Uno's situation is complicated by the fact that his father is not in his life as often as his mother with whom he lives, putting further stress on his abilities to develop a biracial identity. Danny is able to relate to Uno, as a biracial male as well as through the absence of both characters' fathers, and they find ways to become more comfortable in forming trusting relationships with others. Their friendship allows them to tackle their identity crises in a supportive environment.

Unlike the other books referenced in this analysis, Jaime Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* (2008) does not include an additional biracial character as a counterpart to the protagonist outright. Instead, this story, which focuses on sixteen-year-old Jayson Porter and his struggles to discover his identity through a tumultuous family life in the rough neighborhood of Bandon, Florida, includes two supporting foil characters for Jayson that help him navigate his identity issues. Trax is the White friend of Jayson with whom he works part time in the summer; Trax lives in the same apartment complex as Jayson. Though not biracial, Trax helps Jayson to understand the different identities that make up who he is. In addition to Trax, Jayson also has a relationship with April, a Black girl from the apartment complex down the street, and their bond allows Jayson to trust others, particularly women, which allows him for brief moments to let his guard down and think more deeply about who he is as an individual.

While the supporting characters in this novel do not work to help the protagonist see parts of himself reflected in another person, as the biracial foils do in the other books, they still assist Jayson in the development of biracial competency, which Lourdes India Ivory defines as an individual's ability to respond to the different social cues, personality traits, and intricacies of living in two different cultures (Ivory 141). Ivory's concept of biracial competency works in tandem with Rockquemore and Brunsma's multidimensional model of racial identity as each

focuses on the individual's ability and desire to successfully operate within a blend of both their racial backgrounds. Because Trax is White and April is Black, each of their interactions with Jayson helps to show him some of the intricacies of living successfully in his respective cultures. However, due to a lack of incorporating a character with a similar racial background to Jayson, he has a more difficult time learning how to navigate his identity. Having someone else to navigate the channels of identity development with allows the character to develop a better understanding of his experience from a perspective other than his own. We see, in comparison to Danny, Simone, Asha, and Nina that Jayson lacks a person with a similar racial background to act as a sounding board during his identity navigation. Danny finds this person in Uno, and we see his experience as being one that is complimented by seeing similarities between himself and his friend. Without this type of person Jayson is forced to bottle up all of his emotions and thoughts about his racial identity as no one in his life truly understands the intricacies of being a part of two racial groups. Jayson, in this sense, lacks what Nancy Hadaway notes as the ability to find comfort and understanding in relation to others who share a similar background (Hadaway 40). Without the peer-to-peer interactions that the other characters in these novels are able to have with other biracial characters, it is up to Jayson alone to create a positive image of himself through blending his two backgrounds, taking pieces from his interactions with both Trax and April to do so.

The two differing circumstances with Danny and Uno in *Mexican Whiteboy* and Jayson, Trax, and April in *The Death of Jayson Porter* highlight the need for texts that focus on biracial protagonists and their relationships with other characters who may identify in the same way. Lisa Scherff and Rudine Sims Bishop both note, because children benefit from seeing themselves being reflected in the texts that they read, it can be argued that the characters in these novels

benefit from seeing qualities in themselves reflected in others (Scherff 3, Bishop 356). The identities of these characters are greatly influenced by the worlds in which they live, including but not limited to influences from social and cultural factors of family, friends, and peers (Scherff 3). The development of a "multidimensional racial identity" is only possible through an understanding of oneself while taking all of these environmental factors into account.

II. Familial Influences on Identity

The influence of family may be the most important factor in the development of identity in *The Death of Jayson Porter*. Jayson's identity is greatly influenced by his living circumstances with his White mother. The two of them live in the projects, in an apartment complex called The Gardens, which is comprised of all low income families, many of whom struggle to make ends meet every day. Based on this small sample of novels, one would tend to assume that it is family that will be the most supportive in the quest to resolve identity crises. This is evident by the support Nina Armstrong receives from her parents, particularly her mother who encourages her to "claim every bit of who [she is]," in Joan Steinau Lester's *Black, White, Other* (Lester 94), as well as by the support that Simone receives from her Aunt Madelon during her identity search in Sandra Forrester's *Dust From Old Bones*. In this novel, however, Jayson's mother is mentally, physically, and emotionally abusive, causing the already outcast teen to begin seriously considering suicide to end his pain. She frequently puts down Jayson's father and Jayson in the process, saying multiple times throughout the story, "I'd like to see you on the streets [like your father]. You'd be eaten alive" (Adoff 43). Jayson's mother is not encouraging of his desires to form a connection with his father in any way, forcing him to sneak away and lie when he wants to see his father. In this way Jayson is forced to deal with "assumptions about who [he is] and what he can achieve [or become] based on skin color" (Hughes-Hassell 218). Instead of these

assumptions coming from those who do not understand his racial background, they are coming from one of the people who should understand that part of his life better than anyone else (Hughes-Hassell 218). A similar, though far less extreme, scenario takes place in *The Latte Rebellion* with Asha's father refusing to acknowledge his daughter's connections to her biracial background. Yet unlike Asha's fathers, Jayson's mother demoralizes her son because of his race throughout the novel. She says that her friends call him "weird," a reminder of the failed relationship with his Black father, and that she doesn't want people to see him "lookin' like somethin' that just crawled out of a hole" presumably due to his lack of motivation to take care of himself and his skin tone's comparison to "death warmed over," like his father's skin (Adoff 11). His mother is also contributing to the "[alienation] of the child from their other heritage and [possibly causing] ambivalence toward that race as well as a fractured sense of loyalty to the parent of the other ethnicity" as noted by Mary Cipriani-Price, Ben K. Lim, and Donna J. Alberici (Cipriani-Price 156).

