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# Representations of Immigrants in Young Adult Literature

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Representations of Immigrants in Young Adult Literature

by

Frances Augusta Ramos Verbruggen

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Education  
in  
Educational Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to determine how immigrants and the immigration experience are represented in current young adult (YA) literature. In the study, I asked the following questions: Who are the immigrant characters in recent YA books? Why do they come? How do they experience immigration? How are they perceived or treated by others? A content analysis methodology was used to examine, from a critical literacy viewpoint, recent young adult novels with immigration themes. Data were analyzed by identifying and interpreting patterns in themes across 22 YA novels with immigrant protagonists or other important characters, published between 2013 and 2017. Data indicated that the protagonists in the study reflected current immigration trends fairly accurately, came to the United States primarily to escape violence or persecution in their home countries, experienced a variety of challenges, tended to hold onto their home country cultures, and were often the objects of racism, but also found kindness and friendship in the United States. Teachers who desire to include authentic immigrant literature in their classroom libraries should consider from whose perspectives the books have been written, and learn about the authors' backgrounds and the messages that authors want to convey through the books that they write. In addition, immigrants can be encouraged to write children's and young adult books, sharing their experiences and contributing to the supply of realistic immigrant literature with complex and authentic immigrant characters.

## Dedication

To my husband, Jan Verbruggen, who is an immigrant, and to my children,  
David, Kristina, Esther, and Hannah, who grew up in two cultures.

Soli Deo gloria

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This study was conducted to determine how immigrants and the immigration experience are represented in current young adult (YA) literature. The explicit and implicit messages in YA literature have a profound influence on readers. The messages that immigrant and non-immigrant youth receive from the books they read matter, because the value that is given, or not given, to students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, and the decisions surrounding what cultural messages are presented and how they are presented all impact whether or not immigrant students are set up to succeed in school and in life.

### **Problem Statement**

Teachers need to be aware of what the messages are, the sociopolitical context from which they developed, and the impact that they have on students, both immigrant and non-immigrant. The goal of this study was to help teachers become more aware of the messages so that they can select reading materials for their courses and classroom libraries that reflect immigrant students' lives and experiences, and that provide windows for both immigrant and non-immigrant students to look through and gain a deeper understanding of people who are not necessarily like themselves.

### **Background of the Problem**

Immigrants are the fastest growing subgroup of students in schools in the United States (Sadowski, 2013). Nearly one in four students in public schools in the United States are immigrants. Of these, between one fourth and one third are undocumented (Camarota, Griffith, & Zeigler, 2017). Schools have a responsibility to educate all of

these students (United States Department of Education, 2014). English language arts classes are especially important for immigrant students, because it is in these classes that students are introduced to much of American literary thought and culture, as well as language. In English language arts classes, an important part of the curriculum is the books that students are given to read. While the classics have traditionally been the staple literary diet in middle and high school English language arts classes, YA literature is increasing in popularity, because many students, especially reluctant readers, relate better to YA literature than to the classics (Dyer, 2014).

The YA literature that young immigrant students are exposed to in the classroom, sends them “explicit and implicit messages” (Lindsey & Parsons, 2010, p. 54) about themselves, other people, and the world around them. Recent researchers have asked the following questions: Do young immigrants find their cultures represented in the characters in the books they read or do they experience cultural invisibility? (Mullen, 2004). Are our young people exposed to texts that portray the complexity of the immigrant experience in authentic ways, or are they stereotyped? (Lamme, Fu, & Lowery, 2004). From what points of view are immigrants represented, and does the point of view of the dominant society provide sympathetic portrayals, or does it represent them in a subtle or not so subtle derogatory manner? (Mullen, 2004). Do the books that students read value diverse home cultures, or do they send the message that the best way to fit into American culture is to reject the language and culture of their home countries? (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011).

While older studies provide important insights into the messages for and about immigrants in children's and YA literature over a span of many years, there is value in learning what messages are found in the books that have been written recently. What do the representations of immigrants in YA literature look like in the most recent years? Do the books reflect the current landscape of immigration in the United States? The inclusion or exclusion of current immigrant themes in YA literature has important implications for immigrant students, and indeed for all students, because through immigration, the United States is becoming an increasingly diverse country.

Not only is the quantity of books available important, it is the quality of the representations of minorities and immigrants in the books' characters that also needs to be considered. Misrepresenting diverse characters can do more than simply lead to disengagement, it can be damaging. "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (Bishop, 1990, as cited in Reading is Fundamental, 2015, p. 1).

According to Gay (2010), many teachers do not understand how factors such as race, ethnicity, and culture impact education, and assume that good teaching should have the same effect on children, no matter what cultural background they come from. Teachers are often unaware that the education system in the United States is primarily a reflection of European American cultural values. If teachers are to nurture critical consciousness, they can "help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities. This notion presumes that teachers themselves recognize social

inequities and their causes” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pp. 476-477). However, many teachers do not have a good understanding of social inequity and its causes, and some teachers reject this information (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

With regard to the discussion about immigration themes in YA literature, it is impossible to discuss immigration without addressing the tensions that exist between assimilation and keeping one’s home identity, and growing to find peace somewhere in between. Teachers must not allow their own standpoint and social values to be privileged over those of their students. “Critical consciousness helps students understand that what they are learning is not only useful to them but also for a larger social purpose” (Camangian, 2015, p. 427). If teachers are to teach a culturally diverse student body effectively, they must also have cultural competence. They must understand the standpoints from which their students see the issues. To teach about immigration, teachers must, at the very least, be aware of the historical and sociopolitical conditions that lead to immigration.

Even if teachers do understand the relevance of culture in students’ learning, they may not know how to translate this understanding into classroom practice (Hammond, 2015; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). Sometimes, teachers know very little about their students’ cultural backgrounds, or may simply be insensitive to them (Saint-Hilaire, 2014). As the diversity of student populations increases, multiple cultures may be represented in one classroom, and teachers wonder how they can adequately address the needs of students from so many different backgrounds (Saint-Hilaire, 2014).

Deficit thinking is also a barrier to effective teaching of a culturally diverse student body. When teachers define culturally, ethnically, racially, or linguistically different students by what they cannot do rather than by their strengths, especially if they conclude that these “deficits” are the result of low intelligence or poor social skills, they will not hold high expectations for their students (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Selecting culturally relevant texts with immigrant themes that foster discussions about race, ethnicity, and social justice can potentially pose a challenge for teachers, if books that reflect their students’ cultures and experiences are nonexistent. For example, teachers might find books about recent immigrants, but according to Saint-Hilaire (2014), “there is an absence of books that consider the reality of immigrant children who have been in the US for several years and the real life of second, third, fourth even fifth-generation of native-born Americans” (p. 600). Even if teachers find a plentiful supply of multicultural books, they might not feel competent about choosing highly appropriate and high quality culturally relevant texts for their adolescent and young adult students that lend themselves to conversations about social justice. Fortunately, information on how to evaluate these texts is readily available. Teachers can begin by reflecting on critical questions such as how race and ethnicity are addressed, realism of characters, how beauty is defined, who the change agents in the story are, and congruity between text and illustrations (Gay, 2010). Even if texts are not sympathetic to different ethnic and cultural groups, they can still hold value for culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2010). In addition, teachers may not feel prepared to facilitate discussions about emotionally charged issues

of race, ethnicity, inequality, and social justice in the classroom. It takes both great courage and great skill to lead discussions of this nature, while maintaining a climate of mutual respect in the classroom.

When teachers are aware of and sensitive to the sociocultural dynamics of their immigrant students' lives, they can choose books in which immigrant students can see their experiences reflected. In her beautifully written essay entitled *Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors*, Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) used the metaphor of windows, mirrors, and doors to describe the power of books to allow young people to look into the worlds of others, see their own lives reflected in literature, and, by using their imaginations, open doors and enter into the characters' worlds. However, she stated,

For many years, nonwhite readers have too frequently found the search futile. This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication, in the *Saturday Review*, of Nancy Larrick's landmark article, "The All-White World of Children's Books." "Across the country," she stated in that piece, "6,340,000 nonwhite children are learning to read and to understand the American way of life in books which either omit them entirely or scarcely mention them." A quarter of a century later, census data indicate that about 30% of the school population are members of the so-called minority groups—Latinos, Afro-Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans—and where will they find their mirrors? (Bishop, 1990, as cited in *Reading is Fundamental*, 2015, p. 1).

While there is a growing body of YA literature since Bishop's essay was published in 1990 that includes diverse characters and challenging topics that adolescents actually face

(Cart, 2010; Williams, 2014), YA literature still does not reflect with equity the diversity found in society (Cart, 2012). Williams and Deyoe (2014) looked at library collections to see if youth collections reflected the diversity and life experiences of young people in society. They found that libraries need to represent diverse and minority youth better. Children from diverse backgrounds, including immigrant children and youth, need to see their lives and experiences reflected in the literature that their teachers give them to read. Otherwise, we must ask along with Bishop (1990) on behalf of immigrants, and indeed all children from diverse backgrounds, “Where will they find their mirrors?”

