

**WHAT AM I READING TO MY STUDENTS?
A CRITICAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF BEST-SELLING LATINX CHILDREN'S
PICTURE BOOKS**

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study children's literature. Our times reading together, both past and present, were and are my favorite times.

ABSTRACT

Diversity in children's literature has been explored significantly within the past several decades. For Latinx children's books, scholars have found issues surrounding representation and authenticity. Books involving Latinx stories and themes are underrepresented in the publishing industry, and portrayals of Latinx individuals and groups are often stereotypical and culturally inauthentic. This study sought to contribute to the research base surrounding representation in Latinx children's literature by critically analyzing narratives and themes in best-selling Latinx children's picture books. Using a qualitative critical content analysis guided by Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies, I examined the top ten best-selling Latinx children's books on Amazon's collection of best-selling Hispanic children's literature in order to address the question: In what ways are these books' plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx cultures and groups? Then, I explored books' themes and elements of representation as they related to authors' statuses as cultural insiders or outsiders in order to seek out any trends related to cultural insider or outsider authorship.

Findings from this study demonstrated that the books in this analysis collectively portrayed Latinx characters and experiences positively and in ways that primarily challenged majoritarian narratives, though with some inclusion of stereotypical elements. Findings indicated few salient themes across books associated with authors' cultural statuses. I provide a discussion of conclusions based on these findings and offer suggestions for ways in which researchers, teachers, and other literacy professionals can utilize findings such as these to seek out representative literature.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A question was posed to me several years ago that went something like this: “As an educator, if there would have been one thing you would have refused to remove from your classroom practices, what would it have been?” Having never been asked this before at any point during my five-year career as a second grade teacher, I felt the need to give the question long, thoughtful deliberation. Naturally, my thoughts began evaluating various practices I held in high regard in my classroom, and I considered the many activities I felt my students most enjoyed as well as my own favorite instructional techniques. To me, the one thing I would refuse to abolish from my classroom would also be the one thing I felt best defined my classroom. So, among the possible responses coming into my mind as I contemplated this question, there was one particular response that was unwaveringly present throughout my thought process as my favorite, most revered classroom practice, and, thus, it quickly took precedence over any other possibilities. My response was “read-alouds.”

Prior to being presented with this question, I had never given much thought as to why reading aloud was so important to me and why I felt it was the one thing that most thoroughly defined my classroom. After giving the thought more attention, nonetheless, I was able to consider this practice’s meaning for me. Reading aloud to my students was, by far, my favorite part of teaching. Children’s books and stories were a welcome reprieve from our day-to-day routines and pressures, as well as a place we could all come together to embark on various adventures and life experiences. From my perspective as a teacher, reading aloud was nearly always a special occurrence for all of my students and one they looked forward to with much enthusiasm and anticipation. I perceived this from the way they excitedly returned from their special area classes every day, knowing that the next ten minutes would be spent on the carpet

hearing a new story read aloud. I felt their excitement from the way they consistently and eagerly asked me to share new stories and books, and from the way these books and stories invoked their attentiveness more than most other activities we took part in throughout the day. Also, I felt that reading aloud was one of the strongest motivating factors in my students' own reading behaviors, as there was hardly a day that passed that my students were not requesting to be the first to get their hands on the book I had shared with them on our carpet that day.

Our daily read-aloud time seemed to be, without a doubt, an enjoyable and special experience for all of my students. Yet, I perceived a particular specialness for my students whose backgrounds did not reflect the predominantly White culture prevalent in our school when I began including more books that involved characters with stories and experiences similar to theirs. As the entirety of my teaching career was spent in elementary schools that included relatively high enrollments of students who identified as Hispanic, most of my students from these non-dominant backgrounds were Spanish-English bilinguals, and most were Latinx. When I read books that reflected experiences and cultural elements with which my Latinx students could identify, their excitement became evident, and they were often quick to share their familiarity with these stories. It seemed to me that these stories, which often included their native language, provided them with a sense of power and identity. As such, I felt that Latinx literature afforded my Latinx students a means of inclusion and a place for them to see themselves represented in an otherwise dominant world from which they were often excluded.

The Role of Children's Literature

There is hardly a question about the significance of children's literature in students' lives. Described as a "force" (Short & Fox, 2003), children's books are artifacts by which young readers can learn about society (Koss, 2015). From nonfiction texts to fictional stories, children's

books offer information and insight into a vast variety of topics, themes, and matters in the world. Children's stories can aid children in developing empathy (Keen, 2006), moral awareness, critical thinking, and understanding of emotionally charged issues and consequences through actions (Short & Fox, 2003). Additionally, children's literature provides readers with opportunities to understand different perspectives and acquaints them with unfamiliar experiences, while also affirming children's views of themselves and their own identities (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). In these ways, children's books have the potential to influence students' self-identification, guide them in questioning stereotypes, and increase their awareness of and acceptance of diversity (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Koss et al., 2018; Yokota, 1993).

Diverse children's books, sometimes also referred to as multicultural literature (Thomas, 2016), are stories and narratives that play particularly powerful roles in developing understandings about diverse experiences and affirming students' identities in the context of a dominant social and cultural setting (Barry, 1998). Described by Grant and Ladson-Billings (1997), diverse and multicultural literature "reflects the diverse life experiences, traditions, histories, values, worldviews, and perspectives of the diverse cultural groups that make up a society" (p. 185), and offers students the opportunity to discuss cultural diversity by "revis[ing] traditional Eurocentric beliefs about history and challeng[ing] monocultural social models" (p. 185). For students from marginalized backgrounds, diverse children's literature has great potential to promote and validate these individuals' unique experiences and histories, and to support their linguistic practices (Souto-Manning, 2016). Additionally, for students from mainstream cultures, such as White, native-born children in the U.S., these books can aid them in developing positive views of diversity, as well as real understandings of society (Mabbott, 2017). As such, literature that accurately reflects diverse cultures and lived experiences in a mainstream

society can help affirm students' identities, promote acceptance, celebrate differences, and develop children's understandings of the world.

In the U.S., much educational and literacy research in the past several decades has examined topics related to diverse children's literature, uncovering issues as they relate to the stories and portrayals of diverse groups in children's books. In their 1965 article, "The All-White World of Children's Picture Books," Nancy Larrick brought attention to the vast overrepresentation of White characters and narratives in children's literature, highlighting primarily the blatant omission of Black characters and portrayals. Years later, Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) argued for the need of metaphoric *windows* and *mirrors* in children's literature. Using this metaphor, Bishop (1990) asserted that children's books must include *mirrors* that provide young readers from non-mainstream cultures opportunities to see themselves reflected through characters and cultural narratives in order to validate their own backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, they argued for *windows* that provide children from the majority culture opportunities to acquaint with unfamiliar cultures and perspectives (Bishop, 1990). Since then, representations of marginalized characters and cultures in children's literature has become a matter of close examination (Mendoza and Reese, 2001). Most recently, the We Need Diverse Books and #OwnVoices movements have called for not only more diverse representations in literature, but also for changes to the cultural makeup of the publishing industry and for, subsequently, more diverse books written by cultural insiders to those diverse groups (Garrison et al., 2018; Whaley, n.d.).

This has been especially true for one particular category of diverse literature: Latinx children's books. In the U.S., the Latinx population has grown exponentially in recent decades, primarily as a result of increases in the number of immigrants entering the U.S. from Latin

American countries (Schall et al., 2019). It is estimated that around 18.3% of the total non-native population in the U.S. identifies as Hispanic and/or Latinx (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), with Latinx students comprising the largest majority of minority and bilingual student enrollments in the U.S. K-12 public school setting (de Brey et al., 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Given the roles children's books can play in students' views about the world and their own places in society, these increases in Latinx groups and individuals have spurred some attention toward Latinx literature with scholars interested in examining cultural themes and portrayals related to Larrick's (1965) and Bishop's (1990) calls to action (Smith et al., 2016), as well as the more recent We Need Diverse Books movement (Martinez et al., 2016; Thomas, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

While increases in the Latinx population have introduced much cultural diversity to the country, Latinx students and families experience various challenges and disparities, stemming largely from a history of hostile anti-immigration policies, English-only movements, and social and political oppression (Brown, 2016; Dinnerstein & Reimers, 2009; Katznelson & Bernstein, 2017). In the classroom, for example, reading assessments have consistently demonstrated significant gaps in overall reading proficiency between students identified as Hispanic bilinguals and monolingual White English-speaking students (The Nation's Report Card, 2019), likely influenced by assimilationist discourses involving English acquisition-focused curricula lacking cultural relevance (Cummins et al., 2015; Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Valentino & Reardon, 2015). Additionally, political rhetoric and social hostility towards Mexican and Central American migrants along with increased mass deportations and immigrant and refugee restrictions have contributed to certain insidious sentiments regarding Latinx groups – both non-

native immigrants and native-born citizens – as they seem to paint a hostile picture of these individuals as unwanted, invasive *others* (Brown, 2016; Katznelson & Bernstein, 2017).

Considering these English-only discourses and anti-immigration sentiments in the U.S., and given the importance of children’s literature in shaping children’s views of the world and of themselves, Latinx literature has great potential to serve as a means of support, inclusion, and self-affirmation for Latinx students (Riojas Clark & Bustos Flores, 2016). Latinx children’s stories that authentically portray the linguistic and sociocultural diversities amongst Latinx cultural experiences – including such facets as those associated with heritage, language, immigration, and transnational identities – offers Latinx students opportunities to identify with perspectives and narratives that inform their identity development in a dominant cultural setting (Naidoo & Quiroa, 2016). Additionally, authentically written books that challenge stereotypes and provoke critical discussions can influence positive perceptions of Latinx groups and cultures for students from the majority culture (Sung et al., 2017). For these reasons, it is especially important that Latinx children’s literature is not only made available to young students, but that these stories accurately and authentically portray Latinxs’ lived experiences.

Issues in Latinx Literature

However, researchers have found issues in the availability, representation, and authenticity of Latinx children’s books. To begin, scholars examining children’s books reveal an overall lack of cultural diversity, as Eurocentric-themed books continue to be overrepresented despite a growing diverse population (Koss, 2015; Naidoo, 2008; Nillson, 2005). For Latinx children’s books, this is particularly true. In the U.S., while the publication of diverse literature has been expanding in recent years, literature by Latinx authors and centered on Latinx narratives continues to be largely underrepresented relative to the growing population of Latinx

individuals (Pérez Huber et al., 2020; Riojas Clark & Bustos Flores, 2016). The Cooperative Children's Book Center (2020) reported for 2019 that, of the approximately 3,700 U.S.-published books reviewed that year, only 6.3 percent were books that included Latinx characters or topics, and only 6.1 percent were written by individuals identifying as Latinx.

Additionally, not only is Latinx literature limited in relative availability, but books deemed as *Hispanic* or *Latinx* often include inaccurate and even demeaning representations of these groups. Several scholars have uncovered inauthentic portrayals in Latinx children's literature, finding that some books contain language commodification, culturally inaccurate representations, or stereotypical cultural elements involving food, language, or narratives around the Latinx experience (see e.g., Domke, 2018; Martínez-Roldán, 2013; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Nillson, 2005; Yoo-Lee et al., 2014). This is particularly problematic considering the influence that children's books have on students' empathy and perceptions of the world (Keen, 2006; Stockwell, 2002), as stereotypical narratives and representations can serve to reinforce prejudices and misunderstandings about diverse groups and cultures (Sung et al., 2017).

An issue that has particularly afflicted much of the Latinx literature base regarding representations involves cultural inauthenticity and stereotyping resulting from cultural outsider perspectives in authorship (Edward, 2017; Naidoo & López-Robertson, 2007). An example of this is demonstrated in Martínez-Roldán's (2013) analysis of Judy Schachner's *Skippyjon Jones* books. In their analysis, Martínez-Roldán (2013) uncovered stereotypical elements resulting from the use of mock Spanish, diminutive Spanish descriptors, and adverse English phrases used to describe some of the Mexican characters. Additionally, Martínez-Roldán (2013) noted in this analysis, as well as in a later analysis of the same books (see Martínez-Roldán, 2017), ways in which the illustrations contribute to problematic portrayals of Mexicans. These included

depictions of the Mexican characters as Chihuahua dogs, as well as images of the characters taking naps and surrounded by stereotypical Mexican props and attire. Furthermore, in their critique of the graphic novel, *Ghosts*, by Raina Telgemeier (2016), Jimenez (2016) points out similar issues related to the author's cultural outsider status, noting ways in which the author inaccurately and stereotypically depicts various elements of Mexican culture. Particularly, Jimenez (2016) calls out Telgemeier's inaccuracies surrounding the history of the Catholic Mission system described in the novel, as well as the author's use of cultural appropriation when portraying elements of the holiday, Día de los Muertos.

Extending even beyond children's literature, a prime, more recent example of problematic cultural portrayals from outsider authors can be found with Jeanine Cummins' (2020) *American Dirt*. Proudly endorsed by Oprah Winfrey as an "Oprah's Book Club Pick" and quickly declared a national bestseller by *Publisher's Weekly*, *American Dirt* tells the story of a Mexican woman who is forced to flee her violence- and drug-inflicted home in Mexico and set out on a treacherous journey to the U.S. border with her son. However, this publication has been highly criticized by Latinx critics as bearing problematic representations of the Latinx migrant experience and portraying harmful stereotypes of Latinxs (Martin, 2020). In addition, critics point out the novel's exemplification of mainstream voices telling the stories of marginalized individuals (Bowles, 2020; Martin, 2020).

Naidoo and Lopez-Robertson (2007) state in this regard that in many cases, "authors who are outsiders tend to rely on their own perceptions rather than on actual research into the culture about which they are writing, resulting in inaccurate and sometimes harmful stereotypes" (p. 25). In the case of Martínez-Roldán's (2013, 2017) analyses, the author contends that Schachner's status as a cultural outsider as well as the pedagogical intentions behind Schachner's writing

likely resulted in the unintentional, yet problematic, use of stereotypical language and representations in these books. Furthermore, despite the fictional nature of many children's books, such as the *Skippyjon Jones* series, these types of issues, still, warrant critical attention considering the influential roles children's books play in readers' empathetic responses (Keen, 2006).

These issues regarding insider and outsider author status are not new, nonetheless, and there are ongoing debates regarding author status as it relates to cultural authenticity, language translation accuracy, othering, and the overall White hegemony in the publishing industry (Short & Fox, 2003). Additionally, given that much of the English language arts curricula base in the U.S. focuses on teaching central themes, main ideas, and authors' purposes in fictional texts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.), representation issues in Latinx literature call for more aggressive examinations in order to understand and dismantle harmful perpetuations of stereotypes and majoritarian stories. These considerations, then, emphasize the need for critical examinations of Latinx texts not only by researchers but also by the teachers using them, especially when those individuals are cultural outsiders.

Study Purpose

Situated within the context of concerns surrounding Latinx oppression in the U.S., issues of inauthenticity in Latinx literature, as well as the need for more representative Latinx books in the U.S. context, the purpose of this study is to examine narratives in popular Latinx children's literature. Using a Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and Latinx Critical (LatCrit) Theory framework, this study employed a critical content analysis to explore and analyze best-selling Latinx picture books' primary plots and themes, comparing authors' insider and outsider statuses in relation to the stories' narratives and themes.

The books for this study were derived from a well-known and popular online sales platform in the U.S.: Amazon. As an educator, I utilized Amazon frequently to locate and purchase books with specific content and themes for my classroom. Given that I purchased most outside resources using my own funds, I could almost always count on Amazon as a place to quickly and easily locate these resources at an affordable price. Amazon Books, a direct extension of Amazon.com, states that its books are “selected based on Customer Ratings, preorders, sales, popularity on Goodreads, and our curators’ assessments” (Amazon.com, n.d.). Amazon also denotes certain books as “Teachers’ Picks” based on “feedback from hundreds of teachers” (Amazon.com, n.d.). Given Amazon’s popularity and their selection process, books for the present study have been selected from Amazon’s list of “Best Sellers in Children’s Hispanic and Latino Books,” where I sought out the top selling books written by insiders to Latinx culture and the top selling books written by cultural outsiders in order to gain an understanding of themes and plots in popular books both authored by Latinx authors as well as non-Latinx authors. Also, in order to respect time constraints as well as to gain an even comparison amongst author cultural insider and outsider status, I only chose the top five books within each category of cultural insider and outsider status. As such, this study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the main plots and themes of Latinx children’s picture books from Amazon’s collection of best-selling Hispanic and Latinx children’s books?
2. In what ways, if any, are these books’ plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and cultures?
3. How do authors’ cultural insider/outsider statuses relate, if at all, to the plots and themes of Latinx children’s picture books?

Significance of the Study

This study is situated within the context of several intersecting premises. First, given the previously mentioned issues faced by the Latinx population in the political and social climate of the U.S., this work recognizes the need for Latinx children's literature to accurately and authentically portray Latinx students' lives, cultures, and experiences. Considering representation issues in Latinx children's literature, this study has been developed with an intention to engage with and interrogate these issues and the perpetuations of harmful and stereotypical narratives, keeping at the forefront the integral role children's books play in students' self-identification and views of society and diversity. Also, with main ideas and themes being common foci in the realm of elementary instructional settings (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.), this study builds from this basis to examine the content and plots of popular Latinx picture books to which young readers are exposed in order to critically analyze the story lines and messages within these pieces of literature.

Thus, this study contributes to the existing body of scholarship critically analyzing Latinx children's literature, using a combined Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies lens to do so. While LatCrit Theory has been applied on several occasions to critical analyses of children's books (see Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018; Schall et al., 2019), and while CWS has been utilized as a theoretical framework to critically examine diverse children's and young adult literature on a few occasions (see Groenke et al., 2019; Rogers & Christian, 2007), this study is the first known of its kind to apply a Critical Whiteness Studies lens in conjunction with LatCrit Theory to a critical content analysis of Latinx children's picture books.

Positionality, Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

As a teacher of Latinx students in both the U.S. and in Honduras, and as a doctoral student in literacy studies, the goals of my research derive from my desires to contribute to equitable education by promoting books that will serve as authentic mirrors for Latinx students and positive windows for their non-Latinx peers. My work with Latinx students during my teaching career as well as the extensive time I have spent in Honduras is the primary source of my proclivities toward and interest in educational resources about and by this population. Additionally, my experiences reading Latinx children's books with the Latinx students earlier in my teaching career spurred my interest in and love for this particular literature. The familiarity I gained with these students' learning and the levels of engagement and motivation I perceived occurring as a result of reading Latinx children's books to them provide me with a level of experience to apply my prior knowledge to the books I examined. Nonetheless, while these experiences situate me within a position to conduct research surrounding Latinx children's literature, my status as a White educator and as an outsider to Latinx identity necessitate that I confront the various influences on my work within this context. With this, there are several limitations to this study resulting from this positioning.

Critical Whiteness Studies posits that ideologies of Whiteness manifest themselves as a standard, invisible setting (Thompson, 2004). Applying these assertions to diverse children's literature, one can recognize how the need to signify children's books as *diverse* is itself a direct result of the normalized and assumed Whiteness that serves as an invisible background (Thompson, 2004). These ideologies present themselves in my work as I examine books deemed to be *diverse* from a perspective in which White has always been a normative standard by which I have measured all other non-White groups and cultures (Smith, 2004; Thompson, 2004).

Understanding that these manifestations of Whiteness as a standard and invisible background (Thompson, 2004) encompass such a profound part of my thinking about literature, it was necessary for me to exercise conscious and deliberate efforts throughout this analysis to make visible that which has been invisible and assumed for my entire life. With this, I engaged with what Jupp et al. (2016) describe as a *racialized consciousness* consistent with my identity as a White educator, meaning that I continually employed a critical, reflexive stance throughout this project as I worked to interrogate stereotypical narratives, and, thus, manifestations of Whiteness, in Latinx children's picture books.

I acknowledge that my desires to use my work to interrogate Whiteness in children's literature derive from a place of privilege, where I only understand race and racism from my own perspective as a White individual who has never experienced discrimination based on my racial identity. Lacking this experience, my understanding of oppression and marginalization is unarguably tainted by how I perceive racial discrimination without having experienced it myself. Nonetheless, even as an outsider to racial oppression and marginalization, I fully acknowledge that racism is endemic in U.S. society, and that race-based discrimination targets the Latinx community within the U.S.'s social and educational context. This understanding has primarily developed and continues to develop from my own learned perspective about what constitutes discrimination and marginalization, from historical accounts of Latinx oppression in the U.S., from experiences about which I have read and heard from Latinx insiders, from my own experiences working with Latinx families and teaching Latinx students, as well as from my conversations with members of the Latinx community. However, this understanding has also developed extensively from my own reflections regarding my experiences growing up in a predominantly White community where I was presented with negative narratives about Latinx

groups, which resulted in my own prejudices against the Latinx community that I now take continual efforts to dismantle. To these ends, Critical Whiteness Studies has been utilized to position my identity and stance due to my desires to promote equity in my work, while I also understand and acknowledge the ways in which my own lifelong experiences of embodying racial stereotypes against Brown and Black individuals and groups influence my ways of thinking and my subconscious inclinations to promote Whiteness as a normative standard (Thompson, 2004).

With this recognition and these understandings, I built this work from my personal engagement with a key question presented by activist and author Daniel José Older (2014) in their plea to industry professionals: “How can I use my position to help create a literary world that is diverse, equitable, and doesn't just represent the same segment of society it always has since its inception?” Much of my grappling with this question and questions like this, as well as my own learned biases, have led to my desire to challenge mainstream discriminatory systems in the U.S. educational context, even if through the seemingly innocent, concealed means of children’s literature. By critically analyzing narratives and themes of Latinx stories as an educator who understands the power of literature in shaping students’ perceptions of the world, my intentions are to use my positioning to work toward dismantling stereotypes and dominant narratives that only serve to perpetuate oppression and discrimination for Latinx students and communities. Though I fully recognize that my racial identity as well as my positioning as an outsider to Latinx culture presents limitations in my work with Latinx children’s books, Critical Whiteness Studies’ focus on interrogating the manifestations of Whiteness (Smith, 2004) lays a foundation for me to situate and frame this positioning as a White educator in order to intentionally confront these mechanisms.

Moving beyond the limitations resulting from my positioning as an outsider to Latinx culture, there are also delimitations presented from various aspects in the study. First, the scope of literature I have analyzed inevitably delimited this work, as the number of books analyzed in this study simply does not offer a complete representation of all Latinx children's picture books. As such, the findings I have uncovered with regard to my critical analysis of Latinx books' themes and insider/outsider author status are not generalizable or necessarily applicable to other Latinx picture books. Additionally, my understandings of the issues surrounding underrepresentation, inauthenticity, and author outsider status that are prevalent in Latinx literature influenced both my expectations for this project and the assumptions I had regarding my findings, and, thus, presented delimitations to the study's degree of objectivity. With the recent deliberations regarding cultural insider and outsider status in relation to cultural portrayals (e.g., Cummins, 2020; Martínez-Roldán, 2013) and the tendency for some outsider authors to include stereotypical elements in Latinx literature (Naidoo & Lopez-Robertson, 2007), I assumed there would be differences in representations and stereotypical elements in these stories relative to author insider and outsider status, such that I would find more stereotypical elements in the books written by Latinx outsiders than those authored by Latinx individuals.

Definition of Terms

In order to most thoroughly explicate this project and its components, the following key terms have been defined in specific relation to how they are utilized in the study.

Authenticity

Authenticity in relation to diverse literature is defined by Short and Fox (2003) as “the success with which a writer is able to reflect the cultural perspectives of the people whom he or she is writing about, and make readers from the inside group believe that he or she ‘knows what's

going on' (Rudine Sims Bishop)" (p. 20). Smith et al. (2016) note that authenticity in literature is apparent when stories are told by insiders to the particular culture being portrayed, and is displayed through a story's plot, language, and characters. As such, *inauthenticity* describes stories about cultures or people that contain inaccurate representations of those cultures' or individuals' lived experiences, often due to the stories being told by cultural outsiders (Naidoo, 2011b).

Culturally Relevant

Coined by Ladson-Billings (1992), the term *culturally relevant* refers to instruction and pedagogy that incorporates students' cultures to provide personally meaningful content on which literacy learning can be facilitated. Ladson-Billings (1992) further describes culturally relevant teaching as teaching that challenges assimilationist approaches to teaching and provides empowering education to students of color who are oppressed through social and economic ranks based on a dominant culture. Applied to children's literature, this term describes stories and texts that offer characters, settings, plots, and themes that are relatable and affirmative to marginalized students, and that affirm culturally and linguistically diverse students' identities by offering plots and narratives that do not cater to Eurocentric themes (Cartledge et al., 2016).

Cultural Insider

In this study, the term *cultural insider* is used to refer to authors' statuses in relation to the Latinx culture and identity. Authors were considered Latinx insiders based on their identification with Latinx groups or cultures as stated in personal interviews, biographies, autobiographies, or their affiliation with Latinx book awards that base criteria on author identity.

Cultural Outsider

Conversely, the term *cultural outsider* is used to refer to authors who are *not* Latinx based on their personal named identity. Additionally, I use this term to refer to my own status as an outsider to Latinx culture.

Diverse/Diversity

The terms *diverse* and *diversity* are used in this study to refer to the various “life experiences, traditions, histories, values, worldviews, and perspectives of the diverse cultural groups that make up a society” (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 185). Using this definition, these terms reflect a postcolonial meaning that encompasses intersectional identities as well as “differences in gender, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, cultural and linguistic differences, and disabilities” (Thomas, 2016, pp. 114-115). For this study, these terms have largely been used to describe children’s literature and the groups of people centered by this literature. From a Critical Whiteness perspective applied to children’s literature, the term *diverse* indicates literature that centers and reflects a deviation from a norm; in the case of children’s literature, this “norm” is White, Eurocentric, heterosexual, able-bodied characters and themes, and anything outside of those categories is considered *diverse*.