Throughout the story Jayson references his father and how he is "glad he looks like him" with a "smooth, honey-glazed face, five foot ten, and never [has] to shave" (Adoff 14). His hair is "straighter than his [father's] but he keeps it cut short" and he often points out that his dad "used to be handsome before he...hit the pipe...and hit it hard" (Adoff 14). Jayson feels a connection to his father because of the resemblance that he shares with him, which increases his desire to learn more about that part of his background and escape the abuse of his mother that he associates with his White identity. At one point in the story when Jayson's mother is attempting to make up for a nasty beating that she had given him with a belt earlier in the week, which left him full of welts and in pain for days, she has her boyfriend prepare a home cooked meal for Jayson. After encouraging him to take a plate of leftovers to Trax, Jayson has other ideas and

instead takes a plate over to his dad who lives in a dangerous part of his neighborhood as a struggling drug addict (Adoff 139). Even through a drug induced rage he waits calmly to hear his father speak, desperate to know more about his father and the Black side of his racial identity. "'Just take your time' I tell him. 'Just take your time'" (Adoff 144). We see through these actions that Jayson is attempting to gain more information about his father, and in the same respect, about the Black side of his racial makeup, although due to his mother's feelings about his father, he must do so secretly. This decision contributes to the development of his biracial competency, once again noted by Ivory as the attempt to understand and respond to the social cues that are unique to different cultures (Ivory 141).

When Jayson goes to visit his father, his world and identity are turned completely upside down when his father reveals a secret that he had never seen coming. During his visit Jayson's dad reveals that he is not his biological father and that his mother, Lizzie, is not his real mother; she kidnapped Jayson from her friend Trina when he was just a baby. Lizzie wanted to protect him from Trina who at the time was struggling with drug and alcohol abuse and was attempting to get clean but Lizzie "made [him] legally hers before Trina got clean" (Adoff 149). With this news Jayson is sent into a tailspin of an identity crisis, not only struggling to understand who he is as a biracial individual but also who he is as a person in general. The one semblance of a support system that should have been in place to help him navigate his identity, his family, is not what it once seemed to be, and he not only has to navigate his racial identity issues but now familial identity issues as well.

While Jayson must deal with multiple layers of identity issues when it comes to navigating his biraciality, Danny has a different experience with familial influences on his identity in de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy*. According to Eurydice B. Bauer, Danny is taking his

cultural identity into his own hands by beginning to search for an authentic representation of the

Mexican part of his racial makeup with his move to National City for the summer to be closer to

his father's side of the family (Bauer 144-145). As the narrator observes, "Danny's brown. Half-

Mexican brown. A shade darker than all the white kids in his private high school. . . But

whenever Danny comes down here, to National City. . . he feels pale. A full shade lighter.

Albino almost" (de la Peña 2). Danny represents a demographic of biracial children who go

through life unsure of where they fit into society, confused as to which part of themselves they

should embrace. Down in National City, Danny's relatives are all Mexican and embrace their

culture and community. Up in San Diego where Danny lives with his mother and sister, he is a

part of a White community that also embraces its customs fully. Danny must work to develop

biracial efficacy or "an individual's belief or confidence in his or her ability to live effectively

and satisfactorily within two cultural groups without having to compromise his or her sense of

cultural identity" (Ivory 141). His efforts to not explicitly choose one cultural group over

another contribute to his development of biracial competency as well.

Thankfully for Danny, his mother is more accepting of his desires to understand both

parts of his identity, willingly letting him go down to National City for the summer. She is

working in support of the idea that alienation can cause ambivalence to other cultures if one

parent chooses to stunt the inquiries of their child in terms of their other identity (Cipriani-Price

156). Because Danny's father is incarcerated and he stays with his uncle, aunt, and cousin,

Danny is put into the interesting predicament of having to navigate his biraciality without the

direct support of his parents and instead must rely on others around him to support him in this

journey. Throughout the text we see Danny longing for a connection with the father he has not

had a chance to interact with in over three years. The impact of his father's absence weighs

heavily on his ability to negotiate his racial identity as the person responsible for this portion of

his background is not present in his life. A large part of Danny's desire to become more in touch

with the Mexican side of his background is explained in a letter he writes to his father saying:

> You were telling me you were going to Mexico. You were sick of living in the
>
> city with so many white people, with a white wife, with two kids who were half
>
> white. You wanted to be around more Mexicans. Your real family. But what I
>
> wanted to tell you, Dad, is how much I've changes since that day. How much
>
> better I am. How much stronger and darker and more Mexican I am (de la Peña
>
> 27-28).

Here we see how the absence of his Mexican father weighs on Danny's decisions to stay in

National City with his cousins and take the first steps toward becoming more comfortable with

that part of his identity. The statement that is made here by Danny does reflect a potential

ambivalence to the White portion of his identity, outlined by Cipriani-Price as being problematic

in terms of identity development; however, because the heart of this comment is found in a

longing for an understanding of his biracial identity as a whole, this immersion with his Mexican

background is beneficial to Danny's overall identity development. We see the pride in this part

of his background that his father's words have instilled in him, and his desire to understand this

part of his background increases.