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The landscape of immigration to the United States is changing. The 45<sup>th</sup> President has stated his intention to build a wall on the United States-Mexico border, and has put a ban on immigration from certain Muslim-majority countries. Many Syrian refugees have settled in the United States recently, but their future here is uncertain. Other immigrants and refugees come from all over the world to find a safe and better place to raise their families. Because real immigrant life is complex, young adult fiction books with immigrant themes need to show the complexity of the immigrant experience so that young immigrants can see their lives and experiences reflected in the books they read. Portraying immigrant life authentically as complex also helps non-immigrants to understand the immigrants’ perspectives, which can develop their empathy for immigrants. Yet teachers are not always aware of or sensitive to the messages contained in the books they have available for their students to read. The messages that immigrant and non-immigrant youth receive from the books they read matter, because the value that



is given, or not given, to students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, and the decisions surrounding what cultural messages are presented and how they are presented all have a profound impact on whether or not immigrant students are set up to succeed in school and in life. When teachers are aware of the messages and the effect that they have on their students, they can be sensitive to their immigrant students' cultures and life experiences. Immigrant students can see their lives reflected in the texts and non-immigrant students can gain a better understanding of and empathy for the immigrant experience.

### **Significance of the Research Problem**

While not all immigrants are dispossessed minorities, all immigrants must navigate the upheaval of leaving behind the world they know and finding their place somewhere in between two worlds, not only learning *about* their new culture, but also learning to be a part of it. Young adult literature can serve as an anchor that keeps immigrant students from going adrift in the storm of the immigration experience, by helping them to see that they are not alone in their struggles, *if* they can make a connection between the stories they read and their real-life culture and experiences. Young adult fiction can serve as a means to empower immigrant students, *if* it leads to dialogue that fosters personal growth and cross-cultural respect and understanding (Landt, 2006). Immigrant youth need caring teachers who will provide them with reading material that accurately reflects their cultures and experiences (Stewart, 2013), who will advocate for them and teach them to advocate for themselves, who will help them to discern the messages contained in the books that they read, and who will guide them to

reflect deeply on how the values of their home culture intersect with the values of their host culture as they seek to answer the question, “Who will I be in this new country?”

### **Presentation of Methods and Research Questions**

This study is an examination of how immigrants and the immigration experience are represented in recent YA literature. Through a qualitative content analysis of recent YA fiction novels, looking through a critical literacy lens, I explored the following questions:

1. Who are the immigrant characters who come to the United States?
2. Why do they come?
3. How do they experience immigration?
4. How are they perceived or treated by other characters?

By identifying patterns in the data and developing themes from a content analysis of 22 recent YA fiction novels with immigrant themes, I gained a better understanding of what students learn from the books about immigrants and immigration, and how the books portray the realities of immigrant students’ experiences. In other words, I learned how current YA fiction novels serve, or fail to serve, as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for immigrant and non-immigrant students.

### **Definitions of Key Concepts**

Table 1.1 contains definitions of some key terms that are used in this paper. While the definitions of these terms may be somewhat different in other contexts, these definitions will help the reader to understand how the terms are used in this research study.

Table 1.1

*Definitions of Key Concepts*

Term	Definition
Assimilation	The process in which an immigrant gives up the distinctive cultural characteristics of the home country and embraces the language, traditions, values, and beliefs of the host culture, (for the purposes of this study, that is American culture), coming to resemble members of the dominant American society.
Asylum seeker	A person who leaves his or her home country because of persecution or oppression and, upon entering the United States, asks for protection.
Authentic portrayal	A portrayal of a character that avoids stereotyping, and shows complexity and uniqueness of personality in areas such as motivations, goals, and desires.
Critical consciousness	A framework developed by Paulo Freire, that is used to examine the roles of dominance and oppression in society.
Critical literacy	A framework used to examine the issues of power and dominance in literature (Luke, 2012).
Cultural and linguistic diversity	Differences among people with regard to their culture and language. People whose cultures are distinct from that of the dominant American society, or whose home language is not English are culturally or linguistically diverse.
Culturally relevant texts	Texts that portray people, places, culture, and experiences that are similar to the people, places, culture, and experiences that the students are familiar with and that students can therefore identify with.
Involuntary immigrants	Foreign-born people who are displaced from their home country by persecution, violence, or war and are unable to return to their home country until conditions become more stable. For the purposes of this study, involuntary immigrant is synonymous with refugee.
Messages (in literature)	The lessons that authors send to their readers through the stories that they write, or the lessons that readers learn from the stories that they read.
Pull factors	Conditions in a country that attract foreign-born people to immigrate. Pull factors can include jobs, educational opportunities, and the chance for a better life.
Push factors:	Dangerous or distressing conditions that motivate people to leave their home countries and migrate to another country. Push factors can include poverty, war, violence, oppression.
Qualitative content analysis	A systematic research method used to classify, analyze, and interpret qualitative data.

Refugees	Foreign-born people who are displaced from their home country by persecution, violence, or war and are unable to return to their home country until conditions become more stable. For the purposes of this study, refugee is synonymous with involuntary immigrant.
Representations (or portrayals)	The personal characteristics, including personality, culture, language, values, and beliefs of a character in a story from the point of view of the author. The ways that the author makes the reader see and understand the character.
Self-identity	The understanding that people have of themselves, including their strengths and weaknesses, skills, talents, values, and beliefs. Self-identity provides an answer to the question, "Who am I?"
Voluntary immigrant:	Foreign-born people who migrate to the United States by choice.
Young adult literature	Literature that is written primarily with young adults in mind, that addresses issues and experiences that young adults deal with in real life. Unlike children's literature, young adult literature typically includes difficult topics such as self-identity, mental health issues, abuse, and so on.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The books that young people read have a profound effect on their developing identity, as well as on their perceptions of and attitudes toward people who are not like themselves (Alsup, 2014; Bishop, 1990; Hill, 2014). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the stories written for and about immigrant youth portray in authentic ways the complexity of the immigrant experience. In this study, I examined how immigrant youth and their families are represented in current YA literature, because young immigrants need books as mirrors, reflecting their lives and experiences back to them, and all young people need books as windows, so that they can see into the lives of people whose backgrounds and life experiences are unlike their own, thereby developing greater understanding and empathy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical literacy is a framework that is used to examine the issues of power and dominance in literature (Luke, 2012). With immigration being one of the most hotly debated issues in the United States today, it is clear that in the arena of real-life, there is a great deal of struggle to decide whose views will dominate immigration policy in our country. How is this struggle represented in immigration literature? By looking through the lens of critical literacy, the reader does not simply accept what is written, but to critically analyzes stories, asking such questions as “What is truth? and “Whose truth is being told, by whom, and for what purposes?”

YA literature, as a form of media, has the power to be a vehicle either of harm or of healing for immigrant and refugee students and a bridge of understanding with non-

immigrants. It can reflect to immigrant and refugee students the kinds of messages that tell them they are threats to the welfare of society and therefore unwelcome, and undesirable. It can stereotype immigrant students, reinforcing the images that non-immigrants learn from popular media. Or, it can provide complex representations of their cultures and experiences that they can identify with. Will the messages in the books that young adults read about immigrants contribute to their understanding of themselves and each other, or will the narratives that are crafted continue to limit that understanding?

As we understand how and why the portrayals of immigrants are what they are, we can better understand the ways that children from different cultural groups, both immigrants and non-immigrants, perceive one another (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). This understanding can help teachers guide students toward greater acceptance of those whose cultures and experiences are different from their own. As Lamme and her colleagues (2004) wrote:

We believe that if children read books about children's life experiences that may differ from their own, they may develop an understanding of children from other cultures. Further, through their enjoyment of the stories, children learn about diverse cultures and the history of those cultures (p. 124).

As readers critically examine what they read, they come to recognize stereotypes and misrepresentations for what they are—a first step in stopping these inaccurate portrayals from continuing. I chose critical literacy as a lens for my research study because it forces me to refrain from looking at the stories I analyzed from the viewpoint of the dominant

society, instead deeply reflecting on life from the perspectives of the immigrant characters that I have come to know.

Over the past decade and a half, several studies have examined how immigrants are represented in children's and YA literature. I have analyzed these studies in this review, asking the following questions:

1. Who are the immigrant characters who come to the United States?
2. Why do they come?
3. How do they experience immigration?
4. How are they perceived or treated by other characters?

My goal was to understand what the research tells us about portrayals of immigrants in historical and contemporary YA literature, to inform my study of representations of immigrants in current YA literature.