Latinx

Groups identifying as *Latinx* – a gender neutral term to refer to both Latino and Latina identities – and/or *Hispanic* – a term often used to refer to individuals with Spanish as a language of origin – represent a wide range of individuals from several countries and regions (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). While *Latinx* signifies having Latin American origin or descent, *Hispanic* is a term associated with conservative policy issues in the U.S. (Naidoo, 2011a), and is thought to have been created by the Bureau of the Census in order

to refer to individuals sharing Spanish as their common language (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). Though not all Latinx individuals speak Spanish as their native language, it is estimated that nearly 3/4 of the U.S. Latinx population speaks Spanish at home (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). For this study, I chose to employ the term “Latinx” as a gender-neutral descriptor to encompass the multifaceted identities of all individuals with Latin American heritage living both inside and outside of the U.S., and both speaking and not speaking Spanish as their native language. With this, *Latinx* in this study refers to individuals with a vast variety of identities and subcultures influenced by various aspects of language, culture, and ethnicity (Riojas Clark & Bustos Flores, 2016).

Latinx Children’s Literature/Books

The terms *Latinx children’s literature* or *Latinx children’s books* largely follow Riojas Clark and Bustos Flores’s (2016) definition of Latinx literature, referring to the body of literary works by and/or about the various Latin American groups living both inside and outside the United States. In this study, Spanish-English dual-language or bilingual books, as well as books written only in English or only in Spanish with Latinx themes or references, are also included in this definition of Latinx children’s literature.

Multicultural

Multicultural, much like the term *diverse*, is used primarily to describe non-Eurocentric literature that centers and reflects various non-White cultural groups within society. Though *multicultural* and *diverse* encompass similar meanings, it is worth noting that some scholars note distinctions in the two terms’ references to race and identity. According to Thomas (2016), *multicultural* was created as a term to describe an inclusivity of cultures, but its meaning does not necessarily stretch beyond racial and ethnic identifiers. As stated previously, however,

diverse more fully encompasses intersectional identities and identities as they relate to such aspects as “gender, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, cultural and linguistic differences, and disabilities” (Thomas, 2016, pp. 114-115). For the purposes of this study, I have selected to utilize the term *diverse* to refer to the broad base of literature to which Latinx children’s books belong; nonetheless, in those instances where I am referencing authors who have used the term *multicultural* to describe Latinx literature and other non-White categories of children’s books, or educational movements, I utilize the term to describe these elements as these scholars have elected to do so.

Narrative

In the context of this study, *narrative* refers to the primary plot of a picture book’s story as created by the story’s main events (Smith et al., 2016). As such, *narrative* is used interchangeably throughout the study with *storyline* and *plot*. In essence, the narrative of each book examined in this study is primarily what each story is about.

Picture Book

The term *picture book* in this study follows the definition of a 16- to 48- page illustrated story (Pattison, 2016). For this study, picture books are exclusively included in the analysis for their popularity and influence in children’s early literacy (Short & Fox; 2003).

Reading “With the Grain”

Coined by Lois Tyson (2015), the term “*reading ‘with the grain’*” (p. 6) refers to interpreting a literary work the way it is intended to be interpreted by the author. Simply put, reading with the grain implies seeking out the author’s purpose within a text.

Reading “Against the Grain”

On the contrary, Tyson (2015) discusses “*reading ‘against the grain’*” as “analyz[ing] elements in the text of which the text itself seems unaware” (p. 7). By reading against the grain, the implication is that the reader digs deeper into the unintended meanings behind a written work, taking into account the historical and sociopolitical influences.

Stereotype

The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology defines *stereotype* as “a relatively fixed and oversimplified generalization about a group or class of people, usually focusing on negative, unfavourable characteristics” (Colman, 2014). The word *stereotype* is used on several occasions in this study to describe the common generalizations surrounding Latinx groups and individuals (see Appendix A for an extensive list of Latinx stereotypes in media and literature).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. The present chapter offered an overview of the study, outlining the study’s background and significance, a statement of the problem, the research purpose, a positionality statement, limitations and delimitations, as well as key terms that will pertain to the analysis. The following chapter will present a review of literature relevant to the study, offering insight into several main areas of interest in Latinx children’s literature, including a historical context, diverse issues in Latinx picture books, and relevant analyses of Latinx literature. Chapter three will provide an outline of the study’s theoretical framework, research methods, and data collection and analysis plans. In chapter four, I will outline the findings of the analysis, and then present a discussion of implications and a conclusion in chapter five.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will begin by presenting a historical perspective centered on Latinx children's books in the U.S, discussing key individuals and movements that contributed to its development. Then, the chapter will offer a review of relevant literature pertaining to content analyses and critical content analyses of Latinx children's books, honing in on particular types of analyses as well as findings related to Latinx narratives and themes and authors' cultural insider and outsider statuses. In addition, this chapter will examine relevant analyses that have used Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies as theoretical foundations, either separately or in conjunction with other theories, and will conclude with a look at where Latinx children's books find themselves in the world of diverse literature today.

A Historical Perspective of Latinx Children's Literature

This analysis focuses on recently published Latinx children's literature in the U.S. within the context of the previously mentioned challenges facing Latinx groups in the U.S. historically as well as the various issues that continue to permeate much of the Latinx literature base. Additionally, this study also draws upon the body of work centered on critically conscious and culturally relevant children's literature in order to engage with the children's books being analyzed. As such, it is worthwhile and necessary to examine Latinx picture books' development in the world of diverse children's literature situated within this context and from a critically conscious perspective.

This historical perspective surrounding Latinx children's books begins with several movements and key scholars primarily concerned with the lack of representations of non-White lives in literature. Primarily, the dialogue concerning Latinx children's books was born out of discussions centered on concerns predominantly related to the underrepresentation of African

American characters and stories, dating back to the mid-nineteenth century (Thomas, 2016). Thomas (2016) notes that these discussions, led by Black parents, educators, and churches, focused heavily on the omission as well as caricature of Black characters in literature, which prompted attention toward counter-narratives and special features of Black children in books and poetry by several writers moving forward. From the early to middle twentieth century, publications like W. E. B. DuBois's expressing concerns regarding the exclusion of Black history, culture, and stories in education, as well as developments like the Harlem Renaissance and Black History Month, contributed to a base of literature and dialogue from which these discussions continued (Pérez Huber et al., 2020; Thomas, 2016).

Years later, toward the latter of the mid-century, Nancy Larrick (1965) called out the children's publishing industry for vast overrepresentations of White stories and characters as well as the tendency of stories to perpetuate stereotypes when they did include characters of color in their famous article, "The All-White World of Children's Books." The Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) was birthed during the same year, created for the purposes of promoting cultural diversity in children's literature (Pérez Huber et al., 2020; Social Justice Books, 2017). Specifically, this council worked to address historical inaccuracies and stereotypes in children's books and materials, and particularly made efforts to publish more works by African American authors (Social Justice Books, 2017). Collectively, these discussions, publications, and efforts, though primarily centered on representations of Black characters and stories in children's literature (Smith et al., 2016), contributed to and grew alongside various movements surrounding multicultural education of the time that focused on shifting the literature base from stories of misrepresentation and mockery to those representing positive and realistic portrayals of all non-White children's lived experiences (Thomas, 2016). As such, these efforts

expanded throughout the years to focus on other marginalized and oppressed groups, including Native Americans, Chicanxs, and Puerto Ricans (Social Justice Books, 2017).

There were several key voices and movements that defined the development of Latinx children's literature within this context and throughout this time period, though these voices and movements arose at a much more gradual pace. The beginnings of Latinx children's literature in the U.S. can be traced back to a few publications recorded as firsts in the field: a series of Spanish-translated English nursery rhymes from Colombian writer Rafael Pombo in 1854, and *La edad de oro*, a children's magazine series, by José Martí in 1889 (Ada, 2016). From there, and well into the early 1900s, Latinx children's literature in the U.S. was somewhat of a rarity, and very few published children's stories were recorded (Smith et al., 2016). Elizabeth Marrow's 1930 picture book, *The Painted Pig*, and Leo Politi's *Little Pacho* of 1938, were notable exceptions (Naidoo, 2011b).

Many years later, as the multicultural education movements took hold in the 1960s and into the 1980s, Latinx children's literature was still largely missing from the scene, despite major growths in representative literature for other historically marginalized groups (Smith et al., 2016). Furthermore, the few books that were published during these years contained inaccurate portrayals and stereotypical depictions of Latinx groups, taking on what Naidoo (2011b) refers to as a "tourist approach to the [Latinx] culture" (p. 47). As such, publications often featured "exotic" people and lifestyles from South America, or...Mexicans taking siestas, celebrating fiestas, or swinging sticks at piñatas" (Naidoo, 2011b, p. 45). According to Barry (1998), much of this continued misrepresentation during these transformative years might have been due to Latinx communities not having vocal support for their representation in literature the way Black communities did with advocates such as W. E. B. DuBois. Also, Naidoo (2011b) notes how,

throughout this time period, most of the authors writing these stories were Latinx outsiders, which resulted in many books depicting harmful misconceptions about Latinx groups.

Eventually, nonetheless, voices from Latinx activists and writers like Pura Belpré, Ernesto Galarza, and Pat Mora began to gain recognition (Ada, 2016; Thomas, 2016), and Latinx children's books began to be included more often in discussions surrounding multicultural education and literature. Additionally, Latinx-focused book awards – namely, The América's Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature in 1993, the Tomás Rivera Mexican Children's Book Award in 1995, and the Pura Belpré Award in 1996 (Naidoo, 2011b) – contributed to this inclusivity. As such, the base of Latinx children's literature experienced growth and improvement compared to the years before, and, by the end of the century, more high-quality, representative, and culturally relevant Latinx literature had made its way into the publishing industry (Naidoo, 2011b).

Content and Critical Content Analyses of Latinx Children's Books

Despite some positive moves forward over the past several decades (Riojas Clark & Bustos Flores, 2016), the historical underrepresentation and inauthenticity still prevalent in Latinx literature have prompted many scholars in the field of diverse literature to critically examine Latinx children's books in recent years. Primarily, scholars have adopted content and critical content analyses as means of analyzing Latinx books in order to examine cultural authenticity and representation, given that issues with cultural misinformation, inaccurate portrayals, and stereotyping have been traditionally pervasive in Latinx stories (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). As such, examinations of Latinx children's and young adult literature have largely focused on individual and group narratives, as well as portrayals of the Spanish language. Findings of these analyses seem to consistently reveal some positive portrayals of Latinx cultures

along with continuing issues involving underrepresentation of Latinx books, stereotypical elements and narratives, and cultural inauthenticity (Naidoo, 2008).

Analyses of Trends in Latinx Children's Literature

Some scholars have used content analysis as a means of examining trends in Latinx children's books through the years. For example, in a study intended to compare trends among portrayals of Latinx characters and stories in children's literature from 1966 to 2003, Nillson (2005) reviewed and synthesized 21 content analyses published within those years involving Latinx children's books, examining evolutions in representations, character roles, and sexual or racial stereotyping. Their review indicated an overall increase in representation of Latinx characters throughout those years as well as increasingly positive portrayals of Latinx culture and individuals; however, the review also revealed a continued and significant underrepresentation of Latinx characters relative to the U.S. population, in addition to stereotypical portrayals of Latinx characters and stories, including gender and racial stereotyping (see e.g., Agosto et al., 2003; Ayala, 1999; Cobb, 1995; Klein, 1998; Rocha & Dowd, 1993).

Similar to several of the studies in Nillson's (2005) review, Barrera and Garza de Cortes (1997) examined 67 children's books with Mexican-American themes published from 1992-1995 in the U.S., finding that several books created exotic portrayals of Mexican-Americans' culture through representations of the culture's holidays and food. Additionally, the authors found that several of the books included stereotypical depictions of Mexican-Americans as immigrants and migrants. Domke (2018) points out the prevalence of these types of portrayals in books about Latinxs throughout much of the twentieth century, indicating that "stereotypes featuring themes of poverty, rural living and migrant farmworkers, and characters limited by not speaking English (Barrera et al., 1993; Naidoo, 2011)" (p. 23) were quite common.

Analyses Focused on Language

Several content analyses have focused on the use of Spanish in Latinx children's books. Barrera and Quiroa (2003) assert that "Spanish words and phrases hold considerable potential for enhancing the realism and cultural authenticity of English-based text," (p. 247), indicating that, when these books' languages are used strategically and with cultural sensitivity, they provide powerful sources of support for Latinx students' cultural identities. However, Acevido (2017) describes how analyses of Latinx children's books often reveal "the integration of Spanish words process as superficial, seldom adding depth or breath to complex understanding regarding cultural practices and values" (p. 25). In their analysis of Puerto Rican children's books, the author revealed that the stories often used translated Spanish words as means of adding "cultural flavor" to the English-based texts (Acevido, 2017, p. 25). These conclusions are consistent with those of Barrera and Quiroa (2003) and Braden and Rodriguez (2016), whose content analyses demonstrated the use of Spanish in English texts as superficial and familiar, lacking complexity, and serving primarily to add cultural flavor. Examples of these types of language include those associated with kinship – such as *mamá*, *papá*, *abuelo/a*, and *tio/a* – as well as culinary terms like *tortilla*, *frijole*, *salsa*, and *chile* – many of which are of Mexican origin (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003).

Analyses Focused on Textual Features

Other analyses focus on examining the physical formats of Spanish and English text in Latinx books. For example, Daly (2018) and Domke (2018) examined the physical placement and formatting of Spanish and English in books identified as Latinx dual-language literature. Daly (2018) conducted a content analysis focused on language dominance and status of English-Spanish dual-language picture books, analyzing the books' text size, font, and placement. Daly's

(2018) analysis determined that the English text was given more space and status in most of the books' landscapes, thus determining it was the privileged language. Similarly, Domke's (2018) content analysis of Latinx Spanish-English dual-language books revealed unequal language representations in most of the books examined, with English often positioned with more dominance than Spanish and English through the texts' displays, sizes, font formatting, and language order.

Chappel and Faltis (2007) also analyzed the Spanish and English languages in several Latinx children's books but with a different lens than Daly (2018) and Domke (2018). These authors examined language to focus on the ways in which Latinx narratives often promote cultural assimilation to American ways of living and speaking. Specifically, using a textual analysis, Chappel and Faltis (2007) analyzed portrayals of bilingualism in Latinx children's literature and found that representations of Spanish and English use amongst Latinx individuals directly represented cultural and linguistic assertions supporting Americanized assimilation of immigrant characters.

Critical Content Analyses

While the studies from these reviews are comparative and more general in nature, several recent analyses reveal similar findings related to inauthentic or stereotypical portrayals of Latinx characters, language, and cultures. In one study, Martínez-Roldán (2013) conducted a critical content analysis focusing on the language and illustrations of *Skippyjon Jones* books. From this analysis, Martínez-Roldán (2013) uncovered potentially negative stereotypical implications resulting from the use of mock Spanish, as well as certain diminutive Spanish descriptors and insidious English phrases to emphasize certain undesirable character traits of the Mexican characters. Then, some years later, Martínez-Roldán (2017) analyzed these same books utilizing

a Marxist theoretical framework, and revealed ways in which the illustrations contribute to stereotypical representations of the Mexican characters – namely, by utilizing cartoon Chihuahua dogs to represent Mexicans, and by incorporating images depicting the characters taking naps next to saguaro cacti and Mexican hats. In another analysis, Sung et al. (2017) utilized postcolonialism to analyze two Latinx themed children’s novels about immigration, finding that the novels featured exotic depictions of the characters’ homes and contributed to “unchallenged assumptions about immigrants and the immigration experience” (p. 59).

Even more recently, Martínez-Roldán and Dávila (2019) applied a postcolonial lens to a critical content analysis of visual images in a Mexican themed picture book, revealing detrimental stereotypes portrayed in the narratives about Mexican culture and people (p. 187). Additionally, in a literary content analysis, Domke (2020) found stereotypical depictions of Mexican culture through frequently used food and clothing representations in their examinations of both visual and verbal elements in Spanish-English concept books. Finally, Acevido (2017) applied a postcolonial and Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to a critical content analysis of Puerto Rican children’s books written by Puerto Rican authors in order to identify patterns and themes of these books. Specifically, Acevido (2017) examined the characters, languages, settings, and cultural and familial practices in the narratives. Acevido’s (2017) findings uncovered exotic and positive, yet incomplete and narrow depictions of Puerto Rican land and people, as well as a vast underrepresentation of Afro-Puerto Rican voices.

LatCrit Theory Applied to Content Analyses. While critical content analyses are somewhat common in examinations of Latinx children’s literature, there are only a few instances in which Latinx Critical Theory has been applied as a theoretical frame as this study intends to do. Hernandez-Truyol et al. (2006) describe work situated within LatCrit theory as existing “both

as a collective act of subversion against, and of resistance to, the dominant norms and practices of formal legal education in the United States today” (p. 171). These considerations should be very apparent in the small number of content analyses involving LatCrit Theory as a primary framework, as LatCrit scholars work to critically analyze many forms of oppression and utilize counter-storytelling and voice as a means to speak against the dominant majority and advocate for the marginalized (Osorio, 2018; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002).

Braden and Rodriguez’s (2016) critical content and multicultural analysis demonstrates such an instance, whereas they apply LatCrit Theory to examine cultural authenticity in a collection of children’s literature deemed as having Latinx content. Specifically, using selections of relevant literature from the Cooperative Children’s Book Center’s (CCBC’s) collection of books, Braden and Rodriguez (2016) apply critical multicultural perspectives with Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Theory to “critically examine issues related to race and to challenge dominant and accepted ways in which groups are positioned” (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016, p. 60). In their analysis, LatCrit Theory’s tenet of examining portrayals of Latinxs’ lived experiences is included as a focal point, which allows them to put into place their focus of analyzing the representations and cultural narratives of Latinx individuals in Latinx story picture books. They used tenets from critical multicultural perspectives, CRT, and LatCrit as a holistic framework to guide their reading and thinking about the books as they analyzed the texts and pictures, finding that, often, these books offered superficial generalizations and stereotypical representations of Latinx culture (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). Specifically, the results of their analysis included four primary contentions based on the implicit and explicit suggestions of the texts analyzed: English text is privileged, the books include superficial generalizations about the

Latinx culture, traditional gender roles and perspectives are relied upon within the stories, and the stories involve underlying assumptions of a utopian society.

These same scholars apply LatCrit Theory in another critical analysis of Latinx literature. In this study, Rodriguez and Braden (2018) conduct a critical content analysis of children's picture books representing Latinx immigration experiences to the U.S. For this examination, they specifically utilize LatCrit Theory in order to extend their application of Critical Race Theory, indicating their desire to "focus on the issues related to the lives of Latinxs" and "make the voices of Latinx children and families central to our research" (Rodriguez & Braden, 2018, p. 60). The results of their analysis demonstrated a lack of culturally authentic details, stereotypical gender roles, and a privileging of the English text over Spanish.

Finally, Schall et al. (2019) conducted a critical content analysis of visual images in order to examine portrayals of Latinx immigrants in the illustrations of picture books featuring Latinx immigrant characters. To guide their analysis, the authors utilized both Critical Race Theory and LatCrit Theory as theoretical frameworks, though the analysis primarily centered on tenets of Critical Race Theory. Particularly, they built the grounding for their analysis utilizing CRT's tenet of *the centrality of experiential knowledge* as well as the theory's utilization of counter-storytelling to bring to light marginalized voices and experiences. In this way, they set up their analysis to be largely guided by "the centrality of experiential knowledge as shared through counter-storytelling" (Schall et al., 2019, p. 62). The results of their analysis resulted in four primary themes across the books' illustrations, all of which they connected to a principle of Critical Race Theory in which each theme is prevalent. These themes, titled *Immigrants and Agency*, *Immigrants as Controlled Bodies*, *Immigrants and Community*, and *Multiple Immigrant Stories and Journeys*, highlighted several positive depictions of Latinx individuals as well as

shared challenges these individuals face throughout the immigration process. The authors point out their choice of books written by Latinx insiders as having an impact on their findings, whereas themes resulted in realistic portrayals of border crossing experiences.

Latinx Children’s Literature Today

As noted, Latinx children’s books’ development within the world of diverse literature has not been a seamless journey, and, historically, these books have been wrought with issues of misrepresentation, inaccurate cultural depictions, and stereotyping (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Thus, with the many issues and problematic elements of Latinx literature receiving such a focus in contemporary discussions, it does not seem the positive aspects of these books nor the progress in the field have necessarily been afforded the same attention.

To begin, though Latinx-authored and Latinx-themed children’s literature is still significantly underrepresented relative to the Latinx population in the U.S. (Pérez Huber et al., 2020; Riojas Clark & Bustos Flores, 2016), the CCBC reports that Latinx representation is at least growing some. The number of books by and/or about Latinx authors/groups, while only representing around 2% of the CCBC’s total books received in 1994, grew to nearly 12% in 2019 (Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2020). Also, as noted previously, higher-quality books have made their way into the publishing industry (Naidoo, 2011b), particularly as more Latinx authors, illustrators, and storytellers contribute to their creation, with Latinx-based awards assisting this effort (Ada, 2016; Thomas, 2016). Though the base of Latinx children’s books still has a long way to go with regards to publication and representation, there are these few aspects that offer, at least, some hope for continual improvement.

This leads to the question, “So what does a *good* Latinx children’s book look like?” The answer to this question does not involve one single aspect or a list, per se, of sorts. Indeed, the

characteristics that make a “good” book are subjective in nature; however, there are certain considerations and distinguishing features that should be regarded in Latinx children’s literature according to experts in the field. Smith et al. (2016) state, to begin, that the simple “inclusion of a Latino character or Spanish phrases is not sufficient to make a good Latino children’s book” (p. 35). Smith et al. (2016) explain, instead, that Latinx children’s books should reflect both the uniqueness of the Latino cultural experiences and the universality of human life, while refraining from presenting narratives that perpetuate cultural or linguistic stereotypes. Riojas Clark and Bustos Flores (2016) concur, stating that Latinx children’s literature should depict “concrete reflections of culture and language experiences” (p. 3), while including stories about such values as friendship, family, and traditions. Naidoo (2011b) suggests, too, that Latinx children’s books should reflect the diversity of Latinx subcultures and experiences. Other scholars also discuss the importance of Latinx children’s literature in exhibiting an appreciation for Latinx culture and worldviews, whereas young readers can be assured that their backgrounds and cultures are valued and of importance in the world (Alamillo & Arenas, 2012; Wilkens & Gamble, 1998), and where they can have opportunities to engage in critical discussions around accurate and familiar topics and experiences (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016).

Ladson-Billings’ (1992) concepts surrounding culturally relevant teaching can also offer an angle by which to understand the characteristics that should comprise a good Latinx children’s book. Ladson-Billings (1992) coined the term *culturally relevant teaching* in their work with African American students to describe instruction that involves a recognition of culture as “an important strength upon which to construct the schooling experience” (p. 314) in order provide personally meaningful content on which literacy learning can be facilitated. By framing culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition for African-American culture

(Cartledge et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1992), Ladson-Billings (1992) sought to challenge assimilationist approaches to teaching and provide empowering education to students of color who were oppressed through societal categorizations and social and economic ranks from the dominant, White culture. These principles surrounding culturally relevant teaching lend themselves to Latinx children's books, as they seek to affirm students' identities and build upon background knowledge that doesn't cater to Eurocentric themes (Cartledge et al., 2016). Smith et al. (2016) emphasizes that authentic and critically conscious Latinx children's books in the context of U.S. education, thus, should highlight and validate the contributions made by Latinxs to the U.S. and to all of society. Taking this into account as well as Bishop's (1990) concepts surrounding mirrors and windows, culturally relevant Latinx children's literature should include stories and texts that offer characters, settings, plots, illustrations, and themes that are relatable to Latinx students and affirmative of Latinx culture (Cartledge et al., 2016), in turn providing mirrors in which Latinx students can see themselves and their backgrounds reflected and valued, and authentic windows that allow their non-Latinx peers insights into a culture and experiences different from their own (Bishop, 1990).

Chapter Overview

The review of the presented literature surrounding the history of Latinx literature and analyses of Latinx children's books, while revealing several positive aspects of Latinx literature's development in the U.S., uncovers many issues associated with Latinx narratives, themes, and representation. These findings primarily indicate ongoing issues with language representations, stereotypical elements, and inaccurate depictions of Latinxs' lived experiences, homes, and cultures. Also, analyses included in this review highlight a need for more Latinx insider voices in the writing and publishing of these books, as inauthentic cultural

representations, language inaccuracies, and tendencies to *other* that are sometimes prevalent in this literature are believed to be, often, a result of outside perspectives from non-Latinx authors and publishers (Short & Fox, 2003). However, after reviewing relevant analyses surrounding Latinx children's books, only a few scholars discuss their findings in relation to authors' cultural insider/outsider statuses, and no analyses examine this aspect; as such, there appears to be a need for more analyses focused on this area.

While content analyses and critical content analyses are somewhat common in examinations of Latinx children's literature, this review demonstrates that there are only a few instances in which Latinx Critical Theory has been applied as a theoretical frame for such analyses (see e.g., Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018; Schall et al., 2019), and there are no known instances of Critical Whiteness Studies being applied in the same way specifically to Latinx children's literature. As such, this study contributed to the research base of LatCrit scholarship examining Latinx children's books, and also employed Critical Whiteness Studies as a lens alongside LatCrit Theory for examining Latinx literature. Additionally, given the issues of representation regarding authors' outsider statuses relative to Latinx narratives, this study sought to examine authors' cultural statuses in relation to the themes and plot lines of the books in this analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to critically explore and examine narratives and themes in best-selling Latinx children’s literature. To do this, this study employed a qualitative critical content analysis guided by both Critical Whiteness Studies and Latinx Critical Theory as a means of analyzing stories’ main plots and themes through the texts and illustrations of Latinx children’s picture books. Particularly, using a critical content analysis, this study examined ways in which books’ narratives challenge or perpetuate stereotypes of Latinx groups in the U.S., and compared books’ narratives, themes, and portrayals in relation to authors’ Latinx insider and outsider perspectives. The following sections will outline critical content analysis as it has been used in this study and the theoretical framework that served as its guide. Then, the chapter will provide details regarding the study’s context and procedures, highlighting the data collection and analysis procedures.