Early in the novel as demonstrated by the passage quoted above, we see Danny looking

for validation from his father in knowing that he is becoming a "better" Mexican and making

attempts to understand this part of his identity. Had Danny's father been involved in his life there

is a chance that these pressures would not be as extreme thus making it easier for him to

negotiate his racial identity. His motivation to please his father is a strong contributing factor to

his identity quest. Near the end of the novel, Danny makes an attempt to reconnect with his father when Uno suggests that they go visit him during visiting hours at the prison. At first Danny thinks "he's okay without his dad. Maybe he can make it on his own," but the curiosity and desire to understand his identity and strive toward achieving biracial competency alter his state of thinking (de la Peña 247). He realizes that he is looking forward to "sitting across from each other for the first time in over three years. [And having] his dad say something to him" (de la Peña 247). Family is a powerful influence in an individual's quest to understand who they are as a person and although it is difficult, it is important for individuals to be exposed to both cultures that make up their backgrounds in order to make familial relationships less strenuous, at least in the long run.

III. Community Pressures

Much akin to familial dynamics, the environment of the surrounding community in which biracial individuals find themselves can have a major impact on the ways that they view their biraciality. Growing up in San Diego and going to a predominantly White school in the suburbs has colored Danny's experiences in *Mexican Whiteboy*. In an effort to become closer to the Mexican side of his identity, Danny's relocation to National City again puts him into an environment where he will be the racial minority. This time, however, he is the "Mexican whiteboy" surrounded by uni-racial Mexicans. Physically placing himself into a community that is comprised almost solely of people from only one of his racial identities has an effect on the ways that he views himself. If Danny solely embraces the Mexican side of his culture, it may negatively impact his life with his mother, and if he solely embraces the White portion of his identity, he may never be able to reconnect with the father figure that he so desperately longs for throughout the novel. We see Danny's Mexican relatives refer to White people as "folks who

don't care nothin' for nobody with a little color to they skin" a comment that even without their knowledge attacks part of Danny's racial identity (de la Peña 32). This comment can be seen as discouraging from the surrounding community as Danny attempts to become comfortable with both parts of his racial background. In this case, what becomes a concern is the possibility of Danny facing discrimination from both racial groups: the Mexican side for being White, and the White side for being Mexican, an obvious concern for Danny who worries about being "a white boy among Mexicans and a Mexican among white boys" (de la Peña 90).

In this case, race, as it is described by Danny in the novel, is serving to oppress him. Donald E. Hall writes that, in literature, there are times when inclusion of racial characteristics can empower a character, but there are also times when this inclusion can oppress that same individual (Hall 267). Danny's relatives in National City often refer to him as smarter than they are, which embarrasses and isolates him. Additionally, he feels out of place with these relatives because he feels as though he does not understand the Spanish language and many of the cultural references thrown around by his uncle, such as the "Mexican coma" and the "Mexican minute," while being more acclimated to navigating the channels of his White identity as this is the primary environment in which he grows up (de la Peña 85). However, it is the fact that his community and relatives are proud of him and his accomplishments that allows him to come to terms with his biracial identity and more effectively navigate life in both communities.

Being surrounded by a community that supports and encourages the process of navigating biraciality is a contributing factor to the success of coming to terms with one's identity. Unfortunately for Jayson Porter, his community is not as encouraging as Danny's. He observes:

> Out here in the 'hood, they don't know biracial exists. All they know is that I'm a little too light to be black. . . and I don't speak Spanish, either. So they check off

that "other" box in their head. "Other" means you ain't a brutha. So you *ain't*

down. It can be a dangerous thing around her. *Real* dangerous. . . See Bandon is

like split in two: There's a white section—the haves. And the black section—the

never had shit (Adoff 21).

In the tough neighborhood of Bandon, Florida, not only is Jayson not accepted in his home life

but he is also constantly on high alert everywhere he goes for being the outsider. Since he does

not fit perfectly into a particular "box" and his identity cannot be checked off in one fell swoop,

Jayson must deal with the alienation issue that many biracial individuals face. Because he is

judged to be "different" by his community, simply being is not enough. Jayson experiences the

common instance of discrimination from both ethnic groups within his community and identity

(Cipriani-Price 157).

Jayson attends a predominantly White high school in the nearby town, Milburn, where he

is one of two students of color. Each day he takes the bus across town to attend his classes and he

is met with off-putting stares that seem to question his existence as a whole:

Don't belong

See, *I* know that I'm half white and half black, but I know for damn sure none of

these folks would *ever* think I was. When I tell people what I am, they always just

look at me with that same blank stare, like I'm speaking Greek or somethin'.

Man, I'm the ultimate spy, but without all the benefits. People think I'm anything

else but what I am. And they always think whatever I am, it's not as good as what

they are. I know I'll never belong, so now I don't even try (Adoff 83).

These experiences highlight the extreme need for support of biracial individuals in their processes of navigating their identities. Without having that mirroring aspect in his community and seeing no support from either group that makes up his identity, Jayson lacks the opportunity to deepen his understanding of himself much akin to the biracial readers who lack the opportunity to understand their own identities in books due to a lack of representation (Rich). There is no support from the community in which Jayson finds himself and he is chalked up as just another black teen destined for a life on the streets at some point.