### **Review of the Research Literature**

I reviewed research literature pertaining to immigration, both historically and in previous literary studies that looked at representations of immigrants in children's and YA literature. In the following sections, I present the historical and literary research findings about where immigrants to the United States have come from, their experiences, before, during, and after their immigration journeys, and how other members of society perceive and treat immigrants.

**Immigrant origins.** The demographic tapestry of the United States is highly diverse. Patterns of immigration from different parts of the world are influenced by immigration laws, and change over time. To understand the immigration patterns found

in children's and YA stories, it is helpful to recognize how these patterns reflect the real-life immigration regulations in place at different points in the history of the United States.

**Historical overview of immigrant origins.** To discern how well immigration literature reflects actual patterns of immigration to the United States, an overview of the history of immigration law is useful. Until quite recently, immigration laws in the United States have favored White, Northern European immigrants over all other racial and ethnic groups. As early as 1790, the Naturalization Act allowed only free White people “of good moral character” to become naturalized citizens (Pew Research Center, 2015). The Page Act of 1875 restricted entry of Asians into the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015). A ban on Chinese immigration, that became law in 1882 was finally repealed in 1943 (Pew Research Center, 2015).

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a wave of immigration to the United States. While previously, the majority of immigrants had come from Northern Europe, this wave brought many Southern and Eastern European immigrants, from countries such as Italy and Poland. The Immigration Act of 1924 sought to turn immigration patterns back to those the country had known earlier, imposing quotas on immigration (Pew Research Center, 2015). The law made distinctions between “Colored” and “Non-Colored,” European and non-European, and excluded Chinese, Japanese, and Indian people (Rubin & Melnick, 2006). The 1924 immigration law also banned immigration of criminals, those with mental illness, and those with low mental capacity, among others. Immigrants over the age of 16 had to prove that they could read. (Pew Research Center, 2015). Additionally, the law marginalized Mexicans. As Rubin and Melnick (2006) reported,



With this one piece of legislation, then, the United States government set the agenda for a huge percentage of future discussions about American immigrants.

In the most basic terms, this act organized a longstanding obsession with ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigrants into a form that would dominate immigration policy for the rest of the century (p. 9).

Until a new law was passed in 1965, 70% of the immigration quotas went to people from Germany, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. (Pew Research Center, 2015). Laws have changed, allowing more people from many countries and of many races to enter the United States. In 2016, the largest group of immigrants entering the United States was Asian, with a growing number of African immigrants, while the Mexican immigrant numbers have stabilized over the past few years (Cohn & Caumont, 2016).

The inclusion or exclusion of immigrants for citizenship in the United States, based on their race, has a long history (Flores, 2003). Between 1790 and 1952, immigrants to the United States who sought citizenship had to be recognized as legally White (Flores, 2003). By World War II (WWII), Italian, Irish, and Jewish Americans, who had not always been welcomed into American society, had come to be accepted as groups that would make good Americans. Later immigrants, such as those from Mexico and Puerto Rico, however, were viewed as problems (Rubin & Melnick, 2006). Between 1942 and 1964, when the United States faced a shortage of agricultural workers, Mexican agricultural workers were allowed to migrate temporarily to the United States to alleviate the shortage (Pew Research Center, 2015), but were not given the opportunity to become citizens.

### **Immigrant origins as represented in children's and YA literature.**

Immigration law explains much about the patterns revealed in immigration literature over the years. Children's and YA books that focus on the topic of immigration portray immigration trends accurately. Bousalis (2016) found that the books reflected historical immigration patterns, for example, those written during the late 1800s, represented immigrants from Western and Southern Europe, while later books portrayed immigrants from a much wider variety of countries. Brown (2010), who analyzed books written during three major immigration waves to the United States, found that during the first wave (end of the Revolutionary War to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), immigrant characters came primarily from Europe: The United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavia, and Ireland. During the second wave (1882-1924), many Italian, Polish, and Jewish immigrant characters from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as migrant Chinese and Mexican characters were featured. The third wave (1965-present) saw immigrant characters from Asia, Central America, and Latin America in children's and young adult books. Lowery's (2000) study included books that were not necessarily written during the three great immigration waves, but were set in those periods. She found a similar trend in the nationalities of immigrant characters during the three waves. Characters in books set during the early immigration wave (1820-1899) came from Bohemia, Ireland, Africa, and Arizona (Navaho). Books portraying the middle immigration wave (1900-1964) featured Russian Jews and Jews fleeing from Germany, as well as immigrant characters from Poland, Ukraine, and China. In books reflecting the third immigration wave (1965-present), immigrant characters from El Salvador, Cambodia, Iowa, Mexico, and Vietnam

appear. Other studies of historical and contemporary children's and YA fiction books include stories that highlight protagonists from Lebanon, Korea, Japan, Mexico, Somalia, Italy, Russia, El Salvador, Eastern Europe, China, India, Vietnam, Greece, Eastern Europe (Jewish), and Pakistan, (Lamme, et. al, 2004), as well as Haiti, the Philippines, Cuba, Korea, India, Russian Jews, Italian Jew, Scotland, Laos, Bangladesh, Haiti, Albania, Ethiopia/Eritrea, El Salvador, and Cambodia (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011), Western Europe, Japan, China (Boatright, 2010), Mexico (Cummins, 2013), and Central and South America (Sano, 2011).

These trends reflect historical information and immigration laws, which initially allowed only people from “desirable” ethnic groups to enter the United States, while excluding others, and only gradually opening up the doors of the United States to immigrants from around the world.

**The immigration experience.** Immigration changes people. The reasons why people leave their home countries to settle in the United States, and their experiences along the way, before, during, and after travel, become part of the fabric of the immigrants' lives. An examination of the historical research findings tells us about immigrants' reasons for coming to the United States, what it was like for the immigrants to make the transition to life in the United States, and how different groups of immigrants have adjusted to American life. By understanding what life was like for real-life immigrants at different points in the history of the United States, readers of children's and YA immigration stories can see how these real-life patterns are reflected in stories with immigration themes.

***Reasons for immigration to the United States: The research.*** Immigration is not an event. It is a process, one that can sometimes take an entire lifetime (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). The process begins before people leave their homelands. Those who are lucky have time to carefully plan their immigration experiences. The not-so-lucky ones must sometimes leave in the dark of night, with only the clothes on their backs.

There are two major categories of immigrants: voluntary immigrants and refugees. Voluntary immigrants are those people who make a choice to leave their homeland and settle in another country. Some voluntary immigrants are highly educated professionals, while others have received very little or no formal schooling (Suárez-Orozco, 2013). Refugees are people who have had to flee their homelands because of war, violence, persecution, and so on. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2000) described refugees as people who are outside of their country and unable to return due to “a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a social group” (p. 2). The reasons that immigrants make the choice to leave or are forced to leave their homeland and move to another country vary. The reasons may include wanderlust (Soto Huerta & Perez, 2015), to escape poverty (Abrego, 2014; Chuang & Gielen, 2009) or social strife (Abrego, 2014; Chuang & Gielen, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), the desire for better employment (Solo Huerta & Perez, 2015), political freedom (Chuang & Gielen, 2009), to build a better future for their children (Abrego, 2014; Chuang & Gielen, 2009), or to reunify with family members (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001;

Suárez-Orozco and Todorova, 2008). Many immigrants wish that they could stay in their homelands, but see immigration as the only way out of dire situations (Abrego, 2014).

***Reasons for immigration to the United States: The stories.*** There are many reasons why the immigrant characters in children's and YA books leave their homelands and come to the United States. The reasons include both *push* (circumstances that cause people to leave their homelands) and *pull* (hopes and ideas that draw people to the United States) factors. Often, the push factors are the more compelling of the two. While many push factors are painful and traumatic, immigrant characters are often portrayed as remembering their countries of origin with great affection.

One of the most prevalent push factors, found in every immigration wave discussed in the research studies, is poverty. Just as people in real life came to the United States to escape poverty and often starvation in their home countries, so did the immigrant characters in the children's and YA books in virtually every study reviewed. Poverty could be the result of crop failure or debt (Brown, 2010), drought or famine (Parsons, 2016), war (Brown, 2010; Levy, 2000; Parsons, 2016) or the absence of a parent, particularly a father, often through death (Brown, 2010; Levy, 2000).

Oppression, discrimination, and other forms of injustice were also push factors that were often mentioned. The young protagonists and their families often left their homelands because of anti-Semitism and other forms of religious and ethnic oppression (Bousalis, 2016; Parsons, 2016), abuse, brutality, exploitation, humiliation, injustice (Brown, 2010), persecution, forced resettlement of Native Americans (Lowery, 2000), and genocide (Parsons, 2016). Other push factors mentioned in the studies include war

and violence (Levy, 2000; Lowery, 2000), and to escape forced military service (Lowery, 2000).