Critical Content Analysis

Content analysis can be defined as “a flexible research method for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of a society (White & Marsh, 2006)” (Beach et al., 2009, p. 129). While first developed as a quantitative tool (Beach et al., 2009; Franzosi, 2008), content analysis is now used as both a quantitative and qualitative method in several areas of inquiry and in many fields (Neuendorf, 2017). For children’s and other types of literature, a content analysis can be qualitative and oriented around interpretation, or it can take on more systematic, quantitative approaches (Short, 2017).

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that qualitative research approaches are “incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway and Todres, 2003)” (p. 78), and as such, so are qualitative content analyses. Broadly speaking, applied to children’s literature, qualitative

content analyses involve making inferences from texts and employing analytical constructs derived from theories in order to create meaning from the contexts in which the texts are situated (Short, 2017). Applying a qualitative content analysis to literature involves engaging in careful readings of a text with a specific lens or theory guiding the exploration; subsequently, one utilizes coding techniques in order to categorize the text and themes based on tenets or principles from a chosen theory or lens (Franzosi, 2008). Throughout this process, one draws inferences from the words of the text as well as its context, and enacts what Louise Rosenblatt (1938) describes as a *transactional* engagement with both domains in order to interpret these inferences and to, thus, create meaning (Short, 2017; White & Marsh, 2006). As such, the purposes of content analyses, though they may differ and vary in particular approaches, are centered on analyzing and understanding what the text is about within a specific social, cultural, or political setting (Beach et al., 2009; Short, 2017).

While content analysis offers an approach by which to thoroughly analyze literature and texts' meanings, when the purpose is to illustrate a political stance in order to question portrayals, representations, and authenticity in literature and in media, as is the case with the present study, it is necessary to employ a critical element (Neuendorf, 2017; Short, 2017). In the context of content analysis, Short (2019) defines *critical* as "a stance of locating power in social practices to challenge conditions of inequity" (p. 3). To juxtapose a content analysis approach with a *critical* content analysis, Short (2017) states the following:

Critical content analysis differs from content analysis in prioritizing a critical lens as the frame for the study, not just as part of interpreting the findings or citing scholarship in a literature review. Some researchers who engage in content analyses use a critical theory to comment on their findings, while in critical content analysis, the researcher uses a

specific critical lens as the frame from which to develop the research questions and to select and analyze the texts. (p. 5)

According to Beach et al. (2009), “what makes a study ‘critical’ is not the methodology but the framework used to think within, through, and beyond the text” (p. 131). For a critical content analysis, that framework involves a particular critical theory that is applied to all aspects of the research process (Short, 2017).

Informed by the work of critical theory scholars such as Horkheimer, Marx, Kant, Hegel, and Freire, and based on criticisms of such constructs as capitalism, colonialism, and social, economic, and political relations, a critical content analysis’ primary objective is to uncover issues of inequity and power within dominant societal ideologies, with the underlying intention to transform unjust conditions and emancipate the individuals oppressed by them (Luke, 2012; Neuendorf, 2017; Short, 2017). To do this, scholars often employ an analytical stance that addresses questions around the meaning of “truth” and how these concepts are represented, for whom and by whom they are presented, and for what purposes (Luke, 2012). Since researchers utilizing a critical stance are interested in interrogating what constitutes and is verified as “knowledge” and its role in perpetuating societal inequities, these scholars primarily inquire into forms of knowledge influenced by social issues involving class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Luke, 2012; Neuendorf, 2017; Short, 2017). Thus, these scholars’ works are often centered on specific populations or groups marginalized on the basis of culture, language, gender, race, or sexual orientation (Luke, 2012; Short, 2017), utilizing critical frameworks involving postcolonialism, queer studies, childhood studies, and women’s studies, among others (Beach et al., 2009).

Drawing upon these works, the present study employed a qualitative critical content analysis guided by Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies in order to critically analyze narratives and themes in best-selling Latinx children's picture books. Specifically, this study applied critical content analysis as a means of analyzing the texts and visual representations of best-selling Latinx children's picture books from Amazon's list of best-sellers, selecting the top five best sellers by insiders to Latinx culture and five best sellers by cultural outsiders, with the following research questions guiding the analysis:

1. What are the main plots and themes of Latinx children's picture books from Amazon's collection of best-selling Hispanic and Latinx children's books?
2. In what ways, if any, are these books' plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and cultures?
3. How do authors' cultural insider/outsider statuses relate, if at all, to the plots and themes of Latinx children's picture books?

Situated within a sociopolitical and historical perspective, the critical content analysis employed in this study necessitated a qualitative approach to inquiry that allowed me to employ a critical lens in order to interrogate what I believe are socially, politically, and historically constructed realities (Lincoln et al., 2011) of the Latinx population in the U.S. The nuanced and complex nature of qualitative inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2006) aided me in applying tenets from LatCrit Theory and CWS to examine the various themes and plots of each story I analyzed. In this way, I adopted Lincoln et al.'s (2011) ontological positions aligning with critical paradigms that situate historical realism at the center of inquiry, asserting that individual realities are informed and shaped by various social, political, economic, and cultural values.

Using critical content analysis as a subjectivist approach to inquiry (Lincoln et al., 2011), I embodied Rosenblatt's (1938) *transactional* engagement with the texts and context in order to construct meaning of each book's content. In this regard, I adopted Serafini's (2014) definition of *text* as it is considered within the realm of "print-based multimodal ensembles" (p. 13), such as the children's picture books in this study. Particularly, Serafini (2014) defines *text* as "a cohesive entity that can be disseminated in a number of ways" (p. 13), and that includes all of the textual, visual, and design elements that make up the entity and serve to create its meaning. Applying this definition, I employed Rosenblatt's (1938) simultaneous engagement with each book's text and context as my means of interpreting the stories' written words and visual images in order to create meanings related to the narratives and themes. Taking into account the historical and structural contexts of Latinx groups' lived experiences, this approach aligns with critical inquiries' dialogical methodologies that seek efforts to transform and emancipate (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Considering the purposes underlying critical content analysis as well as the role of the approach in guiding research questions and purposes (Short, 2017), the critical lens guiding the study plays a large role in all facets of the research process. For the present study, I employed Latinx Critical (LatCrit) Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) as a combined theoretical lens. Though LatCrit Theory has been applied as a theoretical frame to analyses of Latinx children's books, even if only on a few occasions, the same is not true for Critical Whiteness Studies. CWS scholarship has expanded into the educational research base and has addressed several educational discourses, including curricular materials and young adult literature (see Groenke et al., 2019), but it has not yet been applied through a critical content analysis for

children's literature to my knowledge. For this study, both theories have been used in conjunction to inform my research questions and to locate the texts I analyzed. The two theories have also been used as a framework to select tenets and guiding questions on which I focused my analysis and to interpret my findings.

Latinx Critical (LatCrit) Theory

Latinx Critical Theory is described as a “branch” of Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). With origins tracing back to the Chicano movement of the 1960's in the United States and then continuing into Critical Legal Studies of the 1980's (Montoya & Valdes, 2008), the body of Latinx Critical scholarship applies tenets from Critical Race Theory – such as CRT's commitments to social justice and challenges of dominant ideologies and systemic oppression – to focus on the complex identities and situations of Latinx groups in the dominant U.S. context (Osorio, 2018; Solórzano, 1998; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002). LatCrit explores transnational identities of Latinx individuals and utilizes these intersections to specifically “reveal the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging the Latina/o experience with issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity and culture” (Pérez Huber, 2010, p. 79). Thus, extending beyond CRT, LatCrit Theory examines the multidimensional nature of Latinx identities in the U.S. context, taking into account such components as culture, immigration or citizenship status, as well as bilingualism and transnationalism, and analyzes ways in which these various components intersect with race to inform individual and group experiences with oppression in a majoritarian society (Davila & de Bradley, 2010; Iglesias, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Stefancic, 1997; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002).

LatCrit Theory examines oppression much the same as CRT in that it focuses on counter-narratives as means of challenging mainstream, dominant narratives and offering insights into

systemic constructs of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2010). Counter-narratives, or *counter-stories*, promote individuals' lived experiences "by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, chronicles, and narratives" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 473). In these ways, counter-storytelling becomes "a method of telling the story of those experiences that are often not told (i.e. those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 475). As such, LatCrit Theory promotes counter-narratives exclusively of Latinx populaces within the broader realm of all non-White minorities (Hernandez-Truyol et al., 2006).

In education, both CRT and LatCrit are described as theories that "challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate and marginalize" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312). These scholars further define the two theories' applications to education as means of "theorizing about the ways in which educational structures, processes, and discourses support and promote racial subordination" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 315). Similarly, Hernandez-Truyol et al. (2006) describe LatCrit work as a resistance to the dominant, formal education practices in the U.S. These emphases turn the attention to such oppressive educational discourses as literacy practices that suppress Latinx students' language while privileging English acquisition (Yip & García, 2015), as well as literature that perpetuates dominant, stereotypical cultural narratives of Latinx groups and individuals (Terrones, 2016).

These considerations are quite apparent in the current body of educational research involving Latinx Critical Theory as a primary framework, as today's LatCrit scholars work to critically analyze many forms of oppression and utilize counter-storytelling as a means of

speaking against dominant majoritarian stories and advocating for the marginalized (Osorio, 2018; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002). Focusing on counter-storytelling offers ways to engage with such literary practices in order to interrogate majoritarian stories, such as stereotypical narratives, that work to oppress. As demonstrated in the studies that have applied LatCrit Theory to Latinx children's literature, the theory has been utilized to uncover negative generalizations about Latinx culture, the privileging of English text over Spanish, cultural inauthenticity, and stereotypical portrayals of Latinx groups (see Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018). Nonetheless, the theory has also been utilized as a means of revealing positive aspects of Latinx books. For example, in Schall et al.'s (2019) critical content analysis, applying counter-storytelling tenets from LatCrit Theory to children's books about immigration uncovered several positive and authentic depictions of Latinx individuals, which the author attributed to the books being written by Latinx authors.

It is within these foci on representation, marginalization, and counter-narratives that the present study is situated. The following tenets have been applied throughout the analysis:

- Promoting counter-narratives of Latinx groups, cultures, and experiences (Delgado, 1989; Fránquiz et al., 2011)
- Analyzing barriers rooted in the oppression of Latinx groups (language, immigration, etc.) through majoritarian stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001)
- Exemplifying the complex experiences and multidimensional identities of Latinxs in the U.S. (Davila & de Bradley, 2010; Iglesias, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Stefancic, 1997; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002)

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS)

As another branch of Critical Race Theory, Critical Whiteness Studies is described as a White-led “intervention within race, [that] unmask[s] the nature of racial privilege” (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011, p. 2209). As its name implies, this body of work centers its focus on the ideology of Whiteness, defined by Razzante (2020) as a “socially constructed discursive formation that displays prejudice and discrimination towards people of colour while re-centering White as the norm and ‘preferred’ racial identity” (p. 17). Whiteness is also described by Jupp et al. (2016) as “hegemonic racial structurings of social and material realities operating in the present moment that perpetuate racialized inequalities and injustices” (p. 1154). Whiteness Studies, then, critically examines and challenges normalized Whiteness ideology and its manifestations in society, interrogating Whiteness as a normative, invisible condition against which other non-White identities are measured (Thompson, 2004). To do this, Whiteness Studies deeply explores White racial identity as a creator of erroneous binaries (Smith, 2004), exposing the nature of White privilege, White fragility, and White emotionality through analyzing historical and contemporary permeations in society (Razzante, 2020).

Developed from Critical Race Theory’s efforts within Critical Legal Studies of the 1980’s (Ladson-Billings, 2010), Whiteness Studies emerged within CRT’s notions of *Whiteness as a privilege* and *Whiteness as property* (Jupp et al., 2016). According to Jupp et al. (2016), though there are salient differences that exist between CRT and Whiteness Studies, both bodies of work maintain many of the same positions about race and its function in society. Nonetheless, whereas the bulk of race-related research has been traditionally conducted by non-dominant groups from positions of racial oppression and has focused on the racialized “other” from a defensive position against the power of Whiteness (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011), Whiteness

Studies works to interrogate the construction of racial injustice and racial privilege by White hegemony, challenging Whiteness's normalized nature and invisible power (Groenke et al., 2019; Maddamsetti, 2020; Smith, 2004; Steyn & Conway, 2010; Warren, 1999). As such, Whiteness Studies scholars' goals are to shift the focus of studies from the outside margins where critical race theories tend to lie in order to "critically examine what lies at the center of racial institutional power: whiteness" (Warren, 1999, p. 185).

The body of Whiteness Studies scholarship is described in varying terms – some being *Whiteness Studies*, *Critical Whiteness*, *Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS)*, *Antiracist Scholarship*, *Whiteness Theory*, and others simply, *theories of Whiteness* – yet all encompass the theory's inherently critical approach centered on interrogating Whiteness as a normalized ideology (Smith, 2004). As such, all bodies of Whiteness Studies, regardless of their specific label, include the following defining goals: to advocate for antiracist social practice through social change, to challenge White power and dominance, and to critically understand and engage with "the power and privilege embedded in the cultural center of whiteness" (Warren, 1999, p. 186). Thus, scholars employing any form of Whiteness Studies or Critical Whiteness concur that "Whiteness is connected to institutionalized power and privileges that benefit White Americans" (Rogers & Christian, 2007, p. 23), and share intentions to expose Whiteness's normalized ideologies, invisibility, neutrality, and privileging in all of its forms in society (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Smith, 2004; Thompson, 2004).

Whiteness Studies seems to have significantly expanded in educational scholarship in recent years. For instance, given recent increases in cultural diversity in the U.S. (Cilluffo & Cohn, 2019), and, subsequently, in U.S. schools, many Whiteness Studies scholars focus their work on analyzing and reconstituting systems associated with teacher preparation, as White

teachers continue to comprise the majority of the teaching base despite a mismatched correspondence of students of color (Jupp et al., 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016). Additionally, as curricula have adopted more seemingly diverse materials in attempts to match the demographics of their student body, and as teacher preparation programs and professional development courses have taken on such labels as *multicultural*, *diverse*, and *culturally relevant*, Whiteness Studies has been utilized as a theoretical base for examining authenticity and discourses within these various contexts (Jupp et al., 2016). As such, critical scholars are confronting Whiteness within practices and policies in contexts of the U.S. education system, situating studies around various aspects as curriculum, standardized testing, instructional practices, hegemonic structures, pedagogies, and the overall White culture of U.S. schools, education systems, and teacher preparation programs (Jupp et al., 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Ohito, 2020). These works have branched into various bodies of work as Critical Whiteness Pedagogy, first- and second-wave White Teacher Identity Studies (Shim, 2020), and, among a few others, Second-Wave Critical Whiteness Studies (Tanner, 2020).

In the field of children's and young adult literature, no known studies have applied Critical Whiteness Studies as a theoretical framework specifically to Latinx children's literature, though the theory has been utilized as a means of critiquing diverse children's and young adult literature. Rogers and Christian (2007), for example, utilized Whiteness studies as a basis on which to lead discussions about racism in children's books with pre-service teachers. In this study, the authors and pre-service teachers applied tenets of Whiteness studies in order to critically examine children's books for indications of literary strategies attempting to racialize White characters, finding themes related to White talk and colorblindness. Schieble (2012) also utilized Whiteness studies to critically analyze discourses of Whiteness in young adult novels

and to highlight ways in which critical conversations contribute to social justice education in secondary classrooms. Additionally, Groenke et al. (2019) offer several examples of ways in which to apply a Critical Whiteness Studies lens to young adult novels. In their paper, the authors establish that Whiteness permeates children's and young adult literature through problematic representations and stereotypes of non-White individuals and groups portrayed by White authors.

Drawing from these examples, the present study sought to examine the ways in which Whiteness is perpetuated within Latinx children's books, particularly through stereotypical portrayals. Applying Thompson's (2004) ideas surrounding Whiteness as an invisible, normalized ideology against which other non-White discourses are measured, this analysis critically analyzed ways in which books' narratives and themes perpetuate and/or challenge Whiteness in Latinx children's books. As such, I applied the following tenets of CWS as I examined Whiteness and White characters in relation to Latinx groups and culture for the present study:

- Challenging Whiteness through examining majoritarian and stereotypical stories (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Smith, 2004; Thompson, 2004)
- Promoting counter-narratives of groups marginalized by White hegemony (Maddamsetti, 2020; Smith, 2004; Steyn & Conway, 2010; Warren, 1999)
- Examining Whiteness as a normative, invisible standard against which all other non-White groups are measured (Thompson, 2004)

Combined Theoretical Framework

Strunk and Betties (2019), referring to theoretical frameworks, state, "The most compelling educational research often mobilizes pieces of more than one theory, pulling

conceptual tools from more than one framework” (p. 78). Lois Tyson (2015), using a metaphor of flowers and bouquets, suggests that theories are not distinct entities as basins of flowers at a floral shop, separated into individual containers as to display each one’s unique properties. Rather, Tyson (2015) suggests, theories are likened to a floral bouquet, individually and uniquely created with various buds and blossoms, whereas some overlap and share space with others for varying purposes and in diverse circumstances. Due to this study’s multidimensional goals and purposes, I adopted these sentiments regarding theoretical frameworks by combining tenets from both Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies in order to offer a comprehensive theoretical and analytical lens through which to engage with this analysis.

First, as stated previously, both Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies were utilized to inform my selection of texts for this analysis. Primarily, nonetheless, the theories were applied as I engaged in a critical analysis of the Latinx picture books’ narratives and themes in order to analyze ways in which stories’ plots and themes challenge or perpetuate stereotypes of Latinx communities, as well as to compare authors’ insider and outsider statuses to books’ primary themes. Figure 3.1 depicts a visual to represent this application and is followed by an in-depth explanation of how these were applied.

Examining Plots and Themes. *Plot* in children’s literature can be defined as “the sequence of events that form the narrative” (Smith et al., 2106), whereas *theme* refers to the central idea or topic that ties a book’s meaning together (Nodelman, 1996). Themes can often be

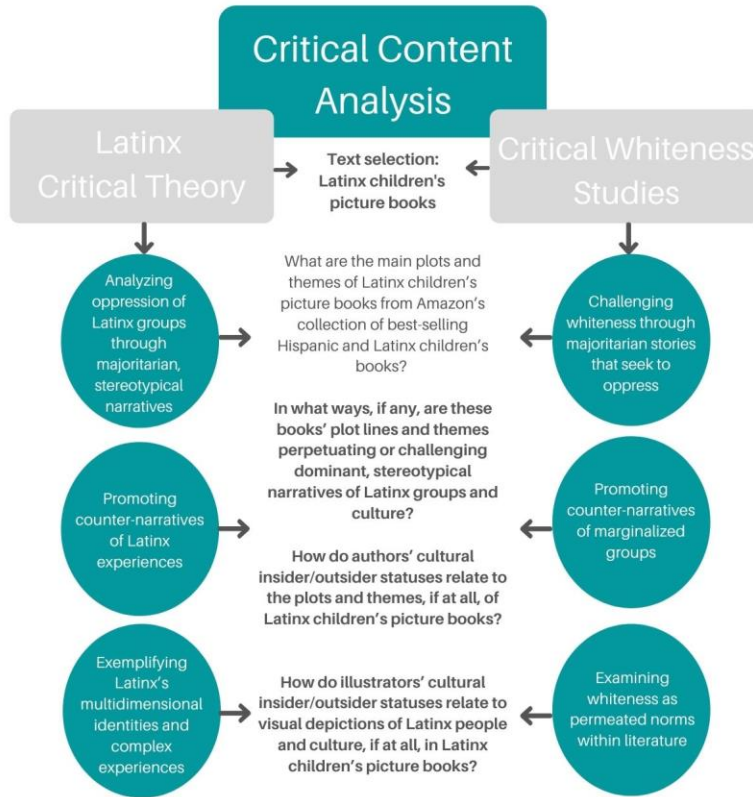


Figure 3.1. Theoretical Framework

explicitly stated and easily identifiable, or incorporated in a more implicit manner that requires the reader to analyze the text from various angles (Brakas & Pittman-Smith, 2005). Themes can also be universal in nature – such as a children’s book about patience – or they can be culturally specific, offering ideas around such topics as beliefs and practices specific to an individual culture or identity (Brakas & Pittman-Smith, 2005).

A book’s theme is arguably one of its most important aspects. Identifying, comparing, and classifying information based on shared (or dissimilar) characteristics is part of our nature as human beings and how we come to make sense of the world (Brakas & Pittman-Smith, 2005). As such, the thematic topic of a book is even quite often the aspect that defines a book and its place and categorization in various contexts (Brakas & Pittman-Smith, 2005). In the U.S. classroom context, much of this is capitalized on in literacy education when students are taught how to identify books’ themes. Literacy curricula and instruction across grade levels consistently involve reading standards that require students to locate and analyze themes of texts using a variety of skills and tools. These standards involve such objectives as identifying the main ideas of stories with supporting details, comparing texts with similar themes or topics, determining authors’ purposes, as well as utilizing illustrations to gain understanding of texts’ meanings (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.).

Books’ themes can be interpreted differently by different readers, depending on the various schemas and levels of background knowledge those readers bring to the text (Brakas & Pittman-Smith, 2005). Brakas and Pittman-Smith (2005) state that, given the different factors that can influence one’s interpretation of a book’s theme, especially when the theme is culturally specific, critical discussions of these themes with students open up opportunities for “expanding or altering cultural schemata” (p. 6). Considering the emphasis on books’ themes in the

classroom context, as well as the roles of thematic topics in organizing and classifying information, a book's theme is an aspect that warrants critical analysis.

For this first part of the analysis, as I engaged with my first research question, I conducted a surface-level examination of books' main plots by identifying the main events and ideas of the stories utilizing both textual and visual depictions, consistent with the English Language Arts instructional strategies outlined by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (n.d.) for identifying stories' main events and details as well as texts' meanings. Then, I used these plots and storylines to determine each book's main theme, which included the central idea of a text and each story's primary message, lesson, or moral, embodying what Tyson (2015) refers to as "*reading 'with the grain'*" (p. 6). As such, the themes identified moved beyond the narrative of the texts in that they did not simply state what each story was about, but what the story had to offer in terms of the plot's significance and meaning. For this component, given that the purpose was solely to identify the authors' intentions in writing the story, tenets from Critical Whiteness Studies and LatCrit Theory surrounding dominant narratives and counter-stories simply served as a lens by which I examined plots and themes and how the authors intended to portray Latinx characters and experiences.

Critically Analyzing Stories' Plots and Themes. After examining and recording each book's plot and theme, I then critically examined these plots and themes through character and cultural representations using both the stories' texts and illustrations, embodying Tyson's (2015) concepts of "*reading 'against the grain'*" (p. 7). I used this basis to purposefully seek out patterns in plots and themes as they related to stereotypical, dominant stories as well as counter-stories of Latinx experiences, thereby analyzing ways in which books' stories either perpetuate

or challenge dominant narratives of Latinx groups in the sociopolitical context of the U.S. educational system.

The U.S. has a complicated and ugly history with immigration centered around the capricious nature of Whiteness, likened by Leonardo and Broderick (2011) to a “moving target” of White ideology, whereas “it reserves the right to exclude any person or group for the purposes of racial domination” (pp. 2211-2212). These same scholars also compare Whiteness’s demarcation to a house with a fenced-off territory that purposefully and willingly keeps others out (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). From these vignettes and based on these discussions, I believe these ideologies can be applied today with Latinx groups who must battle such trials as restricted and difficultly-navigated immigration experiences, pervasive ideologies portraying these individuals as “threatening” (Nelson & Davis-Wiley, 2018), and pushbacks against speaking languages other than English (Katznelson & Bernstein, 2017). Particularly in the current condition of the U.S., Latinx groups – whether immigrants to the country or native-born citizens – are faced with an often hostile political and social climate that reinforces these individuals as unwanted, foreign outsiders (Katznelson & Bernstein, 2017; Nelson & Davis-Wiley, 2018).

Looking at ways in which these manifestations are presented within themes of Latinx picture books, scholars have found that narrow, stereotypical narratives surrounding Latinx groups dominate much of the literature base, with stories focusing heavily on such aspects as migration, immigration, holidays, and food (Terrones, 2016). Within these types of themes, there are often incomplete, superficial, and even detrimental representations of Latinx culture. Naidoo (2008) discusses how, prior to the *Américas* awards, “depictions of Latinos in U.S. children’s books conveyed an overall atmosphere of despair stemming from Latinos being ‘rescued’ from

their problems by Anglos or being forced to move to the United States to achieve success” (p. 30). This tendency of children’s books to convey Latinx individuals and cultures as “poor” or “in need” has been a common theme of several children’s books, not just in older literature but in recent depictions as well (see e.g., Pérez Huber et al., 2020).

Additionally, much of Latinx children’s literature tends to focus themes on the experiences of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans (Acevido, 2017), or simply combines Latinx themes and content into one broad category that fails to distinguish between the complexities of Latinx identities (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003). Other problematic representations within themes of Latinx literature include clichéd, traditional gender roles, such as men working outside of the home while women stay home doing household chores and taking care of children (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Gomez, 2003), simplified depictions of Latinx culture through the overuse of food, holidays, and clothing (Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997; Domke, 2020), and even stories mocking the Spanish language (Martínez-Roldán, 2013).

In this regard, Latinx children’s literature has the potential to either maintain these types of negative ideologies or challenge them through offering realistic and authentic representations of Latinx cultures and narratives (Naidoo & Lopez-Robertson, 2007). However, as outlined above and in chapter two, research in the field often reveals the former, regrettably, by revealing stereotypical representations of Latinx culture in children’s books as well as narratives that focus on cultural assimilation (see e.g., Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Chappel & Faltis, 2007). Nonetheless, Latinx children’s books can also offer realistic and authentic portrayals of Latinx students’ lived experiences, creating a means by which students can take pride in their cultural identities and personal experiences (Naidoo & Lopez-Robertson, 2007).