Jason's situation illustrates the concept of hyperdescent and hypodescent. *Nation Master Encyclopedia* defines the process of engaging in hyperdescent as the mixed race individual designating their race by the more socially dominant lineage, therefore engaging in that culture's characteristics. By doing this, the character in a sense disregards the social ques and defining characteristics deemed to be from the lower racial class and its customs, which make up half of their identity. On the opposing end, there are times when individuals engage in the practice of being hypodescent, which is defined as taking on the characteristics of the socially subordinate side of their identity ("Hyperdescent"). Because of his appearance Jayson is forced to hypodescend like many darker skinned biracial individuals for the simple fact that passing as the dominant racial class would be far too difficult. Seeing this concept played out in the harsh community in which Jayson finds himself illustrates the principle that these types of conflicts and backlash from a community lead to a need for biracial individuals to come up with other methods to navigate their identities in order to feel a sense of belonging.

IV. Psychological Factors

A common factor that was found in both *Mexican Whiteboy* and *The Death of Jayson Porter* is an emphasis on the psychological impact their identity search has on the characters. It

is important to note that this factor is not present in the books dealing with biracial female protagonists discussed earlier in this analysis. Yet quite often in books that include biracial and multiracial characters, there are issues present regarding their psychological safety as it pertains to negotiating their racial identification (Cooney 433). Having a depiction of a biracial child such as Danny who deals with his pain through the use of alcohol and self-mutilation gives validation to Teresa Cooney and Elise Radina's claim that multiracial children could be at risk for developing these same types of self-harming behaviors. Early on in the novel Danny is standing in the cul-de-sac watching a group of Mexican boys play baseball. Wanting so desperately to be included and to not feel like an outcast, he "digs into his wrist some more with his nails. Breaks previously broken skin and pulls away. A smear of blood he wipes away with his other hand, rubs off across his dark jeans. Back home his mom is always on him to stop digging, but that only makes him want to dig more" (de la Peña 4). We see here that the outcasting of Danny and his inability to feel as though he belongs affect his psychological health just as Cooney believed they would.

A 2007 study conducted by Adriana Umana-Taylor and Kimberly Updegraff revealed that "ethnic identity exploration and resolution were positively associated with self-esteem, which was in turn negatively associated with depressive symptoms among Latino adolescents" (Referenced by Rivas-Drake et. al. 44-45). Early in the novel Danny's character is more prone to instances of self-harm and use of illegal substances. As the novel and Danny's search for identity progress, there is less of an emphasis on the negative behaviors that come from a lack of self-esteem and knowing oneself and more emphasis on the confidence that he develops in himself through the strength of his relationship with Uno and a better understanding of how both of his racial backgrounds work in tandem. Danny says late in the novel to his crush, Liberty, "I'm so

happy right now. Being here with you. In National City. I came here because sometimes I feel like a fake Mexican. And I don't want to be fake. I wanna be real. I love my dad's family. And I love the culture and the language and everything my gramma cooks and the way they live" (de la Peña 188). This self-actualization that he can live and identify as a "real" Mexican is apparent in the final paragraph of the novel where Danny does not focus on either aspect of his background solely but instead lives in the moment completely as he is alongside his best friend on the train tracks (de la Peña 247). This moment also reflects the psychological benefits ascertained by identity exploration in characters of multiple races, further verifying Umana-Taylor and Updegraff's claims.

The psychological impact of identity formation is brought to the forefront in Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* as well. The lack of racial identity that plagues Jayson for his entire life begins to take a toll on him psychologically throughout the novel. Very early in the novel, it is apparent that Jayson experiences urges to commit suicide in order to cope with the pain of his abusive home life, lack of identity, and inability to cope with life. As he stands on the balcony of his building after a fight with his mother pushed him to leave his apartment Jayson states, "I smile to myself. Why am I smiling? I feel guilty for what I want to do, but I know it will end this pain that I feel. I know I can end it. Anytime I want" (Adoff 38). What eventually comes of the abuse and mental torture that Jayson faces is this anticipated suicide attempt: "I am a bullet screaming to the ground. . . the ground is getting closer and closer. This is supposed to get rid of my pain. Get rid of it forever. This is my cure" (Adoff 171). These are the thoughts going through Jayson's mind as he plummets to the earth from the sixteenth story balcony of his apartment building. Although Jayson does not die as a result of this action he does injure himself to the point of needing to be in traction and to undergo intensive amounts of therapy to

rehabilitate his body, as well as psychological counseling to deal with his depressive, suicidal state. This string of events directly correlates to the study conducted by Cooney and Radina which found that multiracial children are more likely to have to go to psychological counseling at some point in the lives, and have higher rates of depression and lower graduation retention rates than single raced individuals (Cooney 441-442).

Jayson's lack of identity and instability at home force him into a compromised mental state that results in his eventual admittance into a psychological counseling regime. This occurrence mirrors the potential outcomes outlined by Cooney and Radina in their study illustrating that even in novels, multiracial characters have a greater risk of succumbing to mental illness and ending up needing some type of psychological care. However, it is important to point out that in this small sample size of five novels including biracial characters, Jayson is the only character who ends up in medically required psychological therapy. While it cannot be said for certain, it was most likely the search for identity alone that lead to this compromised mental state for Jayson, which will be discussed later in this analysis. Jayson's case is unique, however, due to the large amounts of intersectionality that exist in his life. Not only is he trying to negotiate his racial identity but Jayson also must deal with the shocking news that his parents are not who he thought they once were upon the realization that he was kidnapped, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. Had Jayson possessed a better understanding of his racial background and the other social and familial factors that make up his identity, there would be less of a predisposition to develop depression and suicidal thoughts, at least if his life narrative follows the same trajectory of those individuals studied by Cooney and Radina (441-442). The impact of the psychological factors that influence the search for identity is brought to the forefront in these two books featuring biracial male protagonists. Their journeys to self-discovery and developing

more of an appreciation and understanding of both aspects of their racial backgrounds are fettered with psychological constraints that impede their ability to fully come to terms with who they are.