In addition to the push factors, a number of pull factors brought the characters and their families in the immigrant stories to the shores of the United States. Many immigrant parents, especially during the second immigration wave, wanted to give their children a better education than they could receive in their home countries, to acquire land, or to reunite with family members who were already in the United States (Bousalis, 2016). Wealthy immigrants came to explore new business investments (Bousalis, 2016). They came to seek their fortune, find prosperity, and follow their dreams for a better life (Lowery, 2000). Some immigration books deal with the topic of international adoption (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2015; Yi, 2014).

While children's books do not usually go into the details of the traumatic experiences that cause people to leave their countries (Lamme et. al, 2004; Levy, 2000), this may be to afford young children a measure of emotional protection. Most of the books for younger children do not recount the details of the wars or other traumas that pushed immigrants out of the homeland. But they do give young children an idea of the history and culture of the country where they were born (Levy, 2000). Young adult books, on the other hand, treat these difficult topics in depth (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). The data from the literature studies, when compiled, parallels quite closely the information provided in research about the reasons why immigrants come to the United States. The literary studies give an accurate representation of the reasons for immigration.

***The immigration journey: The research.*** In the past, the immigrants' whole village would sometimes come out to bid them farewell as they departed on their journey to the United States. Relatives shed many tears, knowing that they would never see their loved ones again (Bayor, 2014). Some immigrants took trains to port cities. Others traveled by foot. Some immigrants had to leave in secret to avoid families who didn't want them to go, or governments that did not allow them to leave. Russian Jews often had to bribe border guards, or evade them in any way possible to get to Germany, to the port that would take them to the United States. Traveling was dangerous for young women, as people would take advantage of them (Bayor, 2014).

Between 1850 and 1930, many immigrants traveled to the United States in the steerage compartments of ships. Once the immigrants arrived in the United States, steerage passengers had to endure a physical examination and an interview. Anyone with a disease or anyone who might potentially become a public charge was not allowed to enter (Bayor, 2014).

In 1911, the United States Immigration Commission published a report on conditions in the steerage on ships carrying immigrants to the United States. The Commission had sent several agents undercover as passengers in the steerage. The agents reported the wretched conditions that steerage passengers endured on the voyage to the United States.

There were two types of steerage, "old steerage" and "new steerage." Most of the new steerage ships brought immigrants from Northern Europe, while passengers from Southern and Eastern Europe were served by old steerage ships. Conditions on the old

steerage ships were the worst. The passenger compartments were crowded. Sometimes over 1,000 steerage passengers would travel together on a single ship. Sleeping berths were small, and passengers were required to keep their hand baggage in the berths with them. Restroom facilities were filthy and inadequate. Often, the only water for bathing and washing dishes was cold sea water from the faucet. The air was noxious, as there was little ventilation. Passengers were not given sick cans, so vomit from seasick passengers remained on the floors, which were rarely cleaned. Passengers had access to limited space on the deck, where they could get fresh air when weather permitted. Food was poorly prepared, and served in makeshift dining areas if there was enough space in the sleeping compartments to set up a dining area. The mortality rate among passengers was high. There were separate compartments for men traveling alone, women traveling alone, and families. The voyage was especially dangerous for young women traveling alone, as they were taken advantage of by crew members and male passengers (Gjenvick-Gjønvik Archives, 2018a).

Conditions on the “new steerage” ships were better, comparable to a simplified version of second class. While the sleeping berths were no bigger than on the old steerage ships, they were cleaner. Stewards cleaned the floors and the restrooms regularly. Passengers could use floor space for their hand baggage. The ventilation was still poor, but the air was not as foul as on the old steerage ships. Food was better, and sometimes there was even a clock or a piano in the dining area (Gjenvick-Gjønvik Archives, 2018b). Steamships were to be preferred over sailing ships because they could travel faster, minimizing the adverse effects of the voyage (Gjenvick-Gjønvik Archives, 2018b).



In contrast to the waves of immigrants who traveled to the United States aboard ships, immigration in the current wave includes undocumented immigrants from Mexico, Central, and South America who cross the border to the United States from Mexico. Although undocumented immigrants flee to the United States to escape poverty, they are not usually the poorest of the poor. It takes money to be smuggled across the border. In 2010, the average cost of hiring a smuggler to take a person across the Mexico-the United States border was \$2,500. Smugglers use remote, unfenced areas to cross the border, or they try to climb the double fences. Some migrants are smuggled in ships, which costs more, but comes with a smaller chance of getting caught. Some undocumented immigrants come through legal channels, and simply overstay their visas. Relatively few Mexicans enter the United States in this manner (National Research Council, 2013).

The border crossing journey is dangerous. Often, the *coyotes*, or guides who are paid to smuggle people across the border, will hold migrants for days in stash houses with little food or water. Women are sometimes sexually assaulted by the coyotes. Migrants either succeed in crossing the border, turn back after being spotted by border patrol officers, or die in the attempt, usually as a result of wandering in the desert for several days (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2015).

***The immigration journey: The stories.*** The research studies under consideration in this paper provided some vivid descriptions of the immigration journey for the characters in stories with immigration themes. The journey was perilous (Boatright, 2010; Brown, 2010; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011), uncomfortable (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011), and required great courage from young immigrant characters (Brown, 2010).

During the early and middle immigration waves, most immigrant characters are portrayed as coming from Europe in boats. The living conditions during the month-long voyages were terrible (Bousalis, 2016; Brown, 2010). “Most European immigrants endured month-long tortuous ship journeys during which they suffered through theft, seasickness, and appalling living conditions” (Bousalis, 2016). Poor immigrant characters traveled below, in the steerage. Travelers often fought because of their different cultures. The stories illustrate that characters traveling in the steerage were not allowed to interact with the rich people traveling in the upper decks (Lowery, 2000). Wealthy passengers had more comfortable quarters (Bousalis, 2016), and were not subject to the physical examination and interview at Ellis Island (Lowery, 2000). Some stories describe poor immigrant characters being sent back to their home countries, being unable to pass the medical exam or the interview at places like Ellis Island (Bousalis, 2016; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011), or because immigration officials feared that they might become a financial liability (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). More recent immigrant characters are portrayed as coming to the United States in airplanes (Bousalis, 2016; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011), but a few come by foot, boat, or even mule on part of the journey (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011).

Some immigrant characters in the stories had to flee from their homelands, and their journeys were difficult (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). Some immigrant characters came from Central and Latin America on boats that were filled beyond capacity (Brown, 2010). Their journeys were incredibly treacherous (Lowery, 2000). Many of immigrants who came on those boats were described in the stories as drowning at sea (Brown, 2010).

Immigrant characters crossing the Rio Grande from Mexico were portrayed as experiencing anxiety about crossing borders without proper documentation (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). Sometimes parents in the stories would take their children across the border. At other times, the young protagonists themselves made the decision to risk crossing the border without authorization. Undocumented immigrant characters crossing the border from Mexico are portrayed as facing physical danger during the border crossing, such as robbery and assault. Immigration laws are all seen as antagonists in stories (Cummins, 2013). Some novels portray undocumented Hispanic immigrants sneaking or being smuggled into the United States (Lowery, 2000). Sometimes, the main character in the novels about border crossers returns to Mexico at the end of the story. In several others, protagonists face deportation (Cummins, 2013).

The stories in immigrant novels end more optimistically than real life does for many immigrants (Brown, 2010). Although many immigrant characters are shown to work through the transitions of moving to the United States, not all immigrant characters in the stories succeed in adjusting to life in the United States (Boatright, 2010). Many return home.

*Adjustment to life in the United States: The research.* Historical research provides us with a great deal of information about immigrants' lives after arriving in the United States. Three factors: jobs, emotional welfare/mental health, and ability to assimilate are closely interconnected when looking at immigrants' ability to adjust to life in the United States. The kinds of jobs that immigrants have been able, or unable, to secure at different points in history have an effect on their feelings about their new

country. These feelings could be either positive or negative, depending on the level of opportunity afforded to the immigrants. Other factors, as well, have an impact on immigrants' emotional welfare and mental health. In addition, the choices that immigrants make about holding on to their home language and culture or embracing the words and ways of their new land influence how well they adjust to life in the United States.