Terrones (2016) states that an effective critical lens is one that should be able to utilize counter-storytelling to challenge “dominant, racist cultural stereotypes and assumptions...found in narrative storylines” (p. 245). Drawing from CWS’s premises that Whiteness operates as an ideology in curriculum, educational policy, and in the social context of schooling (Gillborn, 2005, 2006; Leonardo, 2009), the underlying goal of my work was to explore the ways in which white supremacy takes on roles of pedagogy through Latinx children’s literature. In addition, this work sought out ways that manifestations of Whiteness are challenged through counter-narratives of Latinx groups.

Drawing from this, after examining each book’s primary plot line and determining books’ main narratives and overall themes, I then critically analyzed these narratives and themes based on books’ textual and visual portrayals of Latinx characters, culture, and experiences. For this component, I integrated my selected tenets from CWS and LatCrit in order to examine ways in which books’ stories and illustrations contribute to *or* challenge dominant, normalized narratives of Latinx groups and culture in children’s books. This involved me applying LatCrit’s tenets of promoting counter-stories and exemplifying Latinxs’ complex experiences and multidimensional identities (Pérez Huber, 2010; Hernandez-Truyol et al., 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002), as well as CWS’s tenets of challenging Whiteness through dominant narratives, promoting counter-stories of marginalized groups, and examining Whiteness as permeated norms within literature (Groenke et al., 2019; Rogers & Christian, 2007). As part of examining the themes, in addition, I sought out identity specifications of the Latinx characters in order to determine each book’s cultural specificity. As such, I engaged with ways in which the picture books in this analysis *other* or maintain stereotypes of the Latinx culture or language

(Maddamsetti, 2020; Thompson, 2004), or offer counter-narratives that portray authentic and empowering representations of Latinx culture and groups.

As part of examining these themes and seeking out ways in which narratives and portrayals maintain or challenge dominant stories of Latinx groups, CWS and LatCrit Theory were also utilized to offer a foundation from which to examine Spanish and English linguistic representations in the books' texts. According to Davila and de Bradley (2010), language, much like citizenship, is utilized as a "barrier" within institutional and social systems in order to "oppress people based on factors that do not fit within white social norms" (p. 43). As an example, Yip and Garcia (2015) argue that the failure of many school systems to take into account students' multilingual backgrounds and abilities while promoting language skills in only the dominant language denies these students an equitable education and promotes success measured by such language-dominated constructions as standardized assessments, whereas those from the dominant group primarily succeed. Additionally, Leonardo and Broderick (2011) state, "through the reification and subsequent hegemony of White people, Whiteness is transformed into the common sense that becomes law" (p. 2210). Applied to children's literature, this can be interpreted as the English language being the "common sense" dominating most children's books and language discourses in U.S. classrooms.

Situating language as a social norm and a means of racial domination and oppression for Latinx groups, Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies offer a foundation that collaboratively addresses the hegemony of White discourses in education that perpetuate racial subordination through language suppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Pulling from CWS's tenets involved with dismantling Whiteness and the invisible nature of its ideology, certain language use patterns and representations in books utilizing both Spanish and English can

contribute to this invisibility of Whiteness pervasive throughout society, whereas English is the expected norm, while other languages are given a small voice at the margins. I combined Latinx Critical Theory's focus on oppressive discourses within education (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) – using language as a factor contributing to Latinxs' marginalization – and Critical Whiteness Studies' interrogation of Whiteness to examine how representations of language – both English and Spanish – were integrated into books' themes, when applicable.

Comparing Narratives to Author Insider/Outsider Status. Within analyses of Latinx and other diverse literature, there have been and continue to be debates regarding who should be writing and creating narratives about particular cultures (Naidoo, 2008; Short & Fox, 2003). As stated previously, the We Need Diverse Books and #OwnVoices movements have become part of the more recent influences in the children's and young adult literature world calling for more diverse representations in literature. #OwnVoices specifically advocates for changes within the publishing industry to include more diverse books written by cultural insiders (Garrison et al., 2018). These movements call for more analyses to address issues surrounding misrepresentation amongst Latinx children's literature.

Crisp et al. (2016) note how the cultural makeup of books' creators and publishers impact the types of stories and characters within those books. As such, Crisp et al. (2016) emphasize how important it is for book publishers and authors to “have the knowledge and cultural intuition needed when working with texts, as it makes it less likely that children's books with problematic, inaccurate, and dishonest treatments continue to make their way into classrooms and the hands of young readers” (p. 30). This implies that authors' racial and cultural identities hold a heavy influence on the stories they create, and it is from this perspective that this analysis sought to examine authors' statuses relative to the narratives and themes of the books in this study.

For this component of the analysis, I applied LatCrit Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies to examine and compare books' narratives and themes as they related to authors' cultural insider and outsider identities. Specifically, LatCrit Theory's tenets of challenging dominant ideologies (Fránquiz et al., 2011) and promoting counter-narratives of Latinx groups and individuals (Delgado, 1989) were utilized to examine these themes relative to author statuses, while CWS offered an angle by which to explore how books promote Eurocentricism and the domination of Whiteness in children's literature (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). Particularly, Critical Whiteness Studies' tenets were applied to critically engage with ways in which Latinx representations and/or themes of cultural assimilation promote or disrupt Whiteness in these stories' narratives, and to examine the means by which those narratives situate Whiteness as a normalized, invisible backdrop (Thompson, 2004) while *othering* or setting apart the Latinx experience.

Data Sources and Context

I selected books for this study from Amazon's "Best Sellers in Children's Hispanic and Latino Books" list available on their website in order to locate the top fiction best-selling picture books authored by insiders to Latinx culture and the top fiction best-sellers authored by Latinx outsiders. Due to time constraints and intentions to include an even comparison among author status, I selected only the top selling five books within the two categories of author status from this list, resulting in a total of ten books. In order to determine authors' cultural statuses, I used the Cooperative Children's Book Center's (n.d.) guidelines for identifying author status. This involved consulting online biographies and websites, as well as tending to information indicating authors as award recipients of Latinx based awards, such as the Pura Belpré, Tomas Rivera Mexican-American Children's Book Award, and the Américas awards (Nillson, 2005). Also for

the purposes of this study and in order to offer relatively timely and relevant implications in the context of the current U.S. social climate, I sought to limit my selection to only include picture books published from 2015 to the present day.

Due to the nature of this study and given that no human participants were involved, I conducted the content analysis independently and in the context of a private work environment that solely involved my own autonomous analysis. Nevertheless, in order to ensure validation of the data selection process, I enlisted two colleagues within my field of children's literature studies to aid me in confirming the cultural statuses of the authors for each book selected from Amazon using this study's criteria. These individuals and I worked separately using the list of books from the "Best Sellers in Children's Hispanic and Latino Books" on a specified date, and conferred regarding our conclusions prior to the analysis as a way to offer a level of agreement for the data collection process.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection for this study began by first determining which books would be selected for this analysis. My choice to utilize Critical Whiteness Studies and Latinx Critical Theory as my theoretical framework informed my selection of texts for this analysis, leading me to search for recently-published and popular Latinx-themed children's picture books from Amazon's "Best Sellers in Children's Hispanic and Latino Books" list. In order to establish which books from this list would be included in the analysis given the study's parameters, it was necessary to first analyze books to some extent in order to determine the books' copyright dates, classifications as picture books, genres, inclusion of Latinx content, as well as their authors' identities as Latinx insiders or outsiders.

Accordingly, starting at the beginning of the list where the top-selling book was listed, I began by recording any books in succession published from 2015 to the present day that fit the criteria for a picture book based on its inclusion of illustrations as well as its number of pages, according to Amazon's preview and descriptive information. Also, before selecting a book, I researched its genre utilizing Google Book's or Scholastic's categorizations, ensuring that it was categorized as fitting within any fictional genre. I also recorded any awards granted to books, when applicable, compiling all information into a spreadsheet. In an effort to gain insight into distinct Latinx narratives written by different authors, I did not include more than one book from any given author. In any case when there was more than one book authored by the same individual that fit my criteria on this list, I simply included the book ranked the highest on the list in terms of its best-selling status, while leaving the other or others out. I also did not include books created as part of popular series that were not authored by a single individual – such as *Dora the Explorer* series books that were authored by a publishing house rather than by a single author – as my goal was to seek out individual authors in order to examine these individuals' cultural statuses in relation to books' themes. I also did not include any Spanish-only books due to my limited proficiency in Spanish.

Then, in order to determine authors' cultural identities relative to Latinx insider or outsider status, I utilized methods outlined by the CCBC (2020) for determining authors' ethnic identities, seeking to locate information that included direct identifiers to help me determine authors' statuses as Latinx insiders or outsiders. As such, I sought out publisher or author websites by first checking authors' pages in books' main sales pages on Amazon when those links were available. In addition, I resorted to Google searches as a means of creating a more precise search of authors' names in relation to their identity, especially when that information

was not clear in Amazon's biographies, adding such key terms as *biography* and *book awards*. Utilizing these search methods, and taking into account eligibility for race- or ethnicity-based awards, such as the Pura Belpré award, I was able to determine all authors' statuses relative to Latinx identity.

I continued this process consecutively through the list of "Best Sellers in Children's Hispanic and Latino Books" and was able to locate five fictional picture books authored by Latinx insiders that fit within all other selection criteria. However, I was not able to locate five books authored by non-Latinx authors within the list that were published from 2015 to the present day. As such, I widened my criteria to include books published from 2013 to the present day instead in order to locate the amount of books needed that fit all other criteria. Following this modification to my search criteria, I revisited the list in order to locate the five top selling books authored by Latinx authors and the five top selling books authored by non-Latinx authors that were classified as picture books, that fit within a fictional genre, and that were published from 2013 to the present day.

Table 3.1 presents titles for each of the books selected for this study, along with books' authors and their cultural statuses. Books are listed in the order they appeared on Amazon's list on March 14, 2021. Given that this list updates hourly, the books were all sought out from the list on the same day, though some ranking changed slightly within the list throughout the selection process. Nonetheless, the top five books written by cultural insiders and top five books written by cultural outsiders fitting all selection criteria, including my modifications to publishing year, are as follows in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1. Books Selected

Book Title	Author	Author Latinx Status	Amazon Recognitions	Awards/ Recognitions
<i>Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion</i> (2017)	Gabi Garcia	Cultural insider		
<i>Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You</i> (2019)	Sonia Sotomayor	Cultural insider	Amazon Teachers' Pick	Amazon Teachers' Pick; A #1 <i>New York Times</i> bestseller; Winner of the Schneider Family Book Award
<i>Julián is a Mermaid</i> (2018)	Jessica Love	Cultural outsider	Amazon Teachers' Pick	Amazon Teachers' Pick; Stonewall Book Award
<i>Sofia Valdez, Future Prez</i> (2019)	Andrea Beaty	Cultural outsider	Amazon Editors' Pick	Amazon Editors' Pick; #1 <i>New York Times</i> bestseller; <i>USA Today</i> bestseller; <i>Wall Street</i> bestseller
<i>Stella's Stellar Hair</i> (2021)	Yesenia Moises	Cultural insider	Amazon Editors' Pick	Amazon Editors' Pick
<i>Islandborn</i> (2018)	Junot Díaz	Cultural insider	Amazon Teachers' Pick	Amazon Teachers' Pick; 2019 Pura Belpré Honor Book for illustrations
<i>Where Are You From?</i> (2019)	Yamile Saied Méndez	Cultural insider	Amazon Teachers' Pick	Amazon Teachers' Pick; 2019 Nerdies Fiction Picture Book Award Winner; Silver Medalist for Bank Street College of Education's Best Spanish Language Picture Books of the Year; One of Kirkus Reviews Best Books of 2019; Mighty Girl's 2019 Book of the Year; One of New York Public Library's Best Books for Kids 2019

Table 3.1 Continued

Book Title	Author	Author Latinx Status	Amazon Recognitions	Awards/ Recognitions
<i>Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes</i> (2013)	Roseanne Greenfield Thong	Cultural outsider	Amazon Teachers' Pick	Amazon Teachers' Pick
<i>La Princesa and the Pea</i> (2017)	Susan Middleton Elya	Cultural outsider		Pura Belpré Medal for illustrations
<i>Brown Baby Lullaby</i> (2020)	Tameka Fryer Brown	Cultural outsider	Amazon Editors' Pick	Amazon Editors' Pick; An Amazon Best Book of the Year; One of NPR's 100 Best Books for Young Readers; A Cooperative Children's Book Center Best Book of the Year; A <i>Parents Latina Magazine</i> Best Latino Children's Book of 2020; Anna Dewdney Award Winner

Data Analysis Procedures

Patton (1990) defines content analysis as “the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” (p. 82). Though this definition outlines a straightforward approach to content analysis, the critical component of this study necessitates a more complex and nuanced method, particularly considering my status as an outsider to Latinx identity. As such, prior to engaging in this analysis, it was, first, necessary that I fully immerse myself in literature surrounding narratives and elements of Latinx picture books in order to better understand issues of representation as well as dominant storylines and stereotypes. Also, in order to prepare for an analysis guided by both Critical Whiteness Studies and Latinx Critical Theory, I engaged with close readings surrounding these theories relevant to Latinx children’s books from a culturally relevant perspective, selecting tenets from each to serve as my theoretical guide.

Having done this, my first step in the analysis drew upon Short’s (2017) position surrounding content analyses, whereas they highlight the importance of reading first “as a reader, rather than as a researcher” (p. 8). Thus, I engaged in the first reading of each book in this manner, simply to acquaint with and enjoy the stories. I then aimed to answer the first research question, *What are the main plots and themes of Latinx children’s picture books from Amazon’s collection of best-selling Hispanic and Latinx children’s books?* To address this inquiry, I utilized the same means of locating main ideas and details outlined by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (n.d.), and the means by which I taught my students how to understand a literary text’s plot and theme.

Specifically, these standards emphasize using words and illustrations in order to gain an understanding of how stories’ characters, settings, and events create the main plot line (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). Adopting these ideas as well as Broadway and Conkle’s

(2011) concepts surrounding illustrations as “symbols which elicit meaning” (p. 67), I considered the visual images as working alongside the written words of each book to create the stories’ narratives. As such, I engaged in the second reading of each book with the purpose of identifying the plot, utilizing both textual and illustrative elements to create meanings of the stories, and taking notes of the book’s details and events as conveyed by the written words and illustrations that I believed to contribute to the main storyline. This ultimately led me to identify the main idea of the text, and, then, the overall theme or message of the story. After doing this for each text, I searched for any commonalities between themes and plots lines, recording those as they applied. This component encompassed Tyson’s (2015) concepts of “*reading ‘with the grain’*” (p. 6) in order to understand the authors’ intentions.

On the contrary, in order to critically analyze the texts and read “*against the grain’*” (Tyson, 2015, p. 7), after initially recording each book’s main plot and theme, I addressed the second research question, *In what ways, if any, are these books’ plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and cultures?* For this component, I followed Glesne’s (1999) approaches regarding prolonged engagement with texts and Krippendorff’s (2003) emphases surrounding the need for systematic readings of texts to engage in multiple readings of each book. Using a similar approach to Brooks (2017) in their critical content analysis applying Critical Race Theory, I utilized the selected tenets from CWS and LatCrit Theory to serve as my theoretical guide, by which I sought out markers of these tenets within each book’s written words and illustrations. In order to hone in even more within each tenet, nonetheless, I followed a deductive approach to organize the data, whereas I utilized guiding questions associated with each theoretical tenet to create categories in which I classified each book’s content (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Table 3.2 depicts this process.

Table 3.2. Analytical Process

Theory	Theoretical Tenet	Guiding Questions	Codes and Memos	Themes	Overall Message (Challenging or Perpetuating Dominant Narratives)
Latinx Critical Theory	Exemplifying Latinxs' multidimensional identities and complex experiences (Osorio, 2018; Pérez Huber, 2010; Solórzano, 1998; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002)	<p>What do the text and visual images suggest about Latinxs' cultures and lived experiences?</p> <p>What culturally specific markers, if any, are found in the story's text and illustrations?</p>	<p>Words:</p> <p>Images:</p> <p>Both:</p>		
Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies combined	Analyzing barriers rooted in the oppression of Latinx groups through examining majoritarian stories; Challenging Whiteness through examining majoritarian stories about marginalized populations (Maddamsetti, 2020; Smith, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Steyn & Conway, 2010; Warren, 1999)	<p>Who is telling the story?</p> <p>Whose voice is being left out, and whose voice is emphasized?</p> <p>What, if any, stereotypical elements about Latinx's cultures and experiences exist?</p> <p>How is the Spanish language used within the text and to create the narrative?</p>	<p>Words:</p> <p>Images:</p> <p>Both:</p>		

Table 3.2 Continued

Theory	Theoretical Tenet	Guiding Questions	Codes and Memos	Themes	Overall Message (Challenging or Perpetuating Dominant Narratives)
Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies combined	Promoting counter-stories of Latinx groups and individuals (Hernandez-Truyol et al., 2006; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Osorio, 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002)	<p>What, if any, counter-stories of Latinx groups exist?</p> <p>In what ways, if any, do stories challenge stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and individuals?</p>	<p>Words:</p> <p>Images:</p> <p>Both:</p>		
Critical Whiteness Studies	Examining Whiteness as permeated norms within literature (Groenke et al., 2019; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Rogers & Christian, 2007; Smith, 2004; Thomas, 2016; Thompson, 2004; Warren, 1999)	<p>How are literary and illustrative elements used to present White characters, experiences, and stories in relation to Latinx characters?</p> <p>What or whose behaviors and experiences are presented as normal?</p> <p>How is Spanish used in relation to English?</p>	<p>Words:</p> <p>Images:</p> <p>Both:</p>		

During each repeated reading, as I engaged with the guiding questions, I examined each book's words and illustrations, writing memos of my thoughts and interpretations as they connected to the selected tenets of LatCrit Theory and CWS. From there, I used my engagement with these questions as well as my research memos to deductively code (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019) each component of text and the visual images illustrating the selected tenets. I completed this process with each book individually, applying tenets and guiding questions to both the written text and illustrations separately as well as in conjunction. With this, I aimed to present each book's content as either challenging dominant narratives of Latinx culture and experiences – thus, working to promote counter-narratives – or perpetuating majoritarian stories and stereotypical elements that serve, even if unintentionally, to oppress.

Then, in order to address the third research question, *How do authors' cultural insider/outsider statuses relate, if at all, to the plots and themes of Latinx children's picture books?*, I revisited authors' insider and outsider perspectives relative to the selected books in order to make comparisons among books' themes and overall narratives as portrayed by books' words and illustrations. Here, I engaged with my memos and books' plots and themes to search for any patterns or commonalities in regard to authors' cultural insider and outsider statuses.

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this study was to critically analyze Latinx children's fictional picture books. The present chapter offered an explication of this study's critical content analysis and the theoretical framework guiding it. Also, this chapter provided a focused overview of the study's data sources, context, as well as data collection and analysis methods. The next chapter will outline the findings from this analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the main plots and themes of best-selling Latinx children's picture books and to critically analyze ways in which stories challenge or perpetuate dominant, stereotypical Latinx narratives. This study also aimed to compare author cultural statuses to the plots and themes of the books analyzed. Specifically, this study utilized a critical content analysis to address the following questions:

1. What are the main plots and themes of Latinx children's picture books from Amazon's collection of best-selling Hispanic and Latinx children's books?
2. In what ways, if any, are these books' plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and cultures?
3. How do authors' cultural insider/outsider statuses relate, if at all, to the plots and themes of Latinx children's picture books?

As outlined in the previous chapters, the children's books at the center of this analysis were retrieved from Amazon's list of "Best Sellers in Children's Hispanic and Latino Books," whereas I selected the top five best-selling books written by Latinx authors (cultural insiders) and the top five best-selling books written by non-Latinx authors (cultural outsiders). The present chapter reports the findings from this critical content analysis.

Examining Main Plots and Themes

The findings of the first research question, *What are the main plots and themes of Latinx children's picture books from Amazon's collection of best-selling Hispanic and Latinx children's books?* are presented below in Table 4.1, along with a brief summary of thematic findings.

For this part of the analysis, reading primarily "*with the grain*" (Tyson, 2015) and seeking out the authors' intentions regarding each book's plot and theme, I found a variety of

Table 4.1. Plots and Themes

Theme(s)	Plot	Book Title
Self-love and self-acceptance; Being yourself	Julian loves mermaids. On the bus with Nana one day, he spots three women dressed as mermaids. Inspired by this, Julian decides to dress himself as a mermaid upon returning home. When Nana discovers Julian in his mermaid attire, her face is full of uncertainty. To Julian's surprise, however, Nana takes Julian on a spontaneous trip to see the mermaids, as Julian proudly displays his mermaid costume. Julian learns that he, too, can be a mermaid.	<i>Julían is a Mermaid</i> (Love, 2018)
	Esperanza feels nervous about the upcoming class play. After finding a heart-shaped rock, she decides this is a sign that she should put her heart and kindness into all she does, or “listen with her heart.” Esperanza is presented with several opportunities to do just that, especially as she befriends a new student at school, Bao. As the story progresses, Esperanza finds herself becoming a good friend to Bao, but not to herself. An incident during the class play reminds Esperanza that she hasn't been kind to herself, and she rediscovers the importance of not only being a good friend to others, but also to herself.	<i>Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion</i> (Garcia, 2017)
	Stella wakes up on the day of her Big Star Little Gala only to find that her hair is not the style she was expecting, and she doesn't know what to do. After encouragement from Momma, Stella jumps on her hoverboard and visits her aunts across the planets, who each give her a unique hairstyle. Stella isn't quite happy with any of the hairstyles, though, and receives some valuable advice about self-love and self-acceptance.	<i>Stella's Stellar Hair</i> (Moises, 2021)

Table 4.1 Continued

Theme(s)	Plot	Book Title
Celebrating differences; Pride in one's heritage or uniqueness	Lola attends a "school of faraway places" (Díaz, 2018, line 2). One day when Lola's teacher asks the students in her class to draw the place from which their families emigrated, Lola doesn't know what to draw, as she was only a baby when she left her home country. While everyone else excitedly discusses and plans their drawings, Lola struggles to remember her home. With the help of her friends and family, Lola is finally able to create a perfect drawing of the Island. Lola learns that even if she doesn't remember a place, that place can still be in her.	<i>Islandborn</i> (Díaz, 2018)
	Sonia is planting a garden with her friends, all of whom are unique. From nonverbal autism to diabetes, each friend describes their individual needs and strengths. Using an analogy of planting a garden, Sonia and her friends show that differences are beautiful.	<i>Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You</i> (Sotomayor, 2019)
	A young girl is always asked where she is from. Having been asked this question many times without ever having an answer to satisfy her inquirers, she turns to her grandfather for help. Abuelo answers by describing the many people, places, and things that make the girls' heritage special. Though she never gets the answer she sought out, she understands the importance of love, family, and heritage.	<i>Where Are You From?</i> (Méndez, 2019)
Having courage and bravery to stand up for your values; Making a difference	Sofia loves helping people and working in her community with Abuelo. One day while walking home, Abuelo falls from a nearby landfill and is injured. This angers Sofia and gives her a creative idea: get rid of Mount Trashmore and build a park in its place. However, Sofia finds that gaining support and assistance to carry out this goal is not as easy as it seems. Sofia learns the importance of bravery and taking a stand for what you believe in.	<i>Sofia Valdez, Future Prez</i> (Beaty, 2019)
A sleepy baby; Parents' love for their baby	The little baby is happy and active. All evening long, he zooms, bounces, and plays. As the evening turns to night, the little baby grows sleepy. Cuddles and love from his mom and dad ease him into a peaceful, calm sleep.	<i>Brown Baby Lullaby</i> (Brown, 2020)
Shapes are found in our everyday world.	The author walks readers through everyday life observing various shapes. Though there is no primary plot or sequence of events, readers are able to see how different shapes are part of the world.	<i>Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes</i> (Thong, 2013)

Table 4.1 Continued

Theme(s)	Plot	Book Title
Fairytale; A prince searching for a princess	The prince, or <i>el príncipe</i> , wants to find a wife, but his mother, or <i>madre</i> , is picky. One day, a young maiden catches his eye. However, his mother desires to test the girl to see if she is good enough for her son. So, she finds a small pea “fit for a queen” (Elya, 2017, line 14) and places it in the girl's bed under 20 mattresses. If the girl can feel the pea as she sleeps, she passes the test and can marry the queen's son. The girl passes, and the queen approves. The prince and girl are married, and they live happily ever after.	<i>La Princesa and the Pea</i> (Elya, 2017)

plots and themes, though with several commonalities. Specifically, in regard to books' plots, there were many similarities. The plots within seven of the books – *Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion*; *Stella's Stellar Hair*; *Julián is a Mermaid*; *Islandborn*; *Where Are You From?*; *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*; and *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* – all involved the main characters facing a challenge or obstacle, and then overcoming that challenge.

For some stories, these challenges related to personal conflicts with the characters' own internal struggles with growing and understanding themselves, such as those highlighted in *Listening with My Heart*, *Islandborn*, and *Where Are You From?* Other stories' challenges focused on characters battling with aspects of themselves that either they disliked or that conflicted with a societal expectation. This is noticed in *Julián is a Mermaid*, as Julián desires to dress in a way that is not often acceptable to societal gender norms. In *Stella's Stellar Hair*, Stella struggles to accept her natural hairstyle, presumably because it doesn't "fit" the look expected for the fancy gala she is planning to attend. In *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, Sofia faces challenges related to adults' views of her as a child seeking to make a large change in the city, and must prove herself to be capable. While *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* centers more on the characters' strengths, the text either directly mentions or subtly alludes to each character's challenge to allow the reader to understand the barriers each individual might face in the world as a result of their physical or mental condition or disability. Nonetheless, the written and visual descriptions of the characters' conditions seem to purposefully highlight the ways in which each individual overcomes those barriers, focusing readers' attention on the strengths resulting from these conditions that make each person unique.