Taking these psychological constraints and other aspects of Danny and Jayson's lives into consideration, it becomes apparent that it may be a combination of several intersectional identities, not one defining factor, that colors the experiences of biracial individuals in their search for their racial identity. Throughout this paper there have been situations proposed in which differences in the support of others with similar backgrounds, familial life, community influences, and coping mechanisms were discussed in terms of their impact on a character's ability to develop a stronger sense of biracial competency and efficacy. What sets the characters discussed in these two chapters apart is not just gender but the different ways in which they handle these various other life circumstances. The final section of this analysis will serve to discuss how it is these differences and the extent to which characters experience them that leads to the effectiveness of their search for identity.

CHAPTER THREE: THE INTERSECTIONALITIES OF IDENTITY

I. The Identity Spectrum

The beginning of this analysis was written under the assumption that the gender of

characters would have a large impact on how they come to terms with their identity as a biracial

individual. What seems to have manifested, however, is that gender is just one of the many

factors that contributes to a character's identity navigation process. Each of the factors that

influences racial identity contributes to the ways in which characters see themselves as a whole

in terms of their racial make-up, thus finding themselves in a different place on the identity

spectrum, which ranges from being comfortable with their racial identity to still being in the

negotiation phases of coming to terms with their racial identity. For the purposes of this analysis,

intersectionality, as defined by Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw, will be used in this

way: "As opposed to examining gender, race, class, and nation, as separate systems of

oppression, intersectionality explores how these systems mutually construct one another, or how

they 'articulate' one another" (Collins 63; Referenced by Blackburn 2). It appears as though the

female biracial characters that are discussed in the first chapter of this analysis have fewer

intersectionalities of identities to worry about. Of course, there is an emphasis on their identity

issues but Nina (*Black, White, Other*), Asha (*The Latte Rebellion*), and Simone (*Dust From Old*

Bones) all come from stable home environments, supportive families, generally safe

neighborhoods, and do not engage in any risky behaviors. As a result, these characters are able to

solely focus on their identity navigation throughout their stories. On the opposite end of the

spectrum Danny (*Mexican Whiteboy*) and Jayson (*The Death of Jayson Porter*) come from

broken homes with absent parents, less supportive neighborhoods, and engage in risky behaviors

which prevent their stories from being focused entirely on identity navigation, let along racial

identity navigation. The intersectionality that the male biracial characters face each day colors their ability to discern their feelings on identity as the physiological and safety needs of the characters take precedence in negotiation, leaving less energy to focus on negotiating racial identity. It is not race alone that makes up the way that a character sees their personal identity but instead race becomes one of several factors that contribute to a character's overall sense of who they are as a person.

According to Abraham Maslow, "the integrated wholeness of the organism must be one of the foundation stones of motivation theory," which falls in line with the assumption that individuals will attempt to understand themselves as a whole entity in terms of motivating themselves to discover who they are (Maslow 370). For example, in efforts to understand themselves as a whole entity, biracial characters will take into consideration both aspects of their racial identity. In order for these characters to attempt to navigate their identity as a whole, there are basic human needs that must be satisfied for the drive to be present in an individual to consider aspects of their life, even their identity, apart from these needs. As Maslow explains, "Human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. That is to say, the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need. . . Also every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives" (Maslow 370). Taking this theory into consideration, the drive to achieve understanding of oneself or obtain biracial competency or efficacy is determined by how satisfied an individual is with the other "pre-potent" needs in their lives. The female biracial characters do not seem to have had any dissatisfaction with their "pre-potent" needs as they come from supportive environments in their home lives. Conversely, the male biracial protagonists have grown up in more unstable environments that may have led to less satisfaction in terms of fulfilling their more basic needs,

which leads to a lack of opportunity to dedicate their time and energy to negotiating their racial

identities because their personal identities and needs (comprised of familial status, perception of

mental health, and understanding of themselves as whole entities, in addition to their racial

identities) are at the forefront of their lives.

Danny and Jayson both are raised in households that have an absent father figure.

Danny's father is incarcerated and he lives with his mother whereas Jayson's father is a drug

addict who lives just a few blocks away from Jayson and his mother but is consistently absent

from his life. While these two characters are attempting to navigate their racial identities they

must also grapple with the fact that an ideal, readily available source of information on one of

their two identities is missing from the picture. Danny, as discussed earlier in this analysis,

suffers huge consequences from the absence of his father in terms of seeking validation for the

Mexican part of his identity. In comparison, in *Black, White, Other*, Nina's parents are divorced;

however both parents still play an active role in her growth and development throughout the

narrative. The characters of Asha and Simone are fortunate enough to have both of their parents

present and in their households. A 2013 study conducted by Amina Chaudhri and Willian H.