*Jobs.* Immigrants tend to be perceived as a labor force with low skills. This used to be true, but the occupational outlook for immigrants in the United States has changed. Most immigrants are literate, even though the majority are not college graduates (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

In the late 1800s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of poor, unskilled or semi-skilled laborers came to the United States. Immigrants could find jobs as steelworkers, meat packers, textile mill workers, and coal miners (Bayor, 2014). There is still a high demand for low cost agricultural work in the United States, and therefore migrant farm workers still cross the border from Mexico to harvest American crops. Many of these workers are temporary (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

Undocumented immigrant workers in the United States tend to find work in service professions, as janitors, child care givers, housekeepers, and so on. Some find work in construction or production (e.g., manufacturing, food, textiles) (Pew Research Center, 2015). While jobs that do not require high levels of skills are often the only ones available to undocumented immigrants, legal immigrants with education can often find better paying occupations (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Highly skilled immigrants today

are often sought in top professions such as medicine, mathematics and computer science, and engineering. Highly skilled immigrants, such as engineers and scientists, come primarily from Asia and Northern Europe (Fix & Kaushal, 2006).

*Mental health.* Voluntary immigrants as well as refugees are likely to suffer acculturation stress (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), the disorientation and emotional upheaval, including feelings of separation and loss, that results from leaving one's family, friends, and culture behind, and learning to navigate a new culture with different traditions, values, beliefs, expectations, and often, a new language (Mbanaso & Crewe, 2011). This acculturation stress can sometimes lead to anxiety and depression (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002).

While all immigrants face challenges, the challenges are especially acute for refugees (Hos, 2016). According to McBrien (2005):

refugees are forced out of their native countries, often in violent circumstances such as civil war, and many homeless refugees must take up residence in temporary refugee camps (Cewart & Cewart, 1993; Huyck & Fields, 1981). Living conditions in the camps are frequently poor, with inadequate food, shelter, and medical care (Westermeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996). The living conditions contribute to significant, often chronic ailments, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria, kidney damage, and liver damage (Trueba et al., 1990). Many refugees suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder after enduring rape or torture and witnessing killings, often including the brutal murders of family members (Boyden et al, 2002; ones & Cha, 1999; Tollefson, 1989). (p. 334).

Immigrant children usually do not have any say in the decision to immigrate. Yet, along with their parents, they may experience acculturation stress. Depending on their means, immigrant families may be more likely than their United States-born peers to live in impoverished neighborhoods with higher crime and schools that have fewer resources. (Suárez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, 2015). They are sometimes separated from their families (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Some come as unaccompanied youth, and as a result, are vulnerable to abuse. Some face fear as a result of being undocumented (Cummins, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Fear that they or someone in their family will be deported is very real among many immigrants. The United States currently deports over 400,000 immigrants per year (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Many new immigrants turn to religious communities to help them deal with acculturation stress (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

In many immigrant families, children take on adult responsibilities such as writing checks or translating because they are able to learn English faster than their parents (Zhou, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 2000). However, immigrant youth may have difficulty navigating the school system because of their lack of English proficiency (Hos, 2016). Many immigrants face discrimination (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). Immigrant adolescents sometimes have difficulty gaining a sense of belonging (Cartmell & Bond, 2015). Having a community of immigrants from the same country of origin may help to ease immigration stress and give young immigrants a sense of community.

Immigration stress can lead to tension within the family. Some immigrant children grow to feel embarrassed by or lose respect for parents who, due to their lack of

English proficiency and understanding of social norms of the new country, are unable to exercise parental authority or provide ideal parenting for their children. These children choose to identify with the host country, and reject the culture and values of their parents (Suárez Orozco et al., 2015). The stresses involved in acculturation sometimes lead to family strife, and there is a high rate of family breakup among new immigrants. Some immigrants are never able to assimilate to the culture in their host country, and return home, often with strong feelings of guilt and failure. (Lamme et. al, 2004).

*Assimilation.* In the past, immigrants were under a great deal of pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture in the United States. While there is still pressure to put aside the language and culture of their home countries, more immigrants and children of immigrants today are developing transcultural identities, allowing them to navigate both mainstream American culture and the culture of their home countries (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). According to Portes and Rumbaut (2006), immigrants who achieve selective acculturation “acculturate to American ways without abandoning their parents’ language and key elements of their culture” (p. 267). This results in more stable families and young people who remain connected to their families and cultural communities, making it easier for immigrant parents to help their children navigate their way through adolescence and the road to success. Religious institutions play an important role in helping young immigrants and children of immigrants to implement selective acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

*Adjustment to life in the United States: The stories.* In the previous section, I discussed the findings from historical research on immigration, in particular, immigrants’

adjustment to life in the United States. In the following pages, I look at findings from literary studies on children's and YA stories with immigration themes, and relate these findings to those from the historical research. In particular, I look at the topics: jobs, mental health, and assimilation.

The immigration journey was not over when immigrant characters finally gained admission to the United States, or when they successfully crossed the border. Immigrant characters are often portrayed as coming to the United States with very little accurate information about the country they were moving to (Brown, 2010). Most immigrants were poor. Yet they endured with great courage and hope for the future (Brown, 2010). Lamme et al. (2004), in their analysis of children's picture books, found several themes missing, such as discrimination, difficult conditions upon arrival, undocumented status, return home because of unsuccessful immigration, longing for homeland visitation, feeling of not belonging either in host country or home country, or community contributions to immigrants' success. They speculate that publishers would not want to publish children's books with such adult themes. Clifford and Kalyanpur (2011) assured that these themes are dealt with in depth in YA novels. During the 1880s and 1890s, many of the trade books available told of the desperate and tragic lives of immigrants (Bousalis, 2016). Even so, YA literature is an "optimistic genre," and immigrant stories in the books generally end on a rosier note than they often do in real life (Brown, 2010).

*Jobs.* Life for immigrant characters in novels and stories was not always what they had expected. In YA books set across eras, immigrant characters often experienced downward social mobility (Lowery, 2000; Sano, 2011; Yi, 2014). They are portrayed as



being given menial jobs, even if they had been skilled workers in their home countries (Bousalis, 2016). Many characters who were white collar professionals are described as struggling with English, and therefore chose to become owners of small businesses, where their lack of language skills would not be such a great problem (Yi, 2014). In the early years, the immigrant characters in children's and YA books are shown to have found jobs that included farming in rural areas or manual labor or factory work in cities. Immigrants were described as being given menial jobs, based on their religion or ethnicity. Relatives who had immigrated earlier are portrayed as giving new immigrants menial jobs. YA books portrayed Mexicans primarily as migrant farm workers, and undocumented workers were described as having difficulty getting jobs, because they had to hide to avoid being found by immigration officials (Bousalis, 2016).

In spite of these difficulties, young immigrant characters in the books that were analyzed were portrayed as being generally hopeful. They were depicted as having the opportunity to get a better education than they would have found in their home countries (Bousalis, 2016). In the stories, because of hard work and determination, immigrants eventually succeeded in making a better life for themselves in the United States (Lowery, 2000).

The books rarely portray the work these immigrants did as contributions to the building of the United States. Yet, immigrants made major contributions to the growth of the United States (Lowery, 2000). Chinese immigrants played a major role in the building of Central American Railroad, as well as the California agricultural industry. African slave immigrants provided free labor. Mexican immigrants contributed through their

work in agriculture, business, and architecture. Immigrants contributed to the building of the United States through their work in manufacturing, garment industries, domestic jobs, and so many other ways. African immigrants fought bravely in American wars (Lowery, 2000). One character in Japanese immigrant novel was portrayed as fighting in WWI, but then being denied citizenship because he was an “Oriental” (Boatright, 2010, p. 473). The contributions immigrants made to their new country are not discussed. Most of the books merely portrayed the benefits of immigration to the immigrants (Lowery, 2000).

*Mental health.* The stories illustrate how, upon arrival in the United States, immigrants were surprised to encounter a whole new set of obstacles that would need to be overcome if they were to achieve their dreams. Failure to acclimatize, along with loss of financial and medical support were depicted as factors that created stress, which in turn, often led to a host of domestic problems. Immigrant fathers were often stereotyped in books as being stressed and abusive, taking comfort in excessive drinking (Bousalis, 2016). Young immigrants who were portrayed as being left to themselves while their parents worked long hours in menial jobs often took to the streets and participated in gangs (Bousalis, 2016; Levy, 2000). Many immigrant characters were described as experiencing feelings of not belonging either in the United States or in their home country (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). Homesickness was a recurring theme in the novels (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011; Lamme et al., 2004; Levy, 2000). Many immigrant characters were shown to experience the grief and loss associated with the incompleteness of families, especially the absence of male relatives (Brown, 2010; Levy, 2000). Some were described as regretting coming to the United States, because it made

them forget their homeland. These characters were portrayed as remembering life as being better in the old country (Bousalis, 2016). Some stories during the early immigration period portrayed immigrants ending their lives (Bousalis, 2016; Lowery, 2000).

Mental health issues were particularly serious in stories about refugees. Some of the recurring themes in the books about Southeast Asian refugees include: adjustment to a new culture, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Levy, 2000).