For my examination of books' themes, I found that three of the books – *Listening with*

My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion, *Stella's Stellar Hair*, and *Julián is a Mermaid* – centered heavily on self-love and self-acceptance. In *Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion*, the story focused on being kind to oneself, especially through mistakes. *Stella's Stellar Hair* followed with a similar theme, yet focused more on physical aspects, as the story tells of a young girl who is not happy with her hair and must learn to love herself just the way she is. Similarly, *Julián is a Mermaid* promoted self-love and acceptance, though in a way that focuses more on gender identity, as Julián, a boy, loves and wants to dress like mermaids, but is uncertain that his Nana will approve.

Several books also included themes highlighting differences. *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*, for example, centered on celebrating various conditions and differences as noted through its analogy to a garden, “Thousands of plants bloom together, but every flower, every berry, and every leaf is different” (Sotomayor, 2019, para. 1). Two other books with themes celebrating differences were *Islandborn* and *Where Are You From?* Unlike *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*, however, these books were focused on celebrating and being proud of one's heritage and culture.

The remaining books offered a variety of unrelated themes. The theme of *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* focused on empowerment and “standing up for what you believe in to make a difference in the world” (Beatty, 2019, front jacket cover, para. 3), even when alone and afraid. *Brown Baby Lullaby* is a story centered on family – specifically, parents' love for a playful baby. The remaining two books from this analysis, *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes* and *La Princesa and the Pea* involved simple themes related to learning shapes and a retold fairytale centered on a prince finding a princess, respectively.

Critically Analyzing Stories' Plots and Themes

Through a critical analysis of each book, focusing primarily on “reading *‘against the grain’*” (Tyson, 2015, p. 7) of stories, I sought to answer the second research question, *In what ways, if any, are these books’ plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and cultures?* To do this, I utilized the guiding questions from Table 2.1 within each theoretical category in order to apply the selected tenets from both LatCrit Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies, highlighting areas from each book’s words and illustrations that reflected these tenets. The notes and memos generated from each individual book were then placed into the theoretical categories, aligning with a deductive approach to coding the data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

By combining the theories and applying deductive coding in this way, I specifically sought to examine indications of majoritarian stories rooted in Whiteness as well as counter-narratives of Latinx individuals, groups, and cultures. While my application of Latinx Critical Theory focused heavily on analyzing Latinx counter-stories and, thus, necessitated critical examinations of the Latinx characters and elements within the books, applying Critical Whiteness Studies tenets required a critical examination of the White characters as well, particularly to analyze discourses and ways in which these characters were portrayed in relation to the Latinx characters. Below, I have outlined the findings as commonalities between books based on my application of LatCrit Theory and CWS tenets within each theoretical category. Though the commonalities identified do not necessarily apply to each book in the analysis, they were noticed as salient codes in several books, and thus, contributed to the analysis’ findings. Table 4.2 highlights these themes from pertinent books, and a full presentation of these findings

Table 4.2. Categorical Findings

Theoretical Category	Theme	Number of Books
LatCrit Theory: Exemplifying Latinxs' Multidimensional Identities and Complex Experiences	Family	9
	Setting/Community	10
	Cultural Origins	6
	Character Traits	10
LatCrit Theory and CWS: Analyzing Barriers Rooted in the Oppression of Latinx Groups Through Examining Majoritarian Stories; Challenging Whiteness Through Examining Majoritarian Stories About Marginalized Populations	Voice	10
	Language Use	6
	Stereotypical Cultural Elements	6
	Traditional Gender Roles	3
LatCrit Theory and CWS: Promoting Counter-Stories of Latinx Groups and Individuals	Nontraditional Gender Roles	3
	Skin Variations	10
	Varied Storylines and Experiences	10
CWS: Examining Whiteness as Permeated Norms Within Literature	Limited White Characters	9
	Roles of Conflict	3
	White Norms	10
	Language Integration	6

follows.

LatCrit Theory: Exemplifying Latinxs' Multidimensional Identities and Complex Experiences

For this component, as outlined in chapter three and in the analytical process in Table 3.2 (p. 66), I applied LatCrit Theory's tenet associated with highlighting the multidimensional identities and complex experiences of Latinx groups and individuals (Osorio, 2018; Pérez Huber, 2010; Solórzano, 1998; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002). Applied to my analysis, this entailed examining books' narratives created by words and images to determine what these elements suggest about Latinx culture and experiences, as well as to analyze the degrees of cultural specificity. Specifically, I engaged with the questions, *What do the text and visual images suggest about Latinxs' cultures and lived experiences?* and *What culturally specific markers, if any, are found in the story's text and illustrations?* Through this process, I noticed several common themes amongst books.

Family. First, within nearly every book analyzed, *family* was a noticeable component, and there was much to be gleaned from each book's portrayal of families. Nine of the ten books included family members of the young protagonists within their storylines, and, overall, the books presented a variety of lifestyles and family dynamics.

The first notice within this theme involved the incorporation of extended family members as caretakers in several of the books. Out of the ten books analyzed, five featured extended family members in roles of primary or secondary caretaking. In *Julian is a Mermaid*, for example, Julian appears to live with his grandmother, and she is portrayed to be his primary caretaker. In *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, Sofia's grandfather, referred to as "Abuelo" in the story, seems to play a significant role in Sofia's life and appears to be Sofia's main caregiver, though it is not entirely clear whether he is her only caregiver. There is a photo in one of the illustrations

in Sofia's bedroom portraying a woman and a small child, which the reader could assume to be Sofia and her mother. Nevertheless, there are no other images or suggestions regarding Sofia's mother, and Abuelo's role in Sofia's life depicts him as a primary caregiver to her.

In *Islandborn*, numerous family members and community members are portrayed as being involved in Lola's life, including her mother, grandmother, cousins, her apartment manager, as well as other individuals within the immediate community. Primarily, nonetheless, Lola lives with both her mother and grandmother, as they are seen living together in both the U.S. and in memories from the Dominican Republic, as well as in a photograph in Lola's bedroom. Lola's grandmother is centered as one of the primary voices as Lola asks questions regarding the island from which her family came, and the text portrays the idea that Lola's grandmother plays a significant role in her life. In a similar manner, in *Where Are You From?*, the grandfather is a primary voice in the story, as the little girl seeks out Abuelo to answer her questions about where she is from. In this story, there are other individuals appearing to be family members of the little girl, as well as a woman appearing to be the grandmother or mother who appears at the end of the story. However, the grandfather's voice is the primary voice throughout the story, and his relationship to the little girl is emphasized throughout their interactions.

Other books featured extended family members as significant parts of the primary characters' lives, even if these family members did not appear to be primary caretakers. For example, in *Stella's Stellar Hair*, the plot centers on Stella visiting each of her aunts on different planets so that these aunts can help her style her hair. Though Stella lives with her mother, her aunts also contribute to her care. In *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes*, though the book does not offer a plot line, throughout the images of shapes in the real world, there are several instances

in which grandparents are portrayed as caretakers of the siblings in the book. In one instance, the grandmother is shown making soup on one page alongside her granddaughter, with the words “Round is a pot of *abuela’s* stew” (Thong, 2013, stanza 3). In another, the same girl is shown playing a letter game with what appears to be her grandfather based on the illustrations, though the text does not specify the man’s identity. Later on, nonetheless, the images show the little girl and her siblings eating dinner with the grandmother and the grandfather from the earlier images. Though other images show the siblings’ mother and portray them as living with her, the grandparents remain in the photos in various caretaking roles as well. These examples salient in most of the books analyzed follow an “It takes a village” approach to children’s upbringing, and portray a multifaceted definition of *family* when comparing the stories.

The portrayals of family in the remaining books contributed to this overall diverse representation. In *La Princesa and the Pea*, though in the context of a fairytale, the illustrations and words suggest that Latinx mothers take on a dominant role in their families, as the mother in this story was depicted as deciding the fate of her son’s marriage. *Brown Baby Lullaby* portrayed a nuclear family consisting solely of a mother and father as caretakers to their baby. Finally, *Listening with My Heart* depicted the mother as Esperanza’s primary caretaker, noticed in illustrations where the mother is preparing to leave for work in business casual attire and in interactions between Esperanza and her mother. The only book in which there was no family portrayed was *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*. The nature of this story and its focus on highlighting individual differences centered more on its disability theme, given that the author’s intention was to bring awareness to diverse abilities and needs of each individual child.

Extending beyond the diverse representations of family provided by most books, there was also an overwhelming theme of “love” and “care” noticed in the words and illustrations of

books that included family. First, the roles that family members played in each of these stories were significant, especially in those stories that involved conflict or overcoming challenges. For example, in *Islandborn*, *Where Are You From?*, and *Stella's Stellar Hair*, Lola, the young girl, and Stella, respectively, seek out their family members to help them solve challenges, and the family members gladly oblige. In *Julian is a Mermaid*, *Listening with My Heart*, and *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, the family members offer help and support to the young characters facing challenges without the characters seeking out help themselves. All of these stories utilize the roles of these family members to aid the main characters in solving their problems and depict the characters' families as sources of support, love, and care.

Also within these books, the visual images especially portray strong feelings of care and love between the protagonists and their family members. For example, in both *Brown Baby Lullaby* and *Listening with My Heart*, the images involving interactions between the young protagonists and their parents depict warmth and care, demonstrated by characters' facial expressions and body language in relation to one another. This can be noticed similarly in the remaining books, where family members are shown embracing the young characters or engaging in actions that demonstrate affection and care.

Setting/Community. One way in which diversity was portrayed throughout the books in this analysis was through the stories' settings, as the communities and neighborhoods depicted in the stories offer a wide range of portrayals. In three stories – *Julian is a Mermaid*, *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, and *Islandborn* – the settings are similar in that they all depict the characters living in a city or urban area, though *Islandborn* offers flashbacks to island scenes where the main character's family used to live. In two stories – *Where Are You From?* and *Brown Baby Lullaby* – the settings are in rural areas, with few houses pictured. *Listening with My Heart* takes place in

what appears to be a suburban setting, as several buildings are shown near the character's house, and the character is easily able to ride her bicycle to school. The remaining stories are varied in their settings, with *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* involving a garden as its primary setting, *Stella's Stellar Hair* offering a fantasy setting in outer space, and *La Princesa and the Pea* depicting a dated setting in Peru. In *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes*, the illustrations depict various city and rural settings within Mexico. Collectively, these stories offered varied depictions of Latinx lives through the settings in which they live.

Cultural Origins. Another area in which I noticed a wide portrayal in diversity was through the books' inclusion of varied Latinx heritages and countries of origin. Few books specified cultures or nationalities through their words, although a few did include indications of cultural specificity through their illustrations. Nonetheless, the scope of countries of origin and heritages portrayed across all books offered a diverse representation of several Latinx cultures.

In *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, there are no indications of specific cultural heritage within the words; however, the illustrations include a small Mexican flag shown above Sofia's bed in her bedroom. This story does not include any other apparent cultural markers apart from this flag, the Spanish language, and Latinx names as indicators of Latinx identity.

In *Round Is a Tortilla*, any indications of cultural specificity are primarily found in the illustrations and in the Spanish words, as well as in the definitions of the glossary. The images portray several generalized Mexican cultural elements, such as mariachi bands, and specify through the glossary Mexican-specific words. The front matter of the book indicates that "Many of the featured objects are Latino in origin" (Thong, 2013, front matter, para. 1) without specifying a particular Latinx origin. Nonetheless, the glossary of the Spanish words in the back of the book utilize "Mexican" or "Mexico" in four of the 22 definitions when defining *masa*,

paletas, *sombrero*, and *zócalo*, while only mentioning South America, Central America, and Spain in two definitions describing *campanas* and *tortillas*. Two other words in the story – *pozole* and *mariachi* – also refer to a type of soup and music, respectively, usually associated with Mexican origins (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a, n.d.b). These words and their definitions in the glossary provide indication that much of the story is centered on Mexican culture, though it appears that the author combined many elements assumed to be associated with Latinx culture into one broad category for the purposes of the book. Though these images and words are primarily indicative of Mexican culture, and even though the author specifies on the front matter than most objects are Latinx in origin, there are U.S. flags shown on two separate occasions – once in an image depicting the town square and park, and another within the illustration of a baseball stadium. In this same image of the baseball stadium, the name shown on the scoreboard is “San Luis Rey Missions,” which, after some light research, does not provide a specific location for a place in the U.S. However, given that California is known for its missions (National Park Service, n.d.), the reader could infer that this is where the story takes place based on that illustration.

For *La Princesa and the Pea*, the reader can gather where the story originates after reading the front jacket cover, as the introduction notes that the story is a “Latino twist on the classic story...captivated by the vibrant art inspired by the culture of Peru” (Elya, 2017, front jacket cover, para. 2). However, were the reader to omit this description on the front jacket cover, there are only subtle indications of another culture that one would need to be familiar with in order to recognize. For example, llamas and alpacas, two of Peru's most iconic creatures (Pattara, 2017) are featured in a few images. Nearly every illustration includes guinea pigs, also known for their presence in Peru (A-Z Animals, n.d.). Other than these specificities, the heritage

is not glaringly obvious to an outsider unfamiliar with Peruvian cultural elements.

The illustrations in *Brown Baby Lullaby* do not give the impression that this family is located in a Latin country, based on the images of a farmhouse located in a large grassy area. Additionally, the food portrayed is very typical of cuisine in the U.S.: spaghetti and meatballs with salad and breadsticks. Thus, it appears this story takes place in the United States, and a specific Latinx heritage is not indicated.

Islandborn and *Where Are You From?* offer the most cultural specificity of all the books that include cultural identifiers. In *Islandborn*, a Dominican flag appears on front cover of the book, on an illustration of Lola's refrigerator, and on a boy's hat from Lola's drawing. While this story does not specify in words the place it is describing, a little reading into the author and the story proves that the island being referenced is the Dominican Republic. As such, the "monster" described in the story refers to "a terrifying embodiment of Rafael Trujillo, the Dominican dictator who orchestrated the 1937 Haitian massacre" (Acree, 2018, para. 7).

In *Where Are You From?*, an outsider reader is left to seek resources outside of the book's offerings to understand where exactly the story's heritage lies. As Abuelo describes to the girl where she is from, the illustrations accompany these descriptions, allowing the reader insight into the richness that is the girl's origin. Throughout these descriptions, there are a few specificities indicating the culture from which this book is written. The most specific and most obvious cultural marker occurs when Abuelo takes the girl to a sculpture in what appears to be the center of a city. Abuelo describes the place on these specific pages as one from which "the grandmothers who search for their grandchildren...[were] always waiting in a plaza, their white handkerchiefs wrapping the sorrow of their thoughts" (Kim, 2019, para. 16). Upon some light research based on this description as well as on the image of the sculpture, inscribed with the

date “25 Mayo 1810,” I was able to determine that the statue is the Pirámide de Mayo, a sculpture located in the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina, created to mark Argentina's revolution of independence (Buenos Aires Ciudad, n.d.).

The remaining books did not offer any apparent indications of cultural specificity.

Character Traits. The final finding within this theoretical category involved the ways in which the stories positively portrayed the Latinx protagonists and other Latinx characters. In nine of the ten books, the main characters appeared to be children of primary or elementary age. The only book that did not involve a main character in this age range was *Brown Baby Lullaby*. Regardless, each of the protagonists in all of the books analyzed, as well as the secondary Latinx characters, were depicted exclusively with positive character traits.

In *Listening with My Heart*, Esperanza is portrayed as a strong individual who overcomes obstacles and is kind to others. In this story, a language barrier is presented, but through Esperanza's Vietnamese friend, Bao, and Esperanza is the one who reaches out to help her friend with his language barrier. In *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*, Sonia is presented as the leader of a group, and as a unique individual who is proud of her differences. Similarly, Julian in *Julian is a Mermaid* is positively portrayed as a unique individual, with a theme that involves being proud of differences surrounding gender norms. In *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, the story overall suggests Latinx individuals are courageous and willing to stand up for their values through its narrative of Sofia's experiences, describing Sofia as a “dreamer” (Beaty, 2019, stanza 3). In *Islandborn*, the characters are depicted as brave as they discuss their struggles with a monster from their past home. *Where Are You From?* depicts characters who are proud of their heritage, and *Brown Baby Lullaby* uses phrases and words to portray Latinxs as *independent, enchanting, brilliant, strong-willed, and sweet*. Additionally, depictions of the main characters in

Sofia Valdez, Future Prez and *Listening with My Heart* emphasize these characters' roles in helping others, another positive trait noted within this category.

LatCrit Theory and CWS: Analyzing Barriers Rooted in the Oppression of Latinx Groups Through Examining Majoritarian Stories; Challenging Whiteness Through Examining Majoritarian Stories About Marginalized Populations

Within this category, I combined tenets from Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies to engage with ways in which stories exhibit majoritarian, stereotypical stories of Latinx groups. The tenets applied were, specifically, those associated with analyzing oppression of Latinx groups through dominant stories— from LatCrit Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) – and challenging Whiteness through dominant narratives – from Critical Whiteness Studies (Maddamsetti, 2020; Warren, 1999). The guiding questions I applied within this category included: *Who is telling the story?; Whose voice is being left out, and whose voice is emphasized?; What, if any, stereotypical elements about Latinx's cultures and experiences exist?; and How is the Spanish language used within the text and to create the narrative?* The common themes within this category are presented below.

Voice. As I engaged with the questions surrounding *voice*, one commonality across the books was the use of voice by authors to center the Latinx characters. Nine of the ten books were presented in third person dialogue, with the remaining book in first person. In those books where third person dialogue was utilized, nonetheless, the protagonists' and primary characters' voices and experiences were those that were centered and emphasized. As such, the books analyzed did not present any minimization to Latinx characters' voices, as these were the voices most prominent in all stories.

Given my application of CWS within this theoretical category, I also made efforts to

examine voices of the White characters in each story, particularly as they compared to the Latinx characters' voices. Out of the ten books, four included characters appearing to be White based on illustrative elements. In these stories, with the exception of *Just Ask! Be Different, be Brave, Be You*, the voices of these White-appearing characters are primarily sidelined and/or portrayed as conflicting voices. In *Listening with My Heart*, the only instance in which White voices are heard is in a scene when Esperanza is recalling a soccer game she had caused her team to lose. She is describing how players from the other team sarcastically called out "Nice work!" (Garcia, 2017, para. 18) when she had missed the ball and, thus, caused her team to lose the game. In this scene, there are three White-appearing characters, and two characters appearing to be Black. However, two of the three White characters are the ones holding their hands to their mouths, making it apparent that they are the ones mocking Esperanza with these words, while the remaining characters laugh at her.

In *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, the White-appearing characters are shown to be Sofia's neighbors, community members, and government leaders. These characters are shown alongside a diverse range of other characters who do not appear to be White, and none of these character's voices – including those of the characters of Color – are specifically identified in the story, as they are simply portrayed as collective voices that counter Sofia's as she is trying to convince her community and people of the City Hall that they need a park. Nonetheless, the city clerk appears White based on illustrations, and hers is the only voice heard from this group of individuals as she opposes and challenges Sofia's plan, telling her "You're only a kid!" (Beatty, 2019, stanza 17).

In *Where Are You From?*, as the girl is describing the questions she is asked about where she is from on the first few pages, there are several peers and adults shown around the little girl

in various inquisitive stances. However, throughout these images, primarily White characters appear to do the asking, as these are the only characters whose mouths are open to speak. These are the only instances in which White voices are heard in this story.

Language Use. Another notice within this category of analysis was in regard to the ways in which Spanish was utilized in texts that included both English and Spanish to create the narratives. I was interested, primarily, in examining the Spanish words' and phrases' purposes in the narratives in order to understand ways in which stories present the languages' roles in the story and in characters' lives.

Of the ten books analyzed, six included Spanish words and phrases within their English text, and none of the books featured their full texts in both languages. Four of the six books that included Spanish – *Islandborn*, *Sofia Valdez*, *Future Prez*, *Brown Baby Lullaby* and *Where Are You From?* – used Spanish sparingly within the English-dominant text, and included atypical, lesser known Spanish words. For example, in *Sofia Valdez*, *Future Prez*, the Spanish text is primarily spoken by Abuelo or inserted on signs or decor. For example, on one occasion, as Abuelo speaks to Sofia to give her courage before she goes to city hall, he says “Te amo, mi vida” (Beaty, 2019, stanza 13). This same phrase is inscribed on Sophia’s cookie bag from her grandfather. *Si, Se Puede!* is written on a petition sign later in the story when the neighbors are gathering, and is also noticed on Sofia's pin. *Bienvenido* is also inscribed on a birdhouse. In this story, Spanish appears to be added to the text to portray the language as Abuelo’s primary language and as a special part of the communication between the characters and the community.

In *Islandborn*, Spanish is used in the story on some occasions. It is used to reference characters’ titles, such as *abuela*, *prima*, *Mami*, and *hija*. As the characters are describing the island to Lola, they utilize Spanish in various moments, such as describing the *agua de coco* and

güira. “No problema” is spoken by Lola's teacher (Díaz, 2018, para. 4), and characters wish *Bendición!* Given the storyline and narrative, the Spanish phrases are primarily utilized in the characters’ narratives as they describe their former home.

In *Where Are You From?*, Spanish is used sparingly – only for the grandfather’s title, *Abuelo*, and by the grandfather to describe the *Pampas*, the *gaucho*, and *Señor Cielo's belly*. In *Brown Baby Lullaby*, Spanish words and phrases are used intermittently and without any apparent purposes other than to demonstrate communication between the parents and the baby. The mother refers to her son as *bebito* on the front jacket cover and as *mi hijo* on the first page, but he is subsequently referred to as *baby* the remainder of the story. Other Spanish phrases and words in this story include, “¡Muy activo!” (Brown, 2020, para. 5), and “Vamos, fussy baby” (para. 7) when the mother is describing and communicating with the baby. The mother also states, “Keep some agua in the tub!” (Brown, 2020, para.10) and “Buenas noches, baby” (para. 16). The father in the story is referred to as *Papi*, a common title in Spanish directly translated as “daddy” (Sanchez, n.d.).

La Princesa and the Pea and *Round Is a Tortilla* utilize Spanish words more throughout their English-dominant texts than the others. In *Round Is a Tortilla*, Spanish words are incorporated in nearly every page as the author presents various shapes, and the author provides a glossary for each Spanish word in the back of the book. The purpose of the Spanish words in this story is to describe the different shapes encountered in a Latin culture using these words’ Spanish names. In *La Princesa and the Pea*, the Spanish words and phrases, made bold and colored within the English text, are presented as a way to demarcate the original version of *The Prince and the Pea* from this fractured fairytale version. Whereas the traditional versions of the fairytale are typically told and read in English, this version of the fairytale is meant to be

presented as its own distinct version of the tale. As such, the ways in which the Spanish words – such as *la reina*, *el príncipe*, and *guisante* – are given emphasis with bold and colorful fonts, and are also provided in English on several occasions, would suggest that the author is seeking attention to those words in order to contrast them from the typical words used in the traditional fairytale, offering the reader another dimension for which to compare versions of the fairytales. Also, Spanish words are used along with English words on several occasions at the end of stanzas to contribute to the story’s poetic rhythm, as seen in this stanza:

Mamá sneaked away
to the royal jardín
and found a small pea
that was fit for a queen (Elya, 2017, stanza 5)

Stereotypical Cultural Elements. Within this category of analysis, in order to closely examine any indications of dominant narratives, I particularly engaged with the question: *What, if any, stereotypical elements about Latinx’s cultures and experiences exist?* As most books did not explicitly specify their stories’ cultures or nationalities, I approached this question with the intent to uncover broad stereotypical elements surrounding Latinx individuals and groups, not limited to one subculture or nationality within the definition of Latinx.

Though findings related to this inquiry were minimal in the books analyzed, some elements that could be associated with stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups were uncovered. In *Listening with My Heart*, for example, the images show Esperanza playing soccer on several occasions, a sport viewed as stereotypical for Latinx culture (David, 2019). The images on the first page in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* show Sophia helping her Abuelo plant and water a flower as Abuelo appears to be wiping sweat from his brow, possibly indicating the “hard work”

portrayal often noticed in Latinx stereotypes (Gomez, 2003).

In *Stella's Stellar Hair*, a stereotype that could be potentially created from this story is that regarding Latinx individuals having large families (Gonzalez, 2018), as Stella lives with her mother, but also has numerous aunts caring for her. This portrayal of large families is also noticed somewhat in *Islandborn*, as Lola's cousins, abuela, and mother all are primary characters in the story. In *La Princesa and the Pea*, this trope is also noted, as the story ends with "The prince and his bride had *hijos* galore, one for each mattress, and then had no more" (Elya, 2017, final page). The visual images show the prince and his bride with their 17 children, alongside the mother and several others who appear to be family members as well.

In *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes*, there were several textual and visual elements that followed narrow, stereotypical depictions often associated with Latinx culture, particularly Mexican culture. Some of these depictions included the use of overused Spanish words and phrases (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003) as well as visual images portraying stereotypical Mexican culture. For example, on several instances, sombreros and traditional Mexican mariachi costumes were portrayed in scenes of the city, and images depict various references to Día de los Muertos and free-roaming chickens. Additionally, generalized culinary words like *tortilla*, *guacamole*, and *quesadillas* – typically associated with traditional Mexican foods (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Gomez, 2003; Martínez-Roldán, 2017; Terrones, 2016) – were used to implement Spanish within the text.

Traditional Gender Roles. In this category of analysis, it was also noticed that a few of the books offered depictions surrounding traditional gender roles in Latinx culture, though these were not pervasive. Images in *Islandborn*, for example, depict Mr. Muir – the building superintendent – in the roles of a laborer, as he is shown mopping the floor, working in a room

surrounded by tools, and taking out the garbage, while Mrs. Mir, Lola's mother, and Lola's grandmother are only shown inside the house. *Brown Baby Lullaby* shows the mother as the one cooking, though it does also portray the father setting the table and serving the food, though this is while the mother is simultaneously shown comforting the crying baby. In *Round Is a Tortilla*, the images primarily depicted men as the laborers in the story, while showing women doing household chores, cooking, and tending to children. The images also placed characters in what seemed to be outdated attire, possibly contributing to the trend discussed by Gomez (2003), whereas characters dress in traditional, more formal clothing. Women and girls were mostly seen wearing dresses and skirts, while men were primarily clothed in trousers and button-up shirts.