Teale found that almost half of the books in their sample, which analyzed mixed-race characters

in books for 9-14 year olds, included situations in which one or both parents were absent, dead,

or uninvolved in the child's life. They assert that because solitary characters are commonly

featured in children's literature in order to emphasize a more individualistic ideology, this

finding is not necessarily surprising (Chaudhri and Teale 365). In terms of this research,

however, what is surprising is that the focus that is placed on the absent parent in books written

about biracial male protagonists is actually far more present than is the focus placed on Nina and

her divorced parents. It can be speculated that because Nina's parents are both active and

encouraging in her attempts to negotiate her biraciality, the need is always focused back on her

search for self-identity, as opposed to dealing with family dynamics. The same can be said of the

lack of focus on Asha and Simone's family dynamics as their parents are also incredibly active in

their lives and their identity search process. The complete absence of a parental figure in

Mexican Whiteboy and *The Death of Jayson Porter* contributes to the lack of knowledge about

oneself that both of these characters are attempting to satisfy. This need to learn about their

absent fathers and the missing pieces of their backgrounds supersedes the need of understanding

the entirety of these characters' racial backgrounds.

The support that these characters receive from their surrounding community (family,

friends, and others) also differs on a type of spectrum. Beth Kleinman-Fleisher asserts, support

from the surrounding community allows biracial characters to further engage with their biracial

make up and as a result become more comfortable with themselves and their identity (Kleinman-

Fleischer 162). The character with the most support is Asha from Stevenson's *The Latte

Rebellion* whose community rallies around her to support her advocacy for biracial individuals at

her school and beyond. Not far away on the spectrum would be Nina from Lester's *Black, White,

Other* who draws heavily on the support of both parents, grandparents in the form of journal

reflections, and friends from school throughout her narrative. Nina does face more discrimination

from both ethnic groups in her school community however, a common occurrence according to

Mary Cipriani-Price, Ben K. Lim, and Donna J. Alberici (157). Next on the spectrum comes

Simone from Forrester's *Dust From Old Bones*. While Simone does not receive much outward

support from her community or her parents, those forces are still present in her life and she

receives much support from her Aunt Madelon as she attempts to negotiate her comfort with her

biracial identity. Not surprisingly, with the added focus on the intersectional identities in their

stories, we find Danny and Jayson on the less supported end of the spectrum. First comes Danny from de la Pena's *Mexican Whiteboy* whose extended family supports him, as well as his mother who encourages him to spend the summer in National City with his cousins. The reason Danny finds himself so low on this spectrum is because of the absence of support from a key force in his life, his father. Jayson from Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter* finds himself on the most extreme end of the spectrum with little to no support at all from the people he initially thought were his mother and father, little support in terms of identity searching from his actual mother Trina who is, rightly, more concerned with saving him from the abusive environment he has been living in for much of his life, and little support from his friends, neighborhood, and school community. As demonstrated in *The Latte Rebellion*, having support from the surrounding community allows the biracial character to fulfill a "basic social need to communicate . . . to form affiliations" (Hardaway 5). A lack of support also leads these characters to engage in more risky behaviors in addition to the inclination to self-harm, as previously discussed. The further from the supportive end of the spectrum that one goes, the more difficult it then becomes to focus on forming the affiliations that in turn help in the character's identity search.

Additionally feeling safe in one's environment contributes to the ability to focus on higher level needs. Defined by Maslow as the "safety needs" that can generally be summed up as meaning "a safe, orderly, predictable, organized world, which [the child] can count on, and in which unexpected, unmanageable or other dangerous things do not happen," these safety needs must be met before any higher level needs can be addressed (Maslow 377). This instance of safety spectrum placement is most visible when we consider that Asha, Nina, Simone, and Danny all grow up in what appear to be generally safe neighborhoods. There is little discussion about danger in the surrounding community, apart from the occasional neighborhood fight in

which Danny finds himself in National City and the racial tensions that are taking place just outside of Nina's hometown in Oakland. Other than those minor instances in two novels, the areas where the majority of these characters grow up are not a hindrance to their safety needs and thus do not carry any negative impacts on their ability to negotiate identity. However, that is not the case for Jayson. Growing up in the south Florida suburb of Bandon in the Sunny Gardens apartment complex comes with its own struggles. Just down the street from Jayson's apartment is an area commonly known as the "crackyard" that is "*pretty* safe during the day" but as the sun sets Jayson remarks, "the crack fiends will be here soon" (Adoff 100). Living so close to that type of an environment where one needs to fear walking around at night greatly impacts the safety need. Not knowing when the next stray bullet is going to come whizzing by during a Fourth of July fireworks show (Adoff 78) or not knowing if there will be a meal on the table to come home to leaves little room for thoughts about how one feels about their biracial identity. The lack of satisfaction of the safety needs and the absence of a "safe, orderly, predictable, organized world" compromise Jayson's ability to focus solely on coming to terms with his biracial identity.

Finally there is the inclination of characters to engage in risky behaviors. Defined by Michael Cart as a variety of behaviors that endanger a character's physical or emotional health, including but not limited to drug and alcohol abuse, risky sexual behaviors, driving recklessly, or reckless endangerment of the body or mind, these risky behaviors also have an impact on characters' ability to negotiate their own identity (Cart 128-129). Apart from Asha's engagement in protest and the formation of the Latte Rebellion with her friends at school, there are no extremely risky behaviors that could be detrimental to her health in her narrative. Even further on the "safe" end of this risky behavior spectrum, Nina and Simone do not engage in any