Several healthy coping skills were seen in the novels and children's books. Many immigrant characters found comfort in their places of worship and in their faith (Bousalis, 2016). Some books illustrated young immigrant characters as being fortunate enough to navigate adjustment to life in the United States with the help of a cultural mentor, who may or may not have also been an immigrant (Brown, 2010). Storytelling played several roles in the lives of characters, including: finding or giving courage or inspiration, healing from their trauma, building or maintaining connections with extended family and with the homeland, and to entertain and thereby finding temporary relief from daily hardships (Parsons, 2016).

One way that immigrant characters in the stories were shown to cope with the transition to the United States was by maintaining connections with their homeland. A theme that runs through the books is the desire among characters to remember or to learn about the country of the immigrant's (or the immigrant's parents') birth, and the desire to return to the homeland. Several books describe grandparents trying to help younger generations remember the language, values and traditions of the old country (Bousalis,

2016; Yi, 2014). Celebrating cultural festivals and eating traditional foods are ways that grandparents and other characters in some of the stories passed on cultural heritage to the younger generation, including children adopted internationally (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2015). Storytelling was seen as an important means of passing on knowledge about the homeland (Parsons, 2016). Immigrant families were also portrayed as making connections to their extended families and homeland by creating memories and by visiting the homeland (Lamme et al., 2004).

*Assimilation.* Once they arrived in the United States, immigrant characters in the stories were shown to be under intense pressure to assimilate to American culture. In the novels, authors illustrate that assimilation was the only way for immigrants to move up on the social ladder. But the stories also show that this was hard for newcomers, especially the older generation, to do (Brown, 2010).

Having difficulty learning English was one barrier to assimilation that the characters in many of the novels struggled with (Lowery, 2000; Yi, 2014). Some immigrant characters were described as being reluctant to give up their home language and exchange it for English, because language is so tied up with identity. Child characters from countries such as Korea were sometimes shown to be encouraged to choose an American name, one that would be easier for Americans to pronounce (Yi, 2014).

Many immigrants were homesick for their home countries (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). Brown (2010) found that as immigrant parents in the novels held onto the traditions and values of their homeland, their children often rebelled, preferring instead to assimilate into American culture. The young people were described as wanting to engage

in the American lifestyle and succeed within the dominant culture, replacing the culture of their home countries with that of the United States. Boatright (2010) gave the example of a Chinese character in a graphic novel who wanted to “be White” to win the affection of an American girl.

Eating the kinds of foods that Americans eat and wearing the clothes that Americans wear were very important steps in assimilation for young immigrants in several stories (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). On the other hand, eating traditional foods from the old country was a way that immigrants were shown to maintain connections with their birth cultures (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2015).

The stories portray how living in the United States changed the young immigrants. The books describe young people as experiencing cultural victories, but only at the cost of surrendering something of the values and culture of the home country (Brown, 2010; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). The stories revealed how this surrender is difficult, as those values and that culture will always be part of who the immigrants are. The immigrant stories rarely show the “ultimate cost of assimilation” (Brown, 2010, p. 145). Parents and children alike in the stories struggled to find the balance. For immigrant characters, becoming American was “more than having a legal status on paper. It is the bridge between their homeland tradition and their new values in another country” (p. 126). It represented their new identity and the process of transitions and connections that they have experienced (Lamme et al., 2004).

Closely tied to the question of assimilation or pluralism is the achievement of the “American Dream,” the dream of what life can be like in the United States. Boatright

(2010) described a protagonist in one graphic novel, the “ideal immigrant,” who followed all the laws, overcame obstacles, and achieved the American Dream. Brown (2010) found the American Dream to be a theme in many novels. Although immigrant characters encountered a host of new troubles and heartbreaking struggles, including discrimination and poverty in the United States, they eventually saw the realization of the better life that they had hoped for. These immigrant characters were shown to have learned that if they were strong and patient, they could achieve their American dreams. According to Lamme et al. (2004), young immigrants are likely to find in children’s and YA books the message that by working hard, immigrants can achieve their dreams. Lowery (2000) found a similar message in the novels that she analyzed. However, she critiques that message, pointing out that little attention is given to the impact of race on the success of the immigrants, although in real life, race and class were and still are important factors in the success of immigrants. While attention is not drawn to this issue, Lowery’s (2000) analysis showed that White immigrants were more likely than non-White to succeed, as were immigrants who came with both parents, as opposed to alone or with only one parent.

Much immigration literature continues to celebrate assimilation, and to send the message to young immigrant readers that this is the only option if they want to fit in. In fact, Bousalis (2016) commented that most of the books reviewed in her study were stories of assimilation. Yoon, Simpson, and Haag (2010) shared an example of a children’s story, *My name is Yoon* (Recorvits, 2003), in which a young Korean girl who moves to the United States is urged to use English. She is praised both by her teacher and

her parents for using English, but never praised for using both English and Korean. Stories such as this one reinforce the notion that assimilation is the preferred way for immigrants to adjust to life in the United States. Yoon et al. (2010) reminded us that pluralism, retaining the best of the home culture while embracing parts of American culture, rather than assimilation, is an option for immigrants today. Pluralism allows immigrants to retain the culture and values of the home country, while at the same time, learning American ways. Yoon et al. (2010) cautioned readers and teachers that although some immigrant books “seemed to exhibit equity and excellence as the basic principles of multicultural texts, they actually showed that this equity and excellence could only be achieved through the immigrants’ assimilation into the dominant culture” (p. 115). These researchers encourage teachers to seek out books that honor pluralism rather than assimilation.

**How are immigrants perceived or treated by others?** From the early days of the United States, the places that immigrants come from have had an effect on how they are welcomed. Immigrants have been perceived as being more or less desirable members of American society depending on their countries of origin. These perceptions have been translated into the ways that American society, including both those with deep roots in this country and immigrants who are further along in the assimilation process, treat immigrants. By understanding the real-life patterns in attitudes toward immigrants and in society’s treatment of them, readers of children’s and YA books with immigrant themes can recognize how these patterns are reflected in the stories.

*What research tells us about perceptions and treatment of immigrants.* One of the challenges that immigrants must face is dealing with the faulty or stereotyped perceptions of who they are by people who do not know them. Awareness of bias in public opinion is relevant to the topic of immigrant themes in YA literature because of how easy it is for bias to creep into the books that students read. Complex and multifaceted representations of immigrants can lead to better understanding, whereas simplistic portrayals will lead to negative attitudes and conflict between immigrants and native-born people in the United States (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). Negative public perception of immigrants can make assimilation into the host society difficult, or even impossible, for immigrants (Bousalis, 2016).

The history of legally favoring certain groups of immigrants over others based on race, has set the stage for society in the United States to discriminate against immigrants and refugees from non-White ethnic groups. Although laws have been updated, along with the “official” message of the United States toward non-Northern European immigrants, attitudes have been much slower to change. United States adults currently hold generally positive views of immigrants from Asia and Europe. They hold neutral views of immigrants from Africa. However, they still hold generally negative views of immigrants from Latin America and the Middle East (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Popular media is a force that, according to many, exacerbates discrimination by problematizing immigrants and refugees (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013), and by stereotyping them (Bender, 2003; Flores, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Molina-Guzmán, 2006; Mullen, 2004). According to Esses and colleagues (2013), media presents immigrants in



a way that makes established members of a society believe that their safety, economic stability, and way of life is being threatened. For example, media stories about immigrants from Mexico often emphasize the terms “illegal” or “illegal aliens” (Johnson, 2003). It is not unusual to hear stories in the media about the high cost of immigration, while very little is discussed about the benefits that immigrants bring to a society (Johnson, 2003). In addition, media discussions that portray immigrants in a negative light do not give the immigrants themselves the opportunity to tell their stories. For example, Mexico’s positions on the United States-Mexico issues such as drug trafficking, trade, the economy, and immigration are rarely voiced in the United States media and rarely heard by the American public (Johnson, 2003). Immigrants are often portrayed through the media as voiceless. The views of the dominant class become normalized. Therefore, it becomes “common sense” to present the voices of authorities from the dominant class, rather than the voices of immigrants themselves, who are unable to change the public’s negative perceptions of them. So audiences are free to see themselves as victims, and immigrants as a threat to their way of life (Gemi, Ulasiuk, & Triandafyllidou, 2013).

The messages that are sent through media have an impact on people’s attitudes toward immigrants and therefore on their behaviors toward immigrants. When immigrants feel unwelcome, it becomes very difficult for them to overcome acculturation stress and find their footing in their new country (Bousalis, 2016; Cartmell & Bond, 2015).