LatCrit Theory and CWS: Promoting Counter-Stories of Latinx Groups and Individuals

This category focused on examining counter-narratives presented in the ten books, using tenets surrounding counter-stories of marginalized groups taken from both LatCrit Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies. As such, the following questions guided my application of these tenets: *What, if any, counter-stories of Latinx groups exist?* and

In what ways, if any, do stories challenge stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and individuals? Several books offered counter-narratives through their depictions and illustrations of Latinx characters and settings, and I grouped these counter-narratives into the most common themes. These themes are presented below.

Nontraditional Gender Roles. Although several books portrayed some level of stereotypical gender roles, as described above, within the remaining books analyzed, one of the most noticeable counter-narratives was that surrounding nontraditional gender roles. *Julian is a Mermaid* presents one of the most apparent examples of this counter-narrative associated with gender roles, as the theme of this story lends itself to challenging traditional depictions of

boy/girl interests. Given that the story's primary theme communicates the message that you can be anything you want to be, this is conveyed as Julian, identified on the first page as a boy, desires to dress up as a mermaid, something only women in the book are seen doing. The interaction between Julian and his Nana when Julian dresses up as a mermaid secretly while Nana is bathing sends the message that he is a bit embarrassed or reluctant to let his grandmother know he wants to dress up as a mermaid, and one can infer that this is because he is a boy and traditionally, mermaids are depicted as girls or women. The story concludes, however, with Nana taking Julian in his mermaid attire to a parade to join the other mermaids, centering the book's theme on accepting oneself and being anything you want to be.

Other stories present girls and women in roles of leadership or agency outside of the house, countering the traditional narrative of women and girls staying home to do household chores and taking on more passive roles (Gomez, 2003). In *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, Sofia is portrayed in both the images and words as an independent, strong-willed, and hard-working female protagonist involved in the community. Additionally, several images within this book include women in power, such as Ida B. Wells' statue outside the city hall, posters of SADE and Frida Kahlo in Sofia's room, and the city clerk's role as a woman in high authority. All of these portrayals also lend themselves to challenge the traditional narrative regarding women in more passive roles, as these emphases on women in roles of power are presented on several occasions throughout the story. Similarly, in *Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion*, Esperanza's mother works what appears to be a business/professional dress job, as her attire is business casual and she appears to be going to/coming from work in several images. This is also in contrast to the oft-presented stereotype of women working within the home while men work outside the home (Gomez, 2003).

Though the remaining books did not offer any salient notices surrounding nontraditional gender roles as the above books did, it is worth noting that eight of the ten books analyzed include female protagonists or center a female as a primary character. I considered two of these books – *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes* and *La Princesa and the Pea* – as presenting females as primary characters, though I did not consider these characters the protagonists in the story due to the absence of character voice from the third person dialogue and the focus on two main characters, respectively. The other six books centered females as the main characters, often in roles of taking action to make a stand or growing through challenging obstacles, with these characters voices and experiences emphasized.

Skin Variations. Another notice in regards to the counter-narratives uncovered in this analysis involved the ways in which the Latinx characters' skin tones were depicted. *Stella's Stellar Hair* is the first book presenting salient counter-narratives through its portrayals of characters' complexions. First, the authors' centering of an Afro-Latinx character pushes back on the traditional brown-eyed, dark-skinned, and dark-haired Latinx character often portrayed in Latinx literature and media (Gomez, 2003; Naidoo, 2008). Moises' identification as Afro-Latinx also contributes to this counter-narrative, demonstrating that Latinx groups and individuals do have complexities, both in skin tone and in identities. With that, *Moises* also includes a variety of complexions within the illustrations of Stella's aunts, portrayed on each page as they work on Stella's hair. In these images, each of Stella's aunts have unique hairstyles, complexions, and ways of dressing. Similarly, in *Islandborn*, while Lola is dark-complexioned, the other Latinx characters, even Lola's mother and grandmother, are portrayed with a range of different skin tones, and are not at all monotonous.

In *Brown Baby Lullaby*, the images depict a Black family, and, though the use of Spanish

is the only indicator of the story being Latinx in nature, the portrayal of a Black family could contribute to a counter-narrative, whereas Black nuclear families are not the typical portrayal of a Latinx family in children's literature (David, 2019). The author's intention is clearly to portray a family of color, based on the title itself, but the author also takes steps to point out physical characteristics highlighting the baby's brown skin and dark hair, as well as adjectives to positively describe other aspects of the baby. For example, the text describes the baby as having "Tight black curls with glossy streaks... Two brown eyes, one brown nose, Ten brown fingers, ten brown toes" (stanzas 9, 10). The author emphasizes the beauty in these features with words like "enchanted" and phrases like "love and cherish all of those" (stanza 11).

The remaining stories, when examined collectively, portray several variations in complexions and appearances, as each book utilizes differing colors and mediums to present the Latinx characters' physical attributes.

Varied Storylines and Experiences. Another pushback on Latinx stereotypes was the mere exclusion of the typical experiences and storylines that have often been presented in Latinx literature, such as those centered on holidays, poverty, migrants fleeing violence, and immigration (Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997; David, 2019; Domke, 2018; Naidoo, 2008; Pérez Huber et al., 2020). Instead, the storylines in this analysis steered away from these typical storylines and primarily offered plots associated with universal human challenges, while also utilizing authentic narratives surrounding social justice topics.

As noted from the first inquiry's findings, several books' plots centered around universal themes, such as kindness, pride in oneself, and having courage to stand up for one's values. Several books centered characters overcoming some type of obstacle or challenge; however, none of the stories depicted challenges associated with poverty or violence. Also, of the ten

books analyzed, only *Islandborn* and *Where Are You From?* dealt with immigration, though in a manner not typical of the immigrant stories traditionally prevalent in Latinx literature that focus on separation, despair, and border-crossing experiences (Rodriguez & Braden, 2018; Sung et al., 2017).

Islandborn's plot primarily revolved around Lola learning about her family's homeland and immigration to the U.S. through the characters' remembering and reminiscing on their homeland, but the narrative did not depict a detailed story focused on violence or poverty as a reason for the characters' immigration. The story mostly centered on Lola's family and community remembering the positive, unique aspects of their homeland, while also including vague descriptions of the "monster" that caused them to leave. In this way, the author presented an authentic topic associated with immigration in a more subtle way, seemingly to help young readers understand why the characters decided to leave their country behind and relocate to a new one, without focusing the storyline on specificities of the "monster." This resulted in a theme of being proud of one's heritage and celebrating differences in cultures, while also opening up opportunities for critical discussions surrounding immigration.

Similarly, in *Where Are You From?*, the author utilizes the storyline to invite opportunities for readers to engage in critical thought surrounding a sense of belonging in a new country. Though the story does not explicitly state an immigration theme, there are several indications that the girl's family has immigrated to a new country, presumably the U.S. This is indicated throughout the text as the girl is asked where she is from and as her grandfather explains the girl's origins through descriptions of her ancestors' lands, which we find out is Argentina after closely examining these descriptions. Also, the girl states of her grandfather,

“like me, he looks like he doesn’t belong” (Kim, 2019, para. 6), though the author doesn’t provide any specific details indicating a reason the family would have immigrated.

Nonetheless, both *Where Are You From?* and *Islandborn* address immigration through more subtle ways and primarily portray the characters *after* their families’ immigration experiences. While *Islandborn* does provide a reason for immigration through its descriptions of the “monster,” *Where Are You From?* does not provide any particular reasons for immigrating. Nonetheless, both stories give sufficient detail to provide opportunities for adults to guide further discussion regarding the characters’ choices to leave their homelands.

CWS: Examining Whiteness as Permeated Norms Within Literature

The final category utilized in this analysis applied tenets from Critical Whiteness Studies in order to examine books for permeations of Whiteness as a norm (Thompson, 2004) within the stories. This entailed me examining White characters and White experiences in relation to Latinx characters and experiences in the stories. As such, I engaged with the questions, *How are literary and illustrative elements used to present White characters, experiences, and stories in relation to Latinx characters?; What or whose behaviors and experiences are presented as normal?; and How is Spanish used in relation to English?* Applying these questions to each book, I found the following themes to be common amongst the stories.

Limited White Characters. In most books, I found there to be a significant exclusion of White-appearing characters. Out of the ten books in this study, four books did not include White characters in any capacity. For the remaining six books, when White characters were depicted, these individuals were not centered in the stories, but instead were sidelined characters that played minimal roles in the narratives. For example, in *Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion*, neither the words nor illustrations center White characters

throughout the story. White characters are only presented on one occasion, when Esperanza is remembering a time she was laughed at while playing soccer. Otherwise, the other characters appearing to be White based on illustrations in the story are shown in neutral roles, participating in the same activities as Esperanza and only are shown in scenes featuring the class play. This is similarly noticed in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* and *Where Are You From?*, as White-appearing characters offer some contribution to the main plot, but are minimized otherwise.

In *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*, the characters appearing White are few, as most of Sonia's friends are children of color, based on the colors of skin tones within the illustrations. The author presents one White character in the story as having dyslexia. Similarly, in *Julian is a Mermaid*, the images portray primarily characters of color, and the only instances in which characters appear to White based on the colors of their skin are within the last few images of the book when Julian is shown walking with the parade. Even then, these characters faces are covered by costume or minimized as they blend in with the crowd. This is also the case for *Islandborn*, as any characters that could be White based on illustrations are shown minimized in the background amongst a sea of many other people with diverse skin tones and appearances.

Roles of Conflict. Though the White characters within these books were limited, in some books where White characters were present, they were presented in ways that opposed to or presented conflicts with the Latinx characters. For example, in *Listening with My Heart*, in one instance, White characters are portrayed when Esperanza is recalling a time when she missed an opportunity to score in a soccer match, and players from the other team laughed at her. In these illustrations, three of the five players appear White, and two of those three are shown mocking Esperanza while the remaining laugh at her.

Similarly, in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, the only characters appearing to be White based on the illustrations are her neighbors and individuals in the city hall when Sofia goes to present her idea for a park. Her neighbors, though there are more than just White characters, present to Sofia their ideas for a park, yet they are the individuals that end up frustrating Sofia once she realizes that they expect her to do all of the work herself in order to get the park built. At the city hall, the clerk, who is also White-appearing, is the only voice in the story actively opposing Sofia's plan and telling her that she is only a kid.

Where Are You From? also presents White characters in roles of conflict, and offers a rich insight into a historical perspective. In the images in the first few pages, as the girl is describing the questions she is asked about where she is from, there are several peers and adults shown around the little girl in various inquisitive stances. However, throughout these images, there are only White characters appearing to do the asking, as these are the only characters whose mouths are open to speak. Then, as the little girl seeks out her grandfather to inquire into where she is from, she states, "like me, he looks like he doesn't belong" (Kim, 2019, para. 6). Though small children reading this book might not understand the implications from these images and phrases, it is clear that the author could be inviting readers to explore these issues by providing a platform for a critical discussion. Particularly, as the grandfather states later when showing the little girl the city, "even when they were in chains because of the color of their skin" (Kim, 2019, para. 15), these words open opportunities for critical conversations, and appear to be presented as a contrast to the White characters continuously asking the little girl questions about where she is from.

White Norms. While several books did not include White characters, I, nonetheless, applied CWS tenets in order to understand the possible White norms portrayed in the stories.

Groenke et al. (2019) discuss ways in which young adult literature projects an essentialized white identity even beyond White characters to over-represent “cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class” (p. 48) characters that contribute to a uniform social discourse centered on Whiteness (Twine & Gallagher, 2008). In addition, scholars note how even themes centered around meritocracy – the belief that success is gained simply by working hard (Putman, 2017) – and individualism also contribute to Whiteness (Groenke et al., 2019).

These essentialized identities and some elements of Whiteness were noticed in several of the books analyzed, even when they did not include White characters. For example, both *Brown Baby Lullaby* and *La Princesa and the Pea* did not present any White characters, though both books portray a nuclear family to be the norm. Specifically, *Brown Baby Lullaby* presents a nuclear religious family, and *La Princesa and the Pea* follows the ideas surrounding the traditional fairytale of young princes looking for a princess, who then become a nuclear family, though this book also depicts extended family members alongside the nuclear family once the princess and prince marry. Additionally, with the exception of *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*, *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, and *Where Are You From?*, books collectively portrayed able-bodied identities for most characters. Illustrations also primarily portrayed characters in middle-class families and living in middle-class communities within each story. This was noticed through the images of characters’ homes, neighborhoods, and clothing.

Finally, a notice related to White norms in the books that involved characters facing challenges lied in the way the characters were able to solve those challenges and overcome obstacles. To examine Whiteness at play here, I looked for ways in which characters were portrayed as individualistic in dealing with their problems and obstacles, and how and if meritocracy was demonstrated when characters succeeded. For the majority of the seven books

that included characters overcoming challenges, collectivity was at the center of the overcoming. In *Where Are You From?*, *Islandborn*, and *Stella's Stellar Hair*, the young characters receive a significant amount of assistance from their families to support them in solving problems and overcoming challenges, and the storylines demonstrate a sense of collectivism through their portrayals of the families' support.

In *Julian Is a Mermaid*, *Listening with My Heart*, and *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, primary family members are also depicted in roles of support for the young characters as they face challenges, though these roles of support are portrayed in less involved ways than those of the previous three books. Particularly, in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, the main character must work hard and put in a significant amount of effort on her own to accomplish her desires, though the story also portrays the work of Sofia's community members in attaining Sofia's goal, as well as her grandfather's moral support. *Listening with My Heart* also showcases a hard work ideology, yet focuses the storyline on demonstrating how failure can occur even when one works hard for something desired. The theme in *Julian Is a Mermaid*, though it involved Julian overcoming a challenge, focused more on his own individual growth related to his gender identity, while the purpose of his grandmother's role in the story was to demonstrate her acceptance and support of his desires to dress unconventional based on societal norms. While the characters in these stories are mostly on their own to deal with their obstacles, the illustrations and words depict the caretakers and others supporting, helping, and giving encouragement as the young characters deal with their challenges. As such, these books do not appear to necessarily promote meritocracy through their storylines, but do focus on individual agency, accomplishments, and growth, while also demonstrating the importance of family and others in accomplishing one's goals or overcoming obstacles.

Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You did not make mention of any support given by other individuals or groups when highlighting the characters' unique needs; however, Sotomayor addresses the need for outside support through their depictions of the various mechanisms most characters rely upon to support them with their conditions.

Language Integration. Also within this category of analysis, I engaged with the question, *How is Spanish used in relation to English?* in order to examine ways in which English could be presented as a norm, while Spanish is presented as a marginalized language. Several scholars have uncovered ways in which Spanish is presented with minimized importance in relation to English in texts that include both languages (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Daly, 2018; Domke, 2018; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018). As such, the purpose of analyzing the use of Spanish in these texts was to determine whether the language was presented as equal to the English text or with more or less emphasis, as well as to determine the purposes for which the words and phrases were included.

Thus, I examined the surface-level textual features of the Spanish and English texts. In this way, I sought to understand the intentions behind each book's textual formatting. In regard to textual formatting, four of the six books that included Spanish within the English text – *Islandborn*, *Sofia Valdez*, *Future Prez*, *Brown Baby Lullaby* and *Where Are You From?* – inserted Spanish words and/or phrases into the English text without any distinctions in formatting. *La Princesa and the Pea* and *Round Is a Tortilla*, nonetheless, do not follow these formatting patterns, but instead separate the Spanish words from the English text either through colored and separate font styles or italics.

In *Round Is a Tortilla*, the story includes a glossary in the back of the book; however, a monolingual reader would likely need to rely heavily on picture clues to determine most Spanish

words' meanings. While the Spanish words are italicized in order to demarcate them from the majority English text, this style seems to encourage a monolingual English reader to utilize the pictures to learn the Spanish words, while catering to a Spanish-English bilingual as the words are incorporated without a disjointed and redundant translation method (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003). This story, as mentioned before, did include several clichéd Spanish words within its English text to describe shapes. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that these words were not the only words utilized to incorporate Spanish into the English text, but the author also included Spanish words that would likely not be as well known to young readers, such as *ventana*, *cuadrado*, *zócalo*, and *paletas*.

Similarly, the written text in *La Princesa and the Pea* also separated Spanish words from English utilizing different formatting, and most of the words were not directly defined. The Spanish words and phrases in this text, as discussed before, appear to be utilized for the purpose of highlighting the distinctions between languages and, thus, contribute to the readers' understanding of the variations in fairytales. Much like in *Round Is a Tortilla*, a monolingual English reader would need to rely heavily on context clues and illustrations to determine the Spanish words' meanings.

In *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, the Spanish words are not translated in any way, but are instead inserted into the English text without any distinctions between the Spanish and English language. These phrases are not accompanied by any direct translations, though monolingual readers could likely understand the gist of the words' meanings based on the contexts in which they are inserted.

In *Islandborn*, two of these phrases are presented in the manner Barrera and Quiroa (2003) describe, in which the words are followed by an immediate English translation, seemingly

catering to a monolingual English reader. Nonetheless, the Spanish words and phrases are not italicized or set apart from the English text in any way, but rather are included in the same formatting and size.

The Spanish words and phrases in *Brown Baby Lullaby* were presented without any distinctions and were inserted into the English text alongside English words and phrases as the parents communicated with their baby, resulting in an integrated flow of speaking the way Barrera and Quiroa (2003) describe when discussing the nature of multilingual code-switching.

Perpetuations and Challenges to Dominant Narratives

Upon analyzing the findings from this second research inquiry, I then returned to the primary question: *In what ways, if any, are these books' plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and cultures?* To address this inquiry, I examined each theme within the theoretical categories and marked it as a theme that either pointed to perpetuations or to challenges of dominant storylines, or counter-narratives, associated with Latinxs in order to synthesize the data. I found there to be two themes that solely contributed to a perpetuation of dominant narratives, and nine themes that challenged these narratives and, thus, offered counter-stories. Five themes were found to exhibit both challenges and perpetuations in some way, and, thus, were considered as both. Table 4.3 shows these findings, and then the findings are discussed in greater detail in the final chapter.

Comparing Narratives to Author Insider/Outsider Status

The third research question in this critical content analysis addressed ways in which author statuses relate to the narratives and themes of the books analyzed. Specifically, the question addressed, *How do authors' cultural insider/outsider statuses relate, if at all, to the plots and themes of Latinx children's picture books?* For this question, the intent was to

Table 4.3. Overall Messages

Theoretical Category	Theme	Number of Books	Overall Message (Challenging or Perpetuating Dominant Narratives)
LatCrit Theory: Exemplifying Latinxs' Multidimensional Identities and Complex Experiences	Family	9	Challenging/ Perpetuating
	Setting/Community	10	Challenging
	Cultural Origins	6	Challenging/ Perpetuating
	Character Traits	10	Challenging
LatCrit Theory and CWS: Analyzing Barriers Rooted in the Oppression of Latinx Groups Through Examining Majoritarian Stories; Challenging Whiteness Through Examining Majoritarian Stories About Marginalized Populations	Voice	10	Challenging
	Language Use	6	Challenging/ Perpetuating
	Stereotypical Cultural Elements	6	Perpetuating
	Traditional Gender Roles	3	Perpetuating
LatCrit Theory and CWS: Promoting Counter-Stories of Latinx Groups and Individuals	Nontraditional Gender Roles	3	Challenging
	Skin Variations	10	Challenging
	Varied Storylines and Experiences	10	Challenging
CWS: Examining Whiteness as Permeated Norms Within Literature	Limited White Characters	9	Challenging
	Roles of Conflict	3	Challenging
	White Norms	10	Challenging/ Perpetuating
	Language Integration	6	Challenging/ Perpetuating

determine if there was any correlation between the themes of each book, both those surface-level themes as well as those determined by reading deeper into the texts' meanings, or "reading 'against the grain'" (Tyson, 2015). Below, I discuss the findings from this research inquiry, presenting the authors' insider and outsider statuses in relation to Latinx identity, and any elements of the book found to correlate with these statuses.

Books Authored by Latinx Authors

For the five books written by Latinx authors, I examined the books' themes and elements analyzed in the previous research questions in order to determine any commonalities amongst them. The five books that included Latinx authors were as follows: *Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion*; *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*; *Stella's Stellar Hair*; *Islandborn*; and *Where Are You From?*

The most salient notice from this examination was in regard to the themes of these five stories, as all five books' themes centered on the main characters exhibiting self-acceptance and pride in their uniqueness or in their cultural heritage. *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* focused on pride and self-acceptance surrounding neurological and physical conditions, *Stella's Stellar Hair* was themed around the girl's pride and acceptance of her hair, and *Islandborn* and *Where Are You From?* both focus on pride in one's heritage and background. Of the five books, *Listening with My Heart* was the only book in which the main theme did not center around pride in one's uniqueness in some way, as the remaining four books did, though it did focus on self-acceptance and self-kindness.

I also noticed that these five books' narratives were amongst those that presented characters as facing some sort of challenge, and then highlighted the characters' strengths as they overcame those challenges. As noted in the discussion above regarding themes, all of these

books were part of the seven books whose themes involved overcoming challenges related to personal or outside conflict. Another aspect noted regarding the commonalities between these books centered on the primary characters within the stories, as all of these books portrayed their characters with positive traits, though the five books authored by cultural outsiders did as well.

Lastly, two of these books within this category of author insider status were two of the three books presenting White characters in roles of conflict against the Latinx characters. The two books where this was found to be present are *Listening with My Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion* and *Where Are You From?*

Books Authored by Latinx Outsiders

The five books authored by outsiders to Latinx identity included: *Julian is a Mermaid*; *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*; *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes*; *La Princesa and the Pea*; and *Brown Baby Lullaby*. Within these books, there were no salient trends noticed across books that seemed related to authors' cultural statuses as Latinx insiders or outsiders, as the books' themes, portrayals, and storylines were mostly varied.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I presented the findings from this critical content analysis. For the first research question, the findings were presented to discuss each book's main plot and theme, along with commonalities between books' themes. Then, findings for the second research inquiry were presented within each of the four theoretical categories of analysis, with highlights from each text demonstrating the selected tenets from Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies. Utilizing both the written words and illustrations of each book, I sought out ways in which books either perpetuated or challenged dominant majoritarian stories of Latinx groups and cultures. Following these findings, I addressed the third research question in order to compare

authors' cultural statuses to the themes and elements uncovered in the critical analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this critical content analysis was to examine the plots and themes of best-selling Latinx children's books, and to analyze ways in which books uphold or challenge dominant narratives of Latinx groups. This study also sought to compare authors' cultural statuses to the themes and elements of these best-selling books.

This final chapter is organized in three parts. First, I provide a discussion of the study's findings for each research inquiry, highlighting conclusions and implications for each. Then, I offer a discussion of limitations within the study and possibilities for future research, as well as a summary of the study.

Discussion of Findings

Given this study's complexity, the discussion of the findings is presented according to each research inquiry. I have first outlined findings from the first two inquiries in order to discuss implications from my examination and critical analysis of books' plots and themes and to answer the second research question, *In what ways, if any, are these books' plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and cultures?* Then, I discuss the third research question and offer implications based on those findings.

Examining and Analyzing Stories' Plots and Themes

As reviewed in chapter two, scholars have uncovered issues surrounding Latinx characters and groups in media and in literature, whereas Latinxs are often viewed as a monolithic group of people, with no variances in culture or identity (Zambrana & Logie, 2009). Revisiting the ideas discussed by Naidoo (2011b), Riojas Clark and Bustos Flores (2016), and Smith et al. (2016), I worked within these first two inquiries to recognize the elements that make a Latinx children's book a "good" one. As these scholars discuss, Latinx children's books should

reflect the complexities of Latinxs' identities, and should refrain from presenting normalized narratives that erase these complexities and/or reinforce stereotypes.

For the first research inquiry, after conducting a surface-level examination of each book's primary plot and theme and searching for trends amongst them, I found that books offered a variety of plots and themes that collectively presented an overall diverse representation of Latinx lives, families, challenges, and cultures. Books' plots centered on characters facing and overcoming challenges, with themes primarily emphasizing self-love, self-acceptance, and pride in differences. Of the ten books analyzed, seven included themes that involved characters facing obstacles or challenges, and then discovering ways to overcome those challenges through collective and individual agency. Some challenges were those associated with everyday, universal experiences, although several were specifically related to characters' particular identities and situations. In this regard, books followed Smith et al.'s (2016) assertions that Latinx children's books should reflect both the uniqueness of cultural experiences as well as the universality and everyday experiences of life.

The second inquiry offered the most complex findings of the four research questions. The discussion of these findings has been divided based on each finding's categorization as either a theme that perpetuated or challenged dominant narratives surrounding Latinx cultures and identities.

Ways in Which Stories Perpetuate Dominant Stories

After critically examining books for dominant narratives and Latinx stereotypes, I found that seven of the fifteen themes from the analysis demonstrated, in some way, a perpetuation of dominant stereotypes related to Latinx culture. These findings were present, yet mostly scarce, in the books analyzed, as most books offered cultural elements and narratives that countered

traditional stereotypes. Nonetheless, the findings of this analysis contributed to the perpetuation of common Latinx stereotypes and majoritarian stories.