type of risky behaviors throughout their stories. Once again it is in the books that are centered on biracial male protagonists in which risky behaviors are executed. Danny and his friend Uno engage in the risky behaviors of underage drinking and getting into fights. These behaviors put them at risk for not only physical harm but also damage to their overall health. These factors interrupt the characters' ability to focus on the development of biracial competency and efficacy as they become more focused on their risky behaviors and less focused on their identity development. Furthermore, Jayson engages in risky sexual behaviors and also falls victim to the risky behaviors of self-harm that compromise his mental state. With all of the trauma that Jayson faces in his life, he is already at an increased risk for developing a risky lifestyle and falling victim to the violence that is increased in youth from "drug, alcohol, or tobacco use; poor family functioning; poor grades in school and poverty in the community," all factors that are present in Jayson's day to day life (Cart 131). Jayson is the only character in which the effects of these intersectionalities come to a head and result in extreme action with his attempted suicide. Examining these five novels can lead to an assumption that, with the increase in risky behaviors, it becomes less important to come to terms with your racial identity and more important to negotiate the behaviors in which one is engaging in order to create a safer lifestyle over all.

In terms of the ability to successfully negotiate one's biracial identity, this analysis began with the idea that gender would be a significant factor in a character's ability to successfully come to terms with their identity. Upon further analysis it has become alarmingly apparent that it is not gender alone that determines a character's ability to negotiate their racial identity but the intersectionalites of various other factors that influence the ability to do so. It is important to acknowledge that there is more of a presence of intersectionality discussed in the two novels that center on male biracial protagonists. There is also more focus on the identity search alone in the

novels centered on female biracial protagonists. One possible assertion as to why this may be the

case is that generally speaking it is more acceptable to see young girls attempting to negotiate

their identity and search for a place to belong. This is not to say that male characters do not go

through these same processes; however, in the books that were analyzed for this study the male

characters had much more compromised routes to their identity searches with many other factors

to take into consideration before racial identity came to the forefront. All five of the characters

can be placed on a spectrum in terms of their identity development. In an effort to categorize

their placement on this identity spectrum, the female biracial characters would be on the end

closer to a satisfied development of Ivory's biracial competency and efficacy. The female

biracial characters were given a chance to negotiate both aspects of their racial identities and

come to terms with who they are, as well as learn how to navigate the intricacies of being a part

of two racial communities successfully. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum would be

Danny. He did have many intersectional aspects to consider in his quest for understanding his

biracial identity, such as the absence of his father and his own self-harming practices, but the

support of his family as well as his friend Uno assisted in his ability to navigate the two channels

of his racial make-up. Furthest away from the achievement of biracial competency and efficacy

would be Jayson. Jayson lacks the ability to fully engage in a negotiation of his racial identity

due in part to the numerous intersectionalities and dangers that fill his life. There is much more

of a need to satisfy the basic levels of physical, mental, and emotional safety in Jayson's life

before issues of racial identity can move to the forefront.

II. Where Do We Go From Here?

After analyzing these novels, the question becomes: where do we go from here? We

know from this analysis that biracial characters must struggle with many different factors when it

comes to navigating their biraciality. Moreover, the intersectionalities that fill the lives of these characters greatly affect their abilities to come to terms with their biracial backgrounds. The structure of this analysis has revealed at least two characters, Jayson and Danny, dealing with unusually high amounts of intersectionality, coping with problems in family dynamics, dealing with mental health issues, and struggling to meet their basic survival needs. Thus, they have a much harder time focusing on coming to terms with their racial identity. In the beginning, I assumed this thesis would be divided into chapters based on books that included female biracial protagonists—Stevensons' *The Latte Rebellion*, Lester's *Black, White, Other*, and Forrester's *Dust from Old Bones*—and books that included male biracial protagonists—de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* and Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Porter*. And, yes, the structure of the thesis has stayed the same. But what has actually happened is a division of books based on where characters would fall on the identity spectrum in terms of how close they are to achieving biracial competency and efficacy based on the amount of intersectionalities in their lives and identities. The more intersectionalities that a character seems to be dealing with, the further away from achieving biracial competency and efficacy they seem to be.

At this point, it is not quite clear what the reasoning for this division may be, and it is even more curious that this division seems to fall across gender lines, at least within this sample. Male biracial protagonists seem to have many more intersectionalites in their lives in comparison to female biracial protagonists, and further research will need to be conducted to ascertain the reasons, if any, for this occurrence. A larger sample size could also be effective in determining whether or not this pattern is just a coincidence or if it is engrained into the literary tradition for books dealing with biracial protagonists. Problems then arise with finding enough texts in this genre subset as there is still a lack of books written about this ever growing national population

today. There is also the potential for this research to be applied to real world individuals in attempts to see if the same issues regarding gender and intersectionalities manifest outside of the literary world.

While a focus on the intersectionalities that influence a character's ability to negotiate their biracial identity is important, it is also crucial to highlight the immense need for books like these five novels to be present in the lives of children and young adults who identify as biracial. Characters, like individuals, always look at themselves "through the eyes of others," and it is the perceptions of others that influence the persona they develop (du Bois 164). It is important for individuals in books and real life to be able to make connections with those who are similar to them in terms of racial self-identity formation, as exemplified by all of the characters discussed in this essay, as well as the research of Rudine Sims Bishop, who discusses the need for readers to connect with characters like themselves in books (1990).