***What the stories tell us about the perceptions and treatment of immigrants.***

While immigrant characters in young adult novels might be likeable, and may even win the reader's sympathy (Cummins, 2013), it is safe to say that they were not portrayed as being liked by the dominant society in the United States. The novels reflect that Americans saw immigrants as being unwilling to assimilate, and were blamed for bringing a variety of social ills to the United States, including diseases (Bousalis, 2016; Brown, 2010), alcoholism, and other problems in society Bousalis (2016). During the early immigration periods, Irish and Italian immigrant youth were portrayed in stories as being street gang members. In the later era, Mexican youth became the gang members featured in novels (Bousalis, 2016). Immigrant parents were seen as illiterate and their children as uneducated (Bousalis, 2016; Brown, 2010). In the stories, dysfluent English and foreign accents made immigrants appear less intelligent in the eyes of the Americans (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). Irish Catholics, who came to the United States in the 1840s and 1850s were seen as having loyalty to the Pope, and being opposed to American values (Brown, 2010).

As a result of the ways that the immigrant characters were perceived by other characters in the books, they were usually treated poorly. Relatives who had immigrated earlier or who were born in the United States acted as though they were superior to the new immigrants (Bousalis, 2016). "Old immigrants" thought they were superior to "new immigrants" at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brown, 2010). Immigrants were criticized as being inferior to the dominant Americans (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). Illustrations portrayed Americans to be wealthy, dressed in fancy clothes, while immigrants were

dressed in drab clothing (Bousalis, 2016). Immigrant characters experienced discrimination (Boatright, 2010; Brown, 2010; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011) and racism (Boatright, 2010; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011; Levy, 2000; Lowery, 2000). Young immigrants were bullied at school (Bousalis, 2016). Some stories portray immigrants as being cruelly mistreated to the point where they lost hope and committed suicide (Bousalis, 2016). However, other immigrants in the novels were able to prevail in the end (Brown, 2010).

In Lowery's (2000) study, race and class were themes in all of the books, but very few of the books addressed these issues in their historical contexts. Many of the novels gave the impression that racist attitudes and actions came from a few individuals, rather than being systemic in the places where the immigrants settled. Race and class issues changed somewhat over the immigration periods, but much remained the same. Hispanic immigrants experienced more discrimination than Asian or White immigrants. African immigrants were usually viewed negatively. During the early immigration era, White immigrants were treated better than non-White immigrants. However, even when immigrants had money and were White, they were still seen as outsiders. Ethnic origins marked immigrants as outsiders.

Mullen (2004) found that the immigrant groups that were less visible in children's books were portrayed more often merely in terms of physical traits rather than other characteristics, such as personality. These immigrants were portrayed more negatively, with smaller heads in illustrations, and with less verbal complexity. Certain immigrant groups were absent or trivialized in popular culture, such as books for children Mullen,

(2004). The absence or trivialization of certain immigrant groups sends a strong message about the value, or lack of value, that the dominant society holds for these people.

### **Review of Methodological Literature**

In this review, I analyzed 14 studies of immigrant children's and YA literature, to find out what the studies tell us about who the immigrants to the United States are, why they came, how they experienced immigration, and how they were perceived by others. All of the studies analyzed a selection of children's or YA books, mostly historical or contemporary fiction narratives, although a few nonfiction works were included in some of the studies. For this literature review, I first searched the EBSCO database for articles in which representations of immigrants in children's and young adult literature were analyzed. By searching the reference section of each study, I found additional relevant articles and books. Each study that I included explored some aspect of the immigrant experience in one or more children's or YA books in which the protagonist or another major character was from a culture other than the dominant (White, European American) culture in the United States. Excluded from my review are studies of books for infants and multicultural literature studies not related to the United States.

The majority of research methods in the studies (eight out of the 14 studies) I analyzed were qualitative content analyses or discourse analyses (Bousalis, 2016; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011; Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2015; Lowery, 2000; Parsons, 2016; Sano, 2011; Yi, 2014; Yoon et al., 2010), which allowed the researchers to focus in on specific topics across a large body of documents. Among the studies there was also one critical literary analysis (Boatright, 2010), one statistical archival analysis

(Mullen, 2004), and four analyses for which the particular method was unspecified (Brown, 2010; Cummins, 2013; Lamme et al., 2004; Levy, 2000). The smallest number of books analyzed in a study was three, while the largest number was 98 (the researcher of the study with 98 books had 46 participant readers).

The researchers had a variety of criteria for selecting books for their studies. It is of utmost importance to understand how these decisions were made, as inclusion or exclusion of certain texts determines to a large extent what the findings of the research study will be. It should be noted that there was some overlap in books selected for the various studies. In three studies (Bousalis, 2016; Brown, 2010; Lowery, 2000), researchers examined books written in or set in peak immigrant waves to the United States. While the books in Brown's (2010) study all of the protagonists were immigrants, Bousalis' (2016) study included "significant characters" who were immigrants. Lowery's (2000) study included only one book that was written before 1970, but the settings portrayed the various peak immigration periods. Mullen (2004) also looked at books written during specific time periods (1901-1910; 1921-1930; 1961-1970). Mullen's (2004) study explored perceptions of immigrants from 19 European ethnic groups, from which 80% to 90% of immigrants to the United States came during those time periods, according to the researcher. Four of the research studies focused on specific ethnic groups: undocumented Mexican immigrants (Cummins, 2013), Chinese-born girls adopted by United States families (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2015), Southeast Asian refugees (Levy, 2000) and Korean or Korean-American characters (Yi, 2014). In two studies, researchers looked at books that were recent publications: 1999-2007

(Boatright, 2010), and bestselling young adult immigrant books published since 2000 (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). In two studies (Lowery, 2000; Sano, 2011), researchers investigated books that were being used in classrooms. One study (Parsons, 2016) included only books with strong storytelling themes, and another study (Yoon et al., 2010) selected four books with assimilationist viewpoints out of a randomly selected set of 12 books. Finally, Lamme et al. (2004) “reviewed more than sixty picture books about immigrants and selected those whose young central characters best depicted authentic aspects of the immigrant experience, based on the experiences of Fu and Lowery who came from two different parts of the world” (p. 124). The researchers in this study did not specify on what they based their perceptions of authenticity, other than the personal experiences of the researchers.

Although I did not specify critical approaches in my selection criteria for studies to include in this review, 11 of the 14 studies were in fact critical analyses of the literature. Critical literacy is an approach to studying literature, proposed by Paulo Freire (1988), based on critical theory, that encourages readers to analyze texts, to become aware of power inequalities in literature and the explicit and implicit messages that those power inequalities send to the reader. It encourages readers to challenge stereotypes and the accuracy of historical information (Lowery, 2003). Readers examining a text from a critical literacy perspective ask the questions, “Whose story is being told, who is telling it, and for what purposes?” (Luke, 2012). The fact that most of the studies took a critical approach suggests that there is a growing concern among literary and educational

researchers to provide students with books that portray immigrants authentically and that present their stories from their perspectives.

Critical literacy, or critical pedagogy in general, is not without its critics. Some opponents have questioned that, because most advocates of critical pedagogy are White males who theorize and teach at universities, what right do they have to speak for oppressed peoples? The positions that these teachers and theorists come from are positions of privilege, so critics wonder what they know of the oppression that they theorize about. After all, they have never experienced injustice or oppression the way that members of the non-dominant society have. Another critique of critical pedagogy is that it is very theoretical and therefore not practical for implementing social change. Critical pedagogy does not give teachers the practical tools and strategies for initiating the societal changes that the theory values. In addition, many teachers have reservations about using critical pedagogy in the classroom, fearing that they will be accused of indoctrinating their students (Foley, Morris, Gounari, & Agostinone-Wilson, 2015). In the studies that I analyzed, several researchers (Boatright, 2010; Bousalis, 2016; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011; Lamme et al., 2004; Lowery, 2000; Sano, 2011; Yoon et al., 2010) called for teachers to take a critical approach to studying children's and YA literature. Yet, without guidance, many teachers will not know how to go about doing this. Lowery (2003) provides an example of a critical-sociological approach to studying literature, using the example of *The star fisher* (Yep, 1992).

Researchers who take a critical literacy analytical approach are concerned with questions such as authors' and illustrators' backgrounds, and track records of publishing

companies. Several researchers noted that some of the authors of the books they analyzed were from the same background as the characters that they wrote about. Levy (2000) commented that some of the authors were immigrants, writing from childhood memories. Brown (2010) found that the stories written by immigrant authors reflected the depth of emotion that is part of the immigration experience. According to Bousalis (2016), stories written by non-immigrant authors tended to use immigration as a backdrop for social or political platforms. Two-thirds of the books in her study were written during the second immigration period, and were authored by non-immigrant writers. Many based their stories on the experiences of family members, social causes, or research. However, non-immigrant authors did not have the personal experience to write the immigrants' stories authentically. Non-ethnic illustrators in both periods tended to stereotype immigrants, while ethnic illustrators were more genuine in their depictions. Clifford and Kalyanpur (2011) suggested that writing young adult fiction is a way for immigrant authors to give voice to their own experiences.