The first way in which stories contributed to a perpetuation of dominant stories was noticed through one primary theme involving ways in which Latinxs families were portrayed. Three books in this analysis followed a stereotypical narrative involving Latinxs having large families (Gonzalez, 2018). I also found many similarities amongst several books in regards to their depictions of extended family members as caretakers of young children, as several books portrayed grandparents as the Latinx characters' main or secondary caretakers. Although several of these books outlined a stereotype often noticed in children's literature and in other media regarding Latinxs having large families (Gonzalez, 2018), it is worth noting this particular stereotype was simultaneously accompanied by a positive, affirmative representation in each book that conveyed the importance of family in these characters' lives. So, while having large families is a common stereotype and is supported by some of the stories in this analysis, these same books also offered counter-narratives in terms of showcasing the complexities within Latinx families, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Another finding regarding ways in which books' portrayals perpetuated dominant majoritarian stories of Latinx groups was through the books' reinforcements of gender stereotypes. Traditional gender norms were present in three of the books analyzed, though these notices were not profound. These roles mostly entailed those discussed by Braden and Rodriguez (2016), Gomez (2003), and Rodriguez and Braden (2018), whereas men are portrayed as working outside the house, while women stay home and do household chores and caretaking. It is important to recognize, nonetheless, that while some elements within the storylines followed these narrow depictions and included stereotypical elements within their illustrations, they were

often presented alongside counter-narratives that offered the reader broader portrayals of those same elements. For example, while several of the images of Mr. Mir, Mrs. Mir, Lola's grandmother, and Lola's mother in *Islandborn* depicted traditional gender roles, these were included alongside images that also portrayed women and men in varied roles working in the city, as well Lola in the role of a strong, female protagonist. While this is not true for *Round Is a Tortilla*, where men's and women's roles appear very distinct, the counter-narratives surrounding gender roles prevalent in the remaining books leave this book to be the only one demonstrating these elements in such a blatant fashion, thus concluding that, overall, most books simultaneously offered counter-narratives regarding Latinx gender roles alongside stereotypical portrayals.

The presence of White norms within several books also contributed to findings surrounding perpetuations of majoritarian stories. Despite the fact that books collectively included a minimal amount of White characters within their narratives and illustrations, as part of examining ways in which the literary and illustrative elements presented Whiteness in the form of normalized behaviors within the stories, I found there to be some general trends. Guided by Groenke et al.'s (2019) discussion of normalized discourses of Whiteness in young adult literature, I focused on looking for markers of the essentialized white identity portrayed in media and literature – such as able-bodied, cis-gendered, middle class characters – as well as themes of Whiteness that remain standard and are usually unnoticed and unnamed (Thompson, 2004) – such as meritocracy and individualism. I also considered ways in which books' uses of the Spanish and English languages could promote or disrupt assimilationist ideologies. For the purposes of this study, I was primarily interested in how these elements could interact with each book's theme to either contribute to or challenge dominant narratives of Latinxs.

In this regard, I found that all books demonstrated some type of White norm, either through their depictions of family structures, socioeconomic class, cultural assimilation, ability, language use, or discourses associated with meritocracy. For example, the portrayed family structures were diverse across all books, though two books exhibited a nuclear family portrayal. All but three books solely depicted able-bodied characters, and the majority of books presented middle-class characters and settings.

Also, given that the majority of the books in this study were themed around characters facing and overcoming challenges, and considering Whiteness's focus on individualism and self-reliance (Groenke et al., 2019; Putman, 2017), I paid special attention to how characters solved challenges in the books that included that as a primary theme. In this regard, a few books promoted ideologies surrounding individualism, as they highlighted characters' individual struggles and strengths, and then demonstrated those characters' abilities to overcome their challenges on their own, as noted in *Listening with My Heart* and *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*. Nonetheless, in *Listening with My Heart* in particular, the character's challenge is a result of a failure in playing out her role in the class play. The author even discusses the hypercompetitive nature of today's world in the paratext, and states "kids often internalize the message that their worth is attached to their accomplishments" (Garcia, 2017, front matter, para. 1). As such, though the story highlights the character as overcoming this failure primarily using her own internal strength, which could be construed as a reference to Whiteness's notions of meritocracy and self-reliance, the author's means of normalizing failure and explicitly calling out the problematic nature of relating value to accomplishments also presents a counter-narrative to ideologies associated with the Eurocentric view of self-reliance, and, instead, promotes self-compassion.

Related to White norms, another theme found across texts that also contributed to a perpetuation of dominant narratives was in regard to books' portrayals and specifications of cultural origins. Of the ten books, five indicated specifications within either the text, paratext, or illustrations of Latinx origin. Nonetheless, the other five books provided no indication of specific cultural heritage, and identifiers of Latinx origin were only presented through characters' names or through the texts' use of Spanish. Even in the books that specified Latinx origin, these origins were either only mentioned in the books' paratext, hinted at subtly throughout the story, or simply not identifiable, requiring the outsider reader to look beyond the books' confines to confirm its cultural origin. For example, in *Where Are You From?* the story's cultural heritage was not made explicit, though the author and illustrator included references to Argentinian culture, such as the Pirámide de Mayo, and specified the authors' Argentinian origins on the back jacket matter. Young readers, however, would not likely use jacket information to understand a book's cultural origin, and the detail in cultural specifications within the text would not be apparent to an outsider reader not familiar with the cultural elements.

In their analysis of Latinx immigrant stories, Rodriguez and Braden (2018) posit that this type of ambiguity in detail regarding countries of origin "has the potential to contribute to the essentializing of immigrants instead of to the recognition of the varied experiences that immigrants from different countries face" (p. 56). Also, these authors note how the use of Spanish as the sole signifier of Latinx origin, as found with five books in this analysis, is also problematic, because including language as an exclusive identifier of ethnicity also contributes to essentialization. Though the authors were applying these ideas to stories specifically about Latinx immigrants, these same ideas can be applied to the books in this analysis, whereas the lack of cultural specificity and use of Spanish or Latinx names as indicators of Latinx origin

contribute to an essentialized Latinx identity.

Also in regard to heritage and language use, Chappell and Faltis (2007) point out issues surrounding assimilationist portrayals in Latinx stories, whereas Latinx children are depicted as being unaware and uninformed of their cultural heritage, and are only familiar with their native language through generalized and overused cultural terms. These authors suggest that this type of portrayal reinforces values associated with cultural assimilation. This particular depiction was noticed in *Islandborn* and *Where Are You From?*, as the themes of these two books centered around the main characters' challenges with not understanding their cultures and origins.

Additionally, as part of examining Whiteness within these books, I drew from these discussions to also examine ways in which books utilized Spanish in relation to English for the purpose of looking at implicit references to Eurocentric assimilation. While most of these books included Spanish in a manner that reflects the nature of bilingualism and refrains from perpetuating the trope that Latinxs are limited by an inability to understand English, discussed in more detail in the next section, ideas surrounding assimilation could be construed from these portrayals of language, as the books portrayed the Latinx characters speaking English the majority of the time, and only using Spanish in rare moments to communicate. Chappell and Faltis (2007) discuss how Latinx children's books often portray, even if unintentionally, an assimilation of immigrants to an Americanized way of living and being, which often includes characters shedding their native language in order to assimilate to using English as their primary language. These authors go on to state that mixing languages, or using *Spanglish* to communicate, can be viewed as "a *low* form of bilingualism" (Chappell & Faltis, 2007, p. 257, emphasis in original). So, while ideas surrounding assimilation can be construed from the ways in which these texts utilized the two languages to demonstrate communication, the stories do not

demonstrate this type of compartmentalization of languages in the way these authors discuss, and instead appear to portray Spanish as contributing linguistic value to the characters' conversations.

Finally, the categorical findings demonstrated some use of other stereotypical cultural elements extending beyond the aforementioned portrayals. These stereotypical depictions involved Latinx kids playing soccer (David, 2019), noticed only on one occasion in *Listening with My Heart*, and clichéd foods and sentiments surrounding Mexican culture (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Gomez, 2003; Martínez-Roldán, 2017; Terrones, 2016), found in *Round Is a Tortilla*. There were not, however, other salient themes noticed across the books in this analysis that demonstrated Latinx stereotypes.

One book that stood out due to its overall commodification of Mexican culture was *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes*. This book portrayed several stereotypes surrounding Latinx identities through its depictions of Latinx food, gender roles, and general culture, though most identifiers within the book were Mexican in nature. The purpose of this story seemed to, unfortunately, lend itself well to the author's and illustrator's use of these portrayals, as the book is attempting to offer a culturally diverse representation of various shapes in a Latin world that diverges from a traditional Eurocentric shape book. However, with these attempts, the author and illustrator, instead, offer readers a narrow view of Latinx culture through the words and images to showcase the different shapes in everyday life. Following a reading of this book, young readers are left with clichéd images of mariachi bands played by men in sombreros and grandmothers making homemade tortillas and soups – what Braden and Rodriguez (2016) refer to as a tourist approach to culture. When considering what the portrayals in this specific book teach readers about about Latinx culture, much of the images and words shadow discussions by

scholars examining Latinx literature and media, whereas Latinx groups are not distinguished, but rather grouped together into what is often mostly representative of Mexican culture (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Zambrana & Logie, 2009), though even the portrayed views of Mexican culture are quite narrow in nature and do not depict complexities.

Ways in Which Stories Challenge Dominant Stories

While findings demonstrated some perpetuations of dominant narratives, the books in this study primarily offered positive counter-stories of Latinx individuals and groups, as most themes from each theoretical category resulted in an overall challenge to majoritarian stories and emphasized positive portrayals of characters and cultures. Below, I discuss these thematic findings within each of the four theoretical categories to highlight ways in which books challenged majoritarian stories.

First Theoretical Category Findings. Within the first theoretical category, I applied Latinx Critical Theory's tenets surrounding the nature of Latinx groups' complex identities and diverse experiences (Osorio, 2018; Pérez Huber, 2010; Solórzano, 1998; Tijerina Revilla & Asato, 2002) to seek out ways in which books depict Latinx cultures and experiences. Therefore, within this category of analysis, one of my goals was to examine each book's level of cultural specificity and to analyze the books' portrayed levels of diversity in a broad sense.

In this regard, Martínez-Roldán (2013) posits that, when analyzing a Latinx text:

...the goal is not to search for a single image that represents the "authentic" Latino. It is to analyze how the author contextualizes the story and, more important, how the representations in the story contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of the richness and complexities of Latino culture and literature and how issues of power are embedded in the text. (p. 7)

Following these guiding ideas, I found that, overall, most books in this analysis did not follow trends portraying Latinxs as one singular culture or identity (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Zambrana & Logie, 2009), but instead offered a variety of portrayals of Latinx individuals and groups. Specifically, I found that the books portrayed diversities in Latinx lives and experiences through four primary elements: characters' families, the settings and communities in which characters' live, characters' heritages, and the characters' traits.

The first main theme noted for challenging dominant stories, is, also, one of the themes discussed for ways in which stories perpetuated majoritarian stories: family. While three books portrayed a stereotypical view of Latinxs having large families, books also offered very positive representations surrounding families, as well as an overall diverse representation of families across the ten books. In the nine books that include family members within their storylines, all portrayed families as important and positive influences in the main characters' lives. Caretakers and other family members were often depicted as offering support or guidance to the young characters, and illustrations exhibited strong mutual affection in images of the family members' interactions with the young characters. The illustrations and actions portrayed within many of these books also contribute to a sense of collectivism amongst the family members, a common disposition within various Latinx groups (Oyserman et al., 2002).

Additionally, across the nine books portraying families, there were diverse depictions of family structures and dynamics when considering the books collectively. Some books portrayed one-parent families, while others showed grandparents as primary caretakers. Two books portrayed a nuclear family, while several others included extended family members as important parts of the characters' lives as well. These varied representations offer readers' a complex view of different family dynamics, and challenge assumptions regarding a uniform, large Latinx

family (Gonzalez, 2018).

In addition, the range of diversity in each story's portrayed setting also contributed to the overall counter-narrative found within this category, as the books depicted Latinx characters living in a wide range of neighborhoods and communities. A Latinx stereotype commonly noticed involves Latinx people portrayed as living in rural or impoverished areas, often doing farm labor or working low-paying physical labor occupations (Barrera et al., 1993; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; David, 2019, Domke, 2018; Gomez, 2003; Naidoo, 2011b). The books in this analysis countered this narrative, however, with settings and communities ranging from suburban neighborhoods to larger cities, to more rural areas and even in fantasy worlds. The only books portraying rural settings were *Brown Baby Lullaby* and *Where Are You From?* Nonetheless, neither of these stories depicted poverty, yet instead portrayed positive images of rural grasslands, landscapes, and countrysides. Likewise, in the remaining books, poverty was not included in any portrayals of the Latinx characters' communities.

In regard to the cultural origins and backgrounds portrayed in each book, though books' cultural specificities were somewhat ambiguous, as previously discussed, there were also a variety of nationalities and backgrounds in those books that specified these aspects, offering challenges to dominant narratives that portray Latinxs as part of a monolithic culture (Zambrana & Logie, 2009). Specificities regarding books' origins were primarily noted in books' images through illustrations of flags, such as the Mexican flag seen in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, the Dominican Republican flag seen in *Islandborn*, and the U.S. flags seen in *Round Is a Tortilla*. *La Princesa and the Pea* noted its cultural origin through the front matter of the book, specifying the book as a Peruvian version of the traditional fairytale, and the illustrations and words in *Where Are You From?* offer readers a view into Argentinian heritage. Even in the books that did not

include culturally specific markers, these books portrayed Latinxs as living in and belonging to diverse backgrounds, as the visual images portrayed a range of communities, family dynamics, and challenges faced by characters, and refrained from presenting cultural markers centered on stereotypical foods and holidays, as is often seen in Latinx literature (Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). When examined collectively, these stories portray Latinxs as belonging to a diverse range of origins and heritages, and push back on the common idea that all Latinx groups share the same culture (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Zambrana & Logie, 2009).

Regarding the last theme within this category of analysis – character traits – the findings also offered positive representations and counter-narratives. While some trends in Latinx literature and media have included negative portrayals of characters as impoverished and poor (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Domke, 2018), in despair or in need of “rescuing” (Naidoo, 2008; Pérez Huber et al., 2020), as illegal immigrants or criminals (Adichie, 2009; Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997; Sung et al., 2017; Terrones, 2016), or as lazy (Gomez, 2003; Martínez-Roldán, 2017), none of the books featured any elements suggesting these ideas. Instead, all of the depictions of the Latinx characters in these stories offered positive representations of Latinxs by emphasizing traits surrounding agency, strength, and bravery. Two books – *Listening with My Heart and Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* – even further pushed back on these stereotypes by situating their main characters in roles of helping others. As such, these stories collectively offered counter-narratives regarding Latinx individuals’ traits.

Second Theoretical Category Findings. For the second theoretical category, tenets from both Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies were utilized to seek out ways in which books emphasized or decentered voices, and to analyze linguistic and cultural elements that accentuate dominant narratives. Applying tenets surrounding majoritarian stories from both

theories (Maddamsetti, 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Warren, 1999), I found that books centered Latinx voices and primarily utilized the Spanish language in affirmative ways.

For children's literature, scholarship critiquing Whiteness has focused heavily on ways in which Whiteness is manifested through representation – that is, overrepresentations of White characters and underrepresentation of characters of Color (Larrick, 1965; Thomas, 2016). Also, the voice emphasized in a story has significant implications for whose opinions and experiences are valued the most. While, historically, literature has both minimized and omitted the roles and voices of people of Color and other marginalized groups (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020; Groenke et al., 2019), results from this analysis demonstrated a positive representation of ways in which children's literature highlights historically marginalized voices, as all of the books analyzed centered the voices and stories of the Latinx characters. Latinx characters were the protagonists and primary characters in each story, and voices of the White-appearing characters were heard in very few instances, if at all, across the books. This holds promising implications for recent trends surrounding the growing representation of marginalized groups within children's and young adult literature (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020).

Another finding was in regard to the way Spanish was utilized to create the narrative in each story that included Spanish within the English text. Six of the ten books from this study included Spanish within their texts. These books simply incorporated Spanish words and phrases into the English-dominant text, and none of these books provided the full texts in both languages. Though findings surrounding the separated nature of the two languages across books pointed to a perpetuation of Whiteness and dominant narratives, as discussed in the previous section, I also paid close attention to how the two languages combined to create the narratives, analyzing the purposes of the Spanish language in the texts that included it. I found that, primarily, Spanish

was inserted to either demonstrate communication between the characters – as seen in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* and *Brown Baby Lullaby* – or to point out specificities of a culture – as seen in *Islandborn* and *Where Are You From? Round Is a Tortilla* utilized Spanish primarily to describe objects for the purpose of teaching children shapes found in Latinx culture, and *La Princesa and the Pea* inserted Spanish as a way to alter the language of the original fairytale and, thus, contribute to the book’s identification as a fractured fairytale.

Looking back to the literature on trends related to language use within Spanish-English texts, these findings mostly provide positive indications of progress. One trend noted by scholars in the field of Latinx children’s literature involves ways in which Spanish words and phrases in a primarily-English book tend to be presented in superficial ways that simply add “cultural flavor” or “flair” to the English text (Acevido, 2017; Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). However, most books from this analysis that included Spanish within their text did not appear to do so for the purposes of adding cultural flair, but rather seemed to include the language to highlight cultural aspects and distinctions within characters’ communication. The only book for which this was not true was *Round Is a Tortilla*, as many of the Spanish words were clichéd words used to describe foods associated with Mexican cuisine (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003).

Also, as I examined the purposes of the Spanish language within these texts, I revisited the literature to examine stereotypes and majoritarian stories associated with language. A common stereotype surrounding Latinx individuals is that these individuals are limited by language barriers, whereas they are not able to speak English in a U.S. setting (Barrera et al., 1993; Domke, 2018; Naidoo, 2011b; Zambrana & Logie, 2009). However, this stereotype was not found in any of the books analyzed, and was even countered directly in one particular book.

In *Listening with My Heart*, a language barrier is presented as part of the narrative, but through Esperanza's Vietnamese friend, Bao. The author states of Bao, "He was new to school... and didn't speak much English. [Esperanza] wondered if he felt lonely or scared" (Garcia, 2017, para. 6). Of particular interest was the way in which the author chose to include a language barrier as a significant part of the plot, but not in regard to Esperanza, the Latinx character. Instead, the author placed the language barrier on Esperanza's friend and utilized Esperanza as the character offering help to him as he navigated school without understanding English. This is a direct counter-narrative to the idea that Latinxs are limited by their ability to speak English, and instead offers a narrative that demonstrates Latinxs' value and contributions to an English-dominant society.

Third Theoretical Category Findings. For my third category of analysis, I applied tenets from both Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies to specifically seek out any counter-narratives presented through books' words, illustrations, plots, or themes. While findings from the previous theoretical category involved some books' portrayals of stereotypical gender norms, one theme found within this category dealt with the books' depictions of nontraditional gender roles, as these were salient notices as well. Braden and Rodriguez (2016) discuss ways in which Latinx characters are often depicted in stereotypical gender roles and perspectives, and Gomez (2003) points out ways in which gender roles are often presented as men doing physical labor outside of the house while women stay home doing household chores and taking care of children. Latinx children's stories have also historically portrayed girls with their moms and boys with their dads (Gomez, 2003). However, for several books in this analysis, this was not the case. Most books centered female protagonist or characters, and highlighted strengths from these portrayals. Furthermore, nontraditional gender roles were noticeably

highlighted in *Julian Is a Mermaid*, and more subtly in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez* and *Listening with My Heart*, offering counter-narratives to traditional gender portrayals in Latinx literature and media.

Variations in characters' skin colors was another theme noticed within this category. Gomez (2003) and Naidoo (2008) point out that, often, Latinx characters are illustrated with similar dark skin and dark hair tones, as if no variations in skin color exist amongst individuals identifying as Latinx. This can be problematic when characters are portrayed monotonously this way, as it does not accurately reflect the diversity in physical appearances amongst Latinx groups (Gomez, 2003). However, this was not the case across the books in this study, and results demonstrated a wide portrayal in skin colors and complexions across all books, collectively pushing back on the trope that Latinxs all have similarly colored skin and hair (Gomez, 2003; Naidoo, 2008).

Not only did the ten books offer a portrayal of varied complexions, but there were also a variety of skin and hair colors depicted across the Latinx characters within books, and even across families in books that included them. In *Stella's Stellar Hair*, for example, several aunts are shown with colorful hair and varied styles of clothing. Similarly, the visual images depicting the characters in *Islandborn* also explicates complexities within Latinx identities, as Lola and the other Latinx characters – many of which are her family members – are portrayed with a variety of complexions and appearances. This detail in skin color within families also offers a view into Latinxs' complexities of identity, countering the stereotypical portrayal of Latinx characters in children's literature as monotone individuals with similar skin and hair (Gomez, 2003; Naidoo, 2008).

Finally within this theoretical category, a theme salient when considering the ten books

collectively included the varied storylines and experiences portrayed through each story, as stories primarily highlighted everyday life experiences and challenges. Historically, a disproportionate amount of the Latinx literature base has centered around characters in poverty with low-paying jobs, who must overcome their poverty in order to escape to a better life (David, 2019; Naidoo, 2008; Pérez Huber et al., 2020). Alongside this portrayal are immigration and migrant stories that have, too, been a clichéd emphasis of Latinx narratives (Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997; Sung et al., 2017; Terrones, 2016). While these stories have the potential, and seemingly the intent, to depict Latinx individuals as resilient and able to overcome challenging obstacles, David (2019) discusses how these portrayals should not be the primary focus of stories about Latinx individuals and groups, as such “repeated storyline[s] can be harmful to the way Latinx/Hispanic children see themselves, and the way non-Latinx/Hispanic people come to view them” (para. 2).

For most books in this analysis, however, themes and plots focused on universal experiences and challenges, while also presenting unique obstacles and experiences for some of the characters and highlighting specifications for how these experiences contribute to the characters’ growth. For example, the obstacle in *Listening with My Heart* involved Esperanza failing at her part in the class play, but then learning a valuable lesson about the importance of being kind to herself. Also, in *Where Are You From?* and *Islandborn*, the main characters learn through their challenges the importance of appreciating their heritage and culture. The ways in which these stories portrayed the Latinx protagonists as having an obstacle or obstacles to overcome, and then utilized those obstacles to center these characters’ strength, endurance, persistence, and agency – rather than highlighting ways that characters receive help from “saviors” or seek out ways to escape – fully pushes back against stereotypes surrounding Latinxs

being “in need” (Naidoo, 2008; Pérez Huber et al., 2020) and offers a powerful counter-narrative regarding Latinx individuals’ agency and strength.

Another notice within this category and in regard to *Islandborn* and *Where Are You From?* was the ways in which the authors presented themes surrounding immigration that did not include typical narratives highlighting border-crossing stories or despair (Rodriguez & Braden, 2018; Sung et al., 2017). While I counted these stories’ exclusion of explicit themes surrounding immigration as a counter-narrative to Latinx dominant narratives, it is important to note how the authors’ decentering of details surrounding the characters’ immigration stories could also contribute to dismissive, normalized narratives, whereas stories falsely reinforce a utopian society by following a “happy endings” plot structure, and fail to directly address difficult issues such as those often associated with immigration (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). Braden and Rodriguez (2016) discuss how these types of normalized narratives that paint “near perfect picture[s]” (p. 67) and fail to address real issues, can, too, be detrimental for Latinx children experiencing them and needing these types of representative mirrors (Bishop, 1990).

Fourth Theoretical Category Findings. For the final theoretical category, I focused the analysis on Critical Whiteness Studies’ tenets in order to seek out any permeations of Whiteness and any norms associated with Whiteness within the stories. The first notice from this application was the way in which stories minimized or omitted White characters and their voices, and there were a very limited number of White-appearing characters available across the books to analyze. As described in chapter four, four books did not include any characters appearing to be White in their narratives or images, and for the books that did include White-appearing characters, these characters’ roles were very minimal or nearly nonexistent in the narratives. The

exception to this was *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*, where all characters' voices were equally presented, given its theme of highlighting each individual's unique ability and need.

For the remaining books where White-appearing characters were presented, the primary instances in which characters' voices were heard were either through conflict with the Latinx characters, or characters' voices were silent while they simply appeared in the illustrations along with other characters. This leads to the next theme found within this category, which centered on the White characters' roles in the stories. Of the six books that included White characters, three of those placed these characters in some role of conflict against the Latinx characters. This was noted in depictions where White characters are incessantly asking the girl in *Where Are You From?* where she is from, and in depictions of White characters making fun of Esperanza in *Listening with My Heart* and challenging Sofia in *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*.

It was interesting to see ways in which White-appearing characters were portrayed within these books as "going against" the Latinx characters and being centered as the sources of conflict. When considering these roles from a sociopolitical perspective, the portrayals in these three stories uncover a unique perspective surrounding ideas that Latinx individuals are the sources of disruption, as discussed in Nelson and Davis-Wiley's (2018) publication in reference to perspectives on immigrants. Whereas the common view of immigrants often centers on the idea that these individuals cause disruption and interfere with the flow of life in the U.S., creating a need to "fence off" the U.S. and keep these "others" out (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011), these narratives center the White characters as the sources of disruption and conflict, providing a unique counter-narrative to common ideas involving immigrants and non-native individuals in the U.S.

Another notice was the ways in which books pushed back against certain White norms. While it was noted that White norms were present in several books, particularly when demonstrating ideas surrounding individualism, for the majority of the seven books that included characters overcoming challenges, collectivity was at the center of the overcoming. In *Where Are You From?*, *Islandborn*, and *Stella's Stellar Hair*, the young characters receive the assistance of their family to support them in problem solving and overcoming challenges. In *Julian Is a Mermaid*, *Listening with My Heart*, and *Sofia Valdez, Future Prez*, primary family members play roles of support for the young characters as they face challenges, though these roles of support are less involved than those in the previous three books. For these three stories, the characters are mostly on their own to deal with their obstacles; however, the illustrations and words depict the caretakers in strong roles of support, offering encouragement and care as the characters deal with their challenges. *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* did not make mention of any support given by other individuals or groups when highlighting each characters' unique need; however, Sotomayor addresses the need for outside support through their depictions of the various mechanisms most characters rely upon to support them with their conditions. Whereas ideologies of Whiteness posit the idea that success is achieved entirely on one's own individual merits and efforts (Putman, 2017), these depictions push back on these ideologies by highlighting characters gaining support and assistance from their families, neighbors, and friends, suggesting a larger emphasis on collectivism, a common Latinx cultural orientation (Oyserman et al., 2002).