This concept is also reflected in the work of Rhina Maria Fernandez Williams, as she looks at the importance of classroom instruction for the biracial child in school environments. Williams points out that, in order to be able to effectively instruct biracial children, one must first understand who the child is culturally, and what forces in their cultures make up who they are (177). In order for the biracial individual to feel comfortable accepting both sides of their background, each person must have the chance to come to terms with the ways that biraciality makes them who they are. For the characters in this study, that may be a simple task, or it could potentially be clouded with several other factors that hinder their ability to negotiate their racial identity. Studies have shown that many biracial children feel that others from uni-racial groups are unaware of the different challenges that biracial individuals face (Williams 199). This concept becomes even more complex when applied to the books in this analysis that include

multiple intersectionalities of identity, further complicating an outsider's perspective in truly understanding the challenges biracial individuals are facing. Education of these children, both insiders and outsiders to biraciality, then becomes important, and texts like Stevenson's *The Latte Rebellion*, Lester's *Black, White, Other,* Forrester's *Dust from Old Bones,* de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy*, and Adoff's *The Death of Jayson Poter* can become monumentally influential. Allowing children to see the significance of being biracial, providing them with representations of the various other factors that influence identity formation, and showing them how navigating the channels of two different cultural groups can assist in the understanding of oneself can serve as stepping stones toward self-acceptance and full identification as members of the biracial community. As the numbers of biracial people increase, society must grow and change, moving toward acceptance of biracial individuals as they see themselves, ensuring that they feel comfortable, and have the opportunity to gain self-confidence and acceptance of who they are. Literature can serve as a means to help guide and reflect this journey. As a society, we can assist in providing the tools, such as works of children's literature, for biracial individuals to feel strengthened by both sides of their background and fully embrace the identities that make them who they are.

WORKS CITED

Adoff, Jaime. *The Death of Jayson Porter*. New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion for Children, 2008.

Bauer, Eurydice. "Using Children's Literature to Shape Identity: A Bilingual, Bicultural and Biracial Perspective." *New Advocate*. 14.2 (2001): 143-152.

Blackburn, Mollie. "Talking About Intersectionality (or Not) in a High School LGBT-Themed Young Adult Literature Course." National Council of Teachers of English, Assembly for Research. Minneapolis Convention Center, Minneapolis. Lecture.

Chaudhri, Amina, and William H. Teale. "Stories of Multiracial Experiences in Literature for Children, Ages 9–14." *Children's Literature in Education* 44.4 (2013): 359-76.

Cipriani-Price, Mary, Ben K. Lim, and Donna J. Alberici. "Biracial." *Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural School Psychology* (2010): 155-61. Springer US.

Cooney, Teresa M, and M. Elise Radina. "Adjustment Problems in Adolescence: Are Multicultural Children at Risk?." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 70.4 (2000): 433-444.

De La Peña, Matt. *Mexican Whiteboy*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008.

Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Encyclopedia- Hypodescent. *Nation Master*, n.d.

Encyclopedia- Hyperdescent. *Nation Master*, n.d.

Forrester, Sandra. *Dust From Old Bones*. New York: Morrow Junior, 1999.

Hadaway, Nancy L, Terrell A Young, and Barbara A Ward. "A Critical Analysis of Language Identity Issues in Young Adult Literature." *The ALAN Review* Summer 2012 (2012): 36-47.

Hall, Donald E. *Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001. 199-210.

Hughes-Hassell, Sandra. "Multicultural Young Adult Literature as a Form of Counter-Storytelling." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 83.3 (2013): 212-28.

Ivory, Lourdes India. "Bicultural Efficacy." *Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural School Psychology* 2010 (2010): 141-43.

Kleinman-Fleischer, Beth. "Biracial/Multiracial Identity Development." *Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural School Psychology* 2010 (2010): 161-64.

Larrick, Nancy. "The All-White World of Children's Books." *Saturday Review*, 11.11 (1965): 63-65.

Lester, Joan Steinau. *Black, White, Other*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Maslow, Abraham. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370-96.

Miller, Katherine. *Organizational communication: Approaches and processes*. Stamford, CT.: Cengage Learning, 2014.

Nuttgens, Simon "Biracial Identity Theory and Research Juxtaposed with Narrative Accounts of a Biracial Individual." *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, (2010) 27.5, 355-364.

Pescosolido, Bernice A., Elizabeth Grauerholz, and Melissa A. Milkie. "Culture and conflict: The portrayal of Blacks in US children's picture books through the mid-and late-twentieth century." *American Sociological Review* (1997): 443-464.

Rich, Motoko. "For Young Latino Readers, an Image Is Missing." *The New York Times* 5 Dec. 2012: A1.

Rivas-Drake, Deborah, Eleanor K. Seaton, Carol Markstrom, Stephen Quintana, Moin Syed, Richard M. Lee, Seth J. Schwartz, Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor, Sabine French, and Tiffany Yip. "Ethnic and Racial Identity in Adolescence: Implications for Psychosocial, Academic, and Health Outcomes." *Child Development* 85.1 (2014): 40-57.

Rockquemore, Kerry Ann, and David L. Brunsma. "Negotiating Racial Identity." *Women and Therapy.* 27.1 (2004): 85-102.

Scherff, Lisa, and Karen Spector. "Clashes and Confrontations with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Clashes and Confrontations.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011. 1-8

Sims Bishop, Rudine "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors." *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom,* 6.3. (Summer 1990).

Stevenson, Sarah Jamila. *The Latte Rebellion.* Woodbury, MN: Flux, 2011.

Williams, Rhina Maria Fernandes. "When Gray Matters More Than Black or White The Schooling Experiences of Black–White Biracial Students."*Education and Urban Society* 45.2 (2013): 175-207.