In addition to examining forms of Whiteness in the ways described above, I also examined ways in which books utilized Spanish in relation to English for the purpose of looking at implicit references to Eurocentric assimilation. Upon analyzing the languages, four of the six books that included Spanish within their texts did so in an integrated manner without separating

the languages, offering an important implication for the ways language is valued and understood. As noted before, the primary purposes of the Spanish words and phrases within most of the books that included both English and Spanish were to demonstrate communication between characters or to point out specifics of Latin culture within the stories. Regardless of the purposes for which the books utilized Spanish, most books' use of Spanish within the English text required readers to rely heavily on context or illustrations in order to understand the words. There was only one book and two instances in which monolingual English readers were not required to use context or illustrations to understand the Spanish words, and on these occasions, Spanish was incorporated using the translation method discussed by Barrera and Quiroa (2003). In their review of English-based books with Spanish text, Barrera and Quiroa (2003) discuss the ways in which these books' translation efforts can unintentionally result in awkward sentence structures and over-translation, or "double-talk," especially when the intended readership is monolingual English children. Though this type of translation aids monolingual readers in understanding the incorporated language, it results in disjointed, textual redundancy for bilingual readers (Barrera & Quiroa, 2003).

For this analysis, the first instance in which this type of translation method was observed was on one occasion in *Islandborn* when Mrs. Bernard is describing what she remembers from the Island. She states, "The whole country is like the inside of a güira. Like the inside of a drum" (Díaz, 2018, stanza 8). Then, as Lola is leaving to go to school and present her project to her class, her family wishes her "Bendición" followed by "Good luck!" (Díaz, 2018, stanza 27). In this way, Spanish was presented followed by an immediate translation, in order to cater to English-only readers, according to these authors. However, given that these two instances were the only ones in which this occurred, they did not seem to carry the same intentions as those

described by Barrera and Quiroa (2003), where most phrases were overly translated for monolingual readers. Rather, the first instance seemed to be translated in this manner for the purpose of explaining parts of the island that Lola is trying to understand, and the second instance seemed to be included as a way of demonstrating the bilingualism of Lola's family.

Barrera and Quiroa (2003) describe how, when including a minority language into an English-dominant text, the languages can work together to offer readers authentic multilingual experiences. The findings from this study related to language integration demonstrate ways in which dual-language books that insert Spanish into an English dominant text has the potential to offer an inclusive means for Spanish-English bilingual children to experience both languages in an integrated way.

Comparing Authors' Cultural Statuses to Books' Themes

For the final research questions, the findings proved to be somewhat inconclusive. In this area of analysis, I examined any patterns related to books' plots, themes, and the words and images of books as they corresponded to the groups of author cultural statuses. I also engaged with comparisons regarding books' awards, seeking out any relations between authors' statuses as Latinx or non-Latinx and the awards conferred to the books by Amazon or other organizations. Nonetheless, after engaging with these examinations, there were few noticeable trends in books that were written by Latinx authors compared to those authored by non-Latinx authors. Rather, most commonalities found were noted almost equally in books both authored by cultural insiders and those authored by cultural outsiders, with a few exceptions.

The primary trend noticed when examining books authored by Latinx authors in comparison to those authored by Latinx outsiders was in regard to stories' main themes. Specifically, when examining the plots and themes of the Latinx-authored books, all five books

heavily centered on characters overcoming challenges and taking pride in one's heritage and/or uniqueness. Though nearly all books' themes centered on concepts surrounding pride or celebrating differences in some way, irrespective of their authorship, the books in this category were the only books that involved pride in cultural heritage as part of their main themes, as none of the non-Latinx-authored books involved this type of theme. In addition, it was noted that two of the three books presenting White characters in roles of conflict against the Latinx characters were authored by Latinx authors. Nonetheless, given that only three books presented White characters in conflict with Latinx authors, there were not enough books to assume a trend for this aspect.

While findings related to examining author statuses proved mostly inconclusive given that there were no consistent trends across books, I did note that *Round Is a Tortilla: A Book of Shapes*, pronounced for its abundance of stereotypical portrayals of Mexican and Latinx cultures, was authored by a non-Latinx author. This followed my expectations for trends in this area, as I assumed, based on historical trends, that the books authored by outsiders to Latinx identity would include more stereotypical elements than those authored by cultural insiders. However, this was only the case for *Round Is a Tortilla*, as the remainder of the books authored by non-Latinx authors did not stand out for stereotypical portrayals more than others. It was worth noting, however, that this book was, interestingly, illustrated by a Latinx illustrator, which seemed ironic given that this book's illustrations were found to be the most stereotypical in nature out of the illustrations in other books. Nonetheless, this was the only book including blatant stereotypes in this manner, so I could not consider these portrayals a trend across books, but I rather considered *Round Is a Tortilla* to be an outlier. Also, it is worth noting that this book was the oldest book analyzed of the ten, with a copyright date of 2013. The remaining books,

with copyright dates ranging from 2017-2021, regardless of being authored by cultural insiders or outsiders, offered many counter-narratives to Latinx stereotypes, so this could provide implications for trends across time. Overall, the lack of trends noted in this area of analysis offers a promising and welcomed finding given the historical state of Latinx literature to portray stereotypes within children's books (see e.g., Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Martínez-Roldán, 2017; Naidoo, 2008; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018), as it points to a positive change in the trajectory of representation.

Another trend I expected to find within the books written by Latinx authors was a deeper level of cultural specificity, and I assumed books authored by Latinx outsiders would include more generalized Latinx representations and elements. Also, I anticipated there might be more themes centered on uniqueness and self-acceptance across intersectional identities, particularly for books authored by Latinx insiders. However, these themes were also varied across books regardless of author status. Last, I expected more books authored by Latinx outsiders to center on storylines surrounding immigration and migrant experiences, given that this is a common theme in Latinx literature written by non-Latinx authors (Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997; Sung et al., 2017; Terrones, 2016). However, this theme was only referenced in two books – *Islandborn* and *Where Are You From?* – both of which were authored by Latinx individuals.

Conclusions

When considering the implications based on this study's findings, results from this analysis primarily point to a promising trajectory of authoring and publishing in the field of diverse children's literature. Though there were stereotypes uncovered across books, these were not the most salient themes in this analysis. Rather, counter-narratives were the primary themes noted across all books. Even in the stories where stereotypical elements were presented, many of

these included other positive, humanizing portrayals that countered negative narratives of Latinx groups and individuals.

One of the most salient notices throughout the inquiries of this analysis and in regard to ideas surrounding “good” Latinx children’s books was the diversity of storylines and themes offered by these books. As previously discussed, much of the Latinx literature base has historically portrayed Latinxs with challenging stories related to poverty and immigration (Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997; Naidoo, 2008; Pérez Huber et al., 2020; Sung et al., 2017; Terrones, 2016). While these types of stories are needed, scholars agree that overusing these storylines create more harm than good when depicting Latinx individuals and culture (David, 2019). Scholars state, instead, that books should offer these types of narratives that provide insight into the uniqueness of Latinx experiences *in addition to* those centered on themes involving everyday life and universal human experiences (Riojas Clark & Bustos Flores, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). In this regard, the books presented in this analysis effectively contributed, offering a diverse range of narratives dealing with such themes as friendship, family, self-love and acceptance, taking a stand, learning to value one’s identity and/or heritage, and even learning everyday shapes, among others.

As an educator, and given the intent of this analysis, I focused my attention on what this analysis conveys about popular Latinx children’s literature, and I considered these findings collectively to engage with them on a practitioner level. Simultaneously, I reflected on my positioning as an outsider to Latinx culture who teaches and shares Latinx literature with students from Latinx cultures as well as from a diverse range of other backgrounds. As such, one particular question I continuously engaged with as I examined the ten books from this analysis was, “What implicit and explicit messages do these stories convey to both Latinx and non-Latinx

readers about Latinx individuals and groups?” Engaging with this question led me to conclude that, based on the books’ overall themes and representations, the following ideas could be construed by young readers:

- Latinxs have large families that are very important parts of their lives.
- Latinx families come in many forms.
- Grandparents often take care of Latinx children.
- Latinxs come from and live in many different types of places.
- Latinx individuals are strong, unique, and brave individuals with diverse characteristics, lives, and experiences.
- Latinxs’ voices are important.
- Spanish is part of Latinx culture, but English is the dominant language.
- Latinx men and women take part in all types of roles.
- Latinxs have varied skin tones and are varied in their appearances and ways of dressing.
- Latinx individuals are presented with obstacles and challenges, and respond to those challenges both through their own individual efforts and with the support of others.

Taken collectively, I concluded based on these determinations that these stories primarily offered positive portrayals of Latinx individuals and cultures, and that, were I to read these books to the students in my classroom, they would receive positive messages surrounding Latinxs. Nonetheless, even though books offered positive depictions of Latinx characters and cultures, and though stereotypical narratives were not widely prevalent across books, it is still important to recognize, particularly as a cultural outsider practitioner presenting these stories, how narratives’ stereotypical elements and underlying messages, even if subtle, must be addressed and considered when sharing these books with young readers.

In this regard, there are important implications surrounding cultural authenticity that can be drawn for non-Latinx teachers and other practitioners seeking to provide authentic mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990) to their Latinx students. Mendoza and Reese (2001) posit that teachers from the dominant culture “are likely to be caught by the unexamined assumption that a book is multicultural and worthwhile if it has non-European-American characters or themes and is critically acclaimed in well-known journals” (p. 158). As stated before, my choice to utilize Amazon as my source of books to analyze for the present study stemmed from my frequent use of Amazon as a teacher seeking out popular diverse children’s literature. However, as a teacher simply looking to diversify my classroom library on a budget, I did so without any understanding of books’ content and authenticity, and simply assumed that any books listed on a best-seller list and named as “diverse” must be high-quality.

This assumption, however, echoes the words of Smith et al. (2016), who assert that merely including a Latinx character or the Spanish language in a book does not constitute a “good” Latinx children’s story. Nevertheless, as an outsider educator, recognizing Latinx cultural authenticity in books is not always possible, nor is it something teachers always have the expertise or capacity to embark upon. However, with the teaching force being led by predominantly White educators (Jupp et al., 2016; Matias & Mackey, 2016), it is especially important for these educators reading diverse literature about individuals from historically marginalized backgrounds to be aware of books’ cultural authenticity, how they present these narratives, and the discussions that follow. So, what are educators to do?

Teachers can start by simply paying attention to authorship when selecting Latinx literature for their classroom libraries or for trade books for lessons, and intentionally select books authored by Latinx individuals. Though the results of this analysis minimally contributed

to trends noted in the authorship of Latinx literature, whereas cultural outsider authors tend to include stereotypical elements and inauthentic portrayals within narratives about Latinx culture (Reese, 2007; Short & Fox, 2003), it is, nonetheless, a place to begin when selecting literature about groups with which one does not identify.

Also in this regard, Mendoza and Reese (2001) discuss the mistake that educators often make by assuming that one book can be adequate for representing a particular culture or group's experience. Results from the present study support these assertions by providing an important implication for educators seeking out Latinx literature for their classrooms, as no single book in this analysis could provide a perfect representation of Latinx groups and culture, nor should one book be expected to. While some books in the analysis did present stereotypical elements of Latinx culture and normalized Whiteness in various forms, several books actively pushed back on these. *Round Is a Tortilla* presented traditional gender norms and ways of dressing, while *Julian is a Mermaid* countered gender norms by focusing on self-acceptance from a standpoint centered on the boy's desire to dress like a mermaid. Several books portrayed Latinxs as having large families, while *Brown Baby Lullaby* depicted a religious nuclear family. *Brown Baby Lullaby* also featured Black-appearing Latinx individuals as the main characters, while *Where Are You From?* mostly featured light brown-complexioned individuals. Most books included only depictions of able-bodied individuals; however, *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* highlighted numerous abilities and needs of a diverse range of individuals that do not portray an able-bodied identity, and two other books featured characters with physical conditions.

The point being, when examined individually, none of the books perfectly portray all of the complexities of a Latinx identity, or entirely omit all possible narrow representations associated with Latinx culture or refrain from presenting any normalized ideologies of

Whiteness. However, when exposed to all of the stories, young readers' ideas of Latinx groups and individuals are not limited to one single image of a Latinx person or culture; instead, young readers are provided with a variety of narratives and images across the ten books, contributing to an understanding of the complexities of these individuals and cultures both inside and outside the U.S. As such, this analysis demonstrates the importance for educators and other practitioners, especially cultural outsiders, to not rely on one book as a means of representing a culture or ethnic group. Rather, teachers should ensure that multiple perspectives and representations within stories about marginalized cultures and groups are included when choosing books for the classroom and for lessons, and should remain vigilant on the portrayals these stories collectively offer the readers in their classrooms.

Most importantly, though, these matters point to the need for inservice training and professional development focused on understanding cultural authenticity, and reinforce the importance for teacher training programs and school systems to take active steps to include culturally relevant training within their programs and resources. This begins, though, with educational professionals engaging in cross-communal teamwork with other educational professionals of different backgrounds in order to ensure that insider perspectives are promoted in decisions surrounding literature in the classroom. As a teacher-researcher, I recognize how even the extensive amount of research I put forth into understanding Latinx identities and cultures did not provide me with the necessary understanding to thoroughly and appropriately critique the literature in this analysis, given my outsider status. Thus, it is necessary for teachers and other professionals in power to collaborate with each other and seek out expertise from insiders to the culture being presented before making decisions on books and stories to include in curriculum, professional development, and teacher training programs.

Limitations and Possibilities for Future Research

This study critically analyzed the words and images of ten best-selling Latinx children's picture books, looking closely at stereotypical narratives as well as counter-stories. This study also sought to compare author cultural statutes as they relate to books' plots and themes. While this study was mostly able to successfully conduct a close examination of each book's words and illustrations for these purposes, there were several limitations within the study that offer valuable implications for future studies in the field looking to conduct similar types of analyses.

According to Terrones (2016), the most effective critical lens is one that utilizes counter-storytelling to confront "dominant, racist cultural stereotypes and assumptions...found in narrative storylines" (p. 245). As stated previously, this is the first critical content analysis known to apply both Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies as a combined theoretical lens. As part of applying Critical Whiteness Studies alongside Latinx Critical Theory, I examined aspects of the selected books from both perspectives, working to combine the two. While joining both theories proved beneficial for examining the books from multiple angles and engaging with how the two perspectives complemented each other to uncover dominant and counter-narratives, this simultaneous application also presented limitations to the study.

Particularly, the scope of tenets applied by combining both theories resulted in a limitation regarding my ability to thoroughly and effectively examine all pertaining aspects of the books for all tenets from the theories, and the amount of application and analysis needed to utilize both theories resulted in a large depth of findings. As such, after reflecting upon this analysis and its goals, there are implications that could be gleaned for future research in this area in regard to the application of theoretical frameworks. It would be beneficial, for example, to utilize the two theories separately in order to examine various aspects of the books related to

each tenet more thoroughly. As such, focusing specific tenets of these theories to dissect particular elements within each book related to each theory would likely be advantageous for a study of this nature, rather than combining the theories and uncovering such a vast multitude of findings.

Also, it would be beneficial for future studies to expand upon critical analyses in this field by including more visual analyses of images in Latinx children's picture books. While this type of depth went beyond the scope of the current analysis, a more detailed visual analysis as opposed to the simpler surface-level examination of images this study offered would likely result in richer findings regarding portrayals of Latinx groups and cultures. For example, an analysis that looked deeper into such illustrative aspects as ambience, pathos, effect, and other elements associated with color, shape, texture, movement, and space (Short, 2019) would produce richer findings. Though my focus was centered on examining visual images, the illustrations were considered part of the text and combined with the written words to create the narratives. An application focused solely on examining visual images and illustrations might allow for a more detailed analysis looking at these types of specific aspects, rather than just examining the most visible aspects and how they interact with Latinx cultural elements. These types of visual analyses could even offer more opportunities for connecting to other theoretical frameworks, such as postcolonialism, feminist criticisms, and critical multicultural analysis in order to uncover findings related to Latinx stereotypes as well as counter-narratives in illustrations.

In regard to visual images and illustrations, this study was also limited in that it focused solely on comparing authors' cultural statuses in relation to books' themes and portrayals, while excluding illustrators' identities and the role these identities played in the books' visual depictions. Broadway and Conkle (2011) state that illustrations, just like written words, function

to communicate information and tell stories, and are products of those who create them. As such, just as it is important for authors to be familiar with the cultures about which they write (Crisp et al., 2016), it is just as important that picture books' illustrators also possess an adequate understanding of the cultures and groups they represent through visual images. Given that illustrations were included and analyzed in this study as part of understanding each book's main plot and theme, this study was limited in that I did not include illustrators' cultural statuses as part of my comparison. Therefore, a study of this nature would be strengthened by examining illustrators' cultural identities and how those relate to the visual depictions within stories, if at all, particularly for more detailed visual analyses.

Additionally, my selection of texts limited my application of Critical Whiteness Studies in relation to author cultural statuses. Although four of the five books I selected from Amazon's list of Latinx books were written by White authors, one author was not, which created another layer to my approach for the analysis of that particular book, and limited my findings as they related to how Whiteness could be perceived, given that the author did not identify as White. Thus, it would have been beneficial to select texts not solely written by non-Latinx authors, but written specifically by White authors, given the analysis's application of Critical Whiteness Studies. Doing so would likely provide more insight into CWS tenets. As such, in order to hone in better on author comparisons, future studies utilizing a Critical Whiteness Studies frame alongside Latinx Critical Theory could select books specifically by White authors, as that would offer a more focused analysis on which to apply Critical Whiteness Studies tenets.

As stated before, this study's data sources were chosen due to my own familiarity with and use of Amazon as a primary source of finding books for my own classroom. However, this choice to utilize Amazon as a source of data and to select only ten books from their top-selling

list limited the study in that it only offered a small view of the books that students are actually reading in classrooms. Therefore, future studies could apply these methods of analysis to other collections of books in order to gain a more accurate insight into the representations within books that students in classrooms are reading, such as those in school and classroom libraries.

There were also several limitations resulting from my positionality in relation to Latinx identity that hold important implications for future studies in the field as well. A primary purpose of this study was to analyze Latinx literature with regards to stereotypes and cultural portrayals; however, when considering portrayals of cultural authenticity, especially as a cultural outsider, it is necessary to understand and recognize that culture “is not a set of static traits, characteristics, or ascriptions, and...that not all members of a particular group are homogenous or share the same experiences (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003)” (Martínez-Roldán, 2013, p. 7). My positionality as an outsider to Latinx culture resulted in several limitations in this regard, as I could not recognize distinguishing factors of Latinx culture due to the fact that I am not a member of the Latinx community myself, and, thus, could not determine each story’s degree of authenticity. For these reasons, given that a large part of the authenticity of a well-written Latinx children’s book is its level of cultural specificity, I did not focus on seeking out stories’ levels of authenticity, but rather focused on observing each story’s use of common perceptions of and stereotypes about Latinx culture as it is defined broadly. Even then, nonetheless, my cultural status limited my ability to recognize stereotypes and negative perceptions, as I only know of those as an outsider who has never been subjected to them. Therefore, I took note of instances where I noticed representations of Latinxs’ that I’m familiar with as an outsider to Latinx culture and that follow majoritarian storylines that have historically been dominant in Latinx literature. Then, the aspects I observed when looking for counter-stories within each book related to the storylines that were

in contrast with those majoritarian stories surrounding Latinx culture. Thus, after examining professional literature and comparing narratives to those found in this study's books, any storylines that did not fit within these familiar and stereotypical narratives were categorized as counter-narratives.

Additionally, it is important to note that, throughout this critical content analysis, even when determining the content that could be considered stereotypical, my positionality here also limited my interpretations. As such, it was necessary for me to simply consider stereotypes in a broad sense of "single story" narratives (Adichie, 2009), including those that *could* be detrimental or harmful, though not necessarily. For example, in *Stella's Stellar Hair*, a potential stereotype within that story involved the authors' use of multiple aunts, which fits into the stereotype of Latinxs having large families (Gonzalez, 2018). Of course, as discussed in the findings, having a large family is not a detrimental stereotype. Nonetheless, by examining all stereotypes, whether harmful or not, the aim of this analysis was to consider ways in which dominant narratives like these can limit the complexities of Latinxs' experiences, thus perpetuating one-sided, majoritarian "single stories" that fail to depict Latinx cultures in wider, more accurate ways (Adichie, 2009; David, 2019).

This emphasizes an important implication for future research in this area, as having insiders to Latinx culture as analysts in order to conduct interracial analyses (Rogers & Christian, 2007) would result in a greater depth of insight and understanding of books' content and authors' intentions. Fox and Short (2003) state of cultural authenticity, "you know it when you see it" as an insider reading a book about your own culture" (p. 4). Yoo-Lee et al. (2014) also states, "cultural authenticity comprises not only the absence of stereotypes but also the presence of values consistent with a particular culture and the accuracy of cultural details in text and

illustrations” (p. 326). For studies examining aspects of Latinx culture, having individuals who identify as Latinx would greatly benefit the study’s focus on critically examining narratives about Latinx groups and culture. For the present study, though it was not possible to include cultural insiders as researchers due to the study’s purpose as an independently-written dissertation, it leaves opportunity for future research in the area.

Also, related to these ideas, was another limitation dealing with my own internalized Whiteness. Even though a primary goal of this analysis was examining permeations of Whiteness within the books analyzed, my positioning as a White individual also prevented me from recognizing Whiteness at work throughout this analysis. Throughout the analysis, as I applied theoretical tenets and examined these narratives with a critical eye, I was aware that my interpretations were, still, only able to be understood from a perspective where Whiteness is normalized and has always been normalized in my world, and that I was only made aware of this normalization later in life. As such, I realize that this study’s findings are limited in that way as well. This, too, offers implications for future studies, as including multiple researchers from diverse backgrounds and with differing experiences would aid in findings related to permeations of Whiteness.

Finally, a limitation within this study lied in the number of books included in the analysis, as ten books can simply not offer findings that can be generalized to all Latinx literature. For future studies critically examining collections of literature, analyzing a larger number of books would likely result in different findings with regards to authors’ cultural statuses and themes. Also, an analysis that applies both qualitative and quantitative measures to a larger number of children’s books would likely offer more generalizable implications and result in fewer limitations.

Summary

This study employed a critical content analysis to examine best-selling Latinx children's literature. Specifically, this study applied Latinx Critical Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies to analyze the top ten best selling picture books from Amazon's collection of best-selling Hispanic children's literature, and sought to address the question: In what ways, if any, are these books' plot lines and themes perpetuating or challenging dominant, stereotypical narratives of Latinx groups and cultures? Then, this study analyzed books' themes and elements of representation as they related to authors' statuses as cultural insiders or outsiders in order to seek out any trends surrounding cultural insider or outsider authorship.

The results of this study demonstrated that the ten books in this analysis collectively portrayed Latinx characters and experiences positively and in ways that primarily challenged majoritarian narratives, though with some inclusion of stereotypical elements. Findings indicated few salient themes across books associated with authors' cultural statuses. I provided a discussion of conclusions based on these findings and offered implications for ways in which teachers, researchers, and other educational professionals can utilize findings such as these to seek out representative, culturally-relevant literature.

Returning to the central question that guided this study, *What am I reading to my students?*, I was pleased to find that most books and most literary elements within stories did not follow the negative trends within representation noted historically in Latinx literature. It was disheartening, nonetheless, as I studied these trends and critically analyzed stories, to understand just how many stories I have shared with my former students followed stereotypical depictions of Latinx cultures, in the absence of my realization. It is my belief that most teachers want to provide high-quality, authentic literature to their students; however, it is imperative that teachers,

particularly White teachers, engage in uncomfortable, critical discussions and remain reflexive of the stories they present to their students. As such, it is my hope that studies such as this one will continue to contribute to scholarship engaging in critical conversations surrounding children's books, and that publishers, teacher preparation programs, and school systems will embark on this positive trajectory of change as we become more aware of issues in representation. As educators, professionals, and researchers, we must continuously ask ourselves, *What are we reading to our children and students?*

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Latinx Stereotypes and Tropes in Media and Literature

Stereotype or Trope	Reference(s)
Traditional foods of Mexico assumed to be the most common foods in all of Latin America (i.e. tacos, tortillas, guacamole, burritos, frijoles)	Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Gomez, 2003; Martínez-Roldán, 2017; Terrones, 2016
Clichéd and traditional gender roles (i.e. men working outside the house, women staying home doing household chores and taking care of children)	Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Gomez, 2003; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018
Spanish language commodification; Spanish used only to add cultural flair to English text	Acevido, 2017; Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016
Mexicans and/or Latinxs as lazy	Gomez, 2003; Martínez-Roldán, 2017
Traditional/outdated clothing; clothing that is colorful and in traditional costumes, even when characters are home	Gomez, 2003
Latinx families do not care about education	Zambrana & Logie, 2009
Latinxs as criminals who steal government money	David, 2019
Dark skin/dark hair; No variations in brown skin tones	Gomez, 2003; Naidoo, 2008
Latinxs as illegal immigrants and/or migrants	Adichie, 2009; Barrera & Garza de Cortes, 1997; Sung et al., 2017; Terrones, 2016
Poverty portrayed through rural or impoverished living, farm-working, and/or low-paying physical labor occupations	Barrera et al., 1993; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; David, 2019, Domke, 2018; Gomez, 2003; Naidoo, 2011b
Mexican-American men as uneducated, manual laborers	Mendoza & Reese, 2001
Latinxs as poor and in need	Naidoo, 2008; Pérez Huber et al., 2020
Latinxs limited by the inability to speak English	Barrera et al., 1993; Domke, 2018; Naidoo, 2011b; Zambrana & Logie, 2009
Latinxs are a monolithic group; all Latinx cultures/groups lumped together into one broad category based on Spanish as the primary language, without any distinctions between complexities within cultures and identities	Barrera & Quiroa, 2003; Zambrana & Logie, 2009
Latinxs as soccer players	David, 2019
Latinxs have large families	Gonzalez, 2018
Latinx males as gang members, crime-ridden	Hasse, 2002

VITA

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