Yi (2014) suggested that books written by immigrant authors are assured to capture the experience authentically: "The authenticity of these stories was verified largely by the backgrounds of the authors" (p.133). Lowery (2003) appeared to challenge this notion. She wrote:

I wonder whether Laurence Yep, a Chinese American born and educated in the United States, was unwittingly using the Orientalist discourse as his frame of reference in composing the text. In *The star fisher*, Yep (1992) seemed to accommodate the western stereotypical view of the Chinese immigrants by



magnifying their physical and linguistic 'oddities', as well as their 'exotic' customs and traditions (p. 22).

Lowery (2003) noted that Laurence Yep (1992), the author of *The star fisher*, seemed to exaggerate certain features of his main characters to “orientalize” them.

He appeared to magnify, deliberately or unwittingly, the physical and-linguistic features of the Chinese immigrants (especially Mrs. Lee), as well as their 'exotic' customs and traditions (e.g., arranged marriage, parental authority) to emphasize the way these immigrants were viewed (p. 23).

According to Lowery (2003), American readers may tend to prefer books about Asians that are written by Anglo-Americans rather than by Asians, therefore, Asian-American authors “orientalize” their characters to please their public and sell books. Lamme et al. (2004) also commented on the decisions that publishers make, which result in topics being either included or excluded from books for children and young adults.

Publishers assume children should only learn about positive experiences, not harsh reality. They want to protect our children’s innocence in our children’s literature...Although books that portray the harsh experiences and sadness of immigrants may not be welcome by the publishers, other harsh topics are seeping into children’s books, especially in historical fiction (Springen, 2004) ...The public purposely neglects topics that reveal the negative aspects of our society and believes that our children should not know that the world is not perfect (p. 128).

One final note, as Bousalis (2016) commented, even award-winning books, best-selling books, and classics did not always represent immigrants and their experiences

authentically. Therefore, teachers and readers need to examine books with critical eyes. Otherwise, stereotypes and other misunderstandings will continue to be passed on in the explicit and implicit messages contained in these books.

Future research on the topic of immigrant themes in young adult literature could take many directions. The landscape of immigration to the United States is rapidly changing. As I write, the United States has just inaugurated a President who has stated his intention to build a wall on the United States-Mexico border, and to deport Syrian refugees who have settled in the United States. Yet, many who reach toward our borders do so with desperate stories to share. Will they see their lives and experiences reflected in current young adult literature? How well do the books that are being written about immigrants today serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors? (Bishop, 1990). These questions are the focus of this study on the representations of the immigrant experience in the most current immigrant YA literature. I conducted a critical content analysis to examine, from a critical literacy viewpoint, recent young adult books with immigrant themes. In the next chapter, I describe the methodology I used for my study.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

Young adult fiction has a significant impact on the identity development of young people (Alsup, 2014). When young adult books that portray immigrants misrepresent or stereotype them, the books send a strong message about the lack of value that society holds for immigrants. If, on the other hand, the books that immigrant students read portray the complexity of their lives and experiences, the students can identify with the characters and better understand themselves and their developing identity. They are also more likely to read more when they can choose books with characters who are like themselves (Dyer, 2014). Furthermore, the characters in these books are likely to be the only immigrants that some native students ever meet (Lowery, 2003). If these students are to develop greater understanding of and empathy for immigrants, they need to read accurate portrayals of the challenges that young immigrants face. Teachers need to be able to select books for their students that present authentic portrayals of immigrants.

The study that I conducted is an exploration of immigrant themes in current YA literature. The landscape of immigration is changing in the United States. New laws are being proposed that limit immigrants' access to this country. Immigrants who have settled here live in growing fear about their future as attitudes toward them become more openly hostile. By examining the most current immigrant YA literature, my goal has been to assist teachers who want to choose books that represent immigrants authentically. Specifically, I explore the following questions from the point of view of how immigrants are represented in YA literature: Who are the immigrants who are coming to the United States? Why do they come? How do they experience immigration? How are they

perceived by others? In answering these questions, I have endeavored to capture the essence of both the challenges and triumphs that immigrant youth and their families experience as they leave their homelands, travel to the United States, and adjust to life in a new culture. In this chapter, I review the methods that I used in my study, my criteria for selecting books that I included in the study, my procedures, the instruments and measures that I used, my view of my role as a researcher, and my data collection and analysis procedures.

### **Research Methods**

A qualitative content analysis method was used in this research study. Qualitative content analysis is a systematic way of describing the meaning of selected aspects of the research material (Schreier, 2012). I chose this method because it was beneficial in identifying patterns in the ways that immigrants are represented within and across the different books that were examined in the research study. By using a qualitative content analysis method, I was able to focus on specific themes in the books that I included in my study to understand the implicit and explicit messages that are contained in the stories.

### **Criteria used to select the books for review**

The YA books included in the list for my analysis were identified through searches on Amazon.com, of the best-selling YA literature with immigration/emigration themes (<http://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Books-Teen-Young-Adult-Emigration-Immigration-Fiction/zgbs/books/10368553011#5>). I chose to identify the books I analyzed through the best seller list at Amazon.com because these are the books that young people are actually buying and reading. I did not consider the award winning

status as an inclusion criterion, however, several of the books on my list did receive awards. Immigration to the United States had to be a major theme in the books included in the study. In addition, the books had to be realistic fiction, and written in English. (Some books may be available in other languages as well.) Because it was important to include only the books that show the most current representations of immigrants, books that were written before 2013 were excluded. In searches conducted on different days in late 2016, I identified 22 books.

The following is the list of books that meet my inclusion criteria.

From 2017:

- Boeve, E. (2017). *A home in America*. Apollo Beach, FL: Rowe.
- Chambers, V. (2017). *The go-between*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- Marquardt, M. (2017). *The radius of us*. New York, NY: St. Martins Griffin.
- Zoboi, I. (2017). *American street*. New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.

From 2016:

- Banks, A. (2016). *Joyride*. New York, NY: Square Fish.
- Budhos, M. (2016). *Watched*. New York, NY: Wendy Lamb Books.
- De la Cruz, M. (2016). *Something in between*. New York, NY: Harlequin Teen.
- Kelly, E. E. (2016). *The land of forgotten girls*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Wilson, T. (2016) *Through my eyes*. Edina, MN: Beavers Pond Press.

From 2015:

- Farish, T. (2015a). *Either the beginning or the end of the world*. New York, NY: Carolrhoda Lab TM.
- Volponi, P. (2015a). *Game seven*. New York, NY: Speak.
- Zeiss, J. B. (2015). *Out of the dragon's mouth*. Llewellyn, MN: Flux.

From 2014:

- Andreu, M. E. (2014). *The secret side of empty*. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Kids.
- Bassoff, L., & DeLuca, L. (2014). *Lost girl found*. Ontario, Canada: Groundwood Books.
- Carleson, J. C. (2014). *The tyrant's daughter*. New York, NY: Ember.
- Jones, P. (2014a). *Bridge (the alternative)*. Minneapolis, MN: Darby Creek.
- Jones, P. (2014b). *The gamble*. Minneapolis, MN: Darby Creek.
- Sacks, N. (2014). *The big fix*. Minneapolis, MN: Darby Creek.

From 2013:

- Galang, M. E. (2013). *Angel de la Luna and the 5th glorious mystery*. Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press.
- Joseph, L. (2013). *Flowers in the sky*. New York, NY: Harper Teen.
- Padian, M. (2013). *Out of nowhere*. New York, NY: Knopf Books for Young Readers.

- Purcell, K. (2013). *Trafficked*. New York, NY: Mass Market Paperbacks.  
(Reprint Edition)

## **Procedure**

This study was conducted following a qualitative content analysis methodology as described by Schreier (2012). I took the following steps to conduct my study. First, I identified books that meet my inclusion criteria. Second, I conducted a pilot study, using five of the of the 22 books that I analyzed. After browsing through all of the books, I chose the five books for the pilot study partly because they were short and would allow me to develop a coding frame that would not be overly complex or burdensome, and partly because the books provided a wide variety of immigrant experiences. The books used in the pilot study were: *Bridge (the alternative)* (Jones, 2014a), *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), *Angel de la Luna and the 5th glorious mystery* (Galang, 2013), and *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013).

For the pilot study, I secured the help of two research assistants. I did this to reduce bias as I tried out my coding frame. Both assistants were college graduates with degrees in English language arts and communication-related fields. In addition, both research assistants had extensive experience living across two cultures.

My first step was to create a preliminary coding frame to identify relevant text segments in my pilot books and divide them into units of coding. This step, I conducted on my own, because my main task for my research assistants was the actual coding. In addition, I developed a pilot coding frame as I read through the books, adding categories as I found relevant topics in the books. I coded each of the five books on my own, and

also had the research assistants code the five books (one assistant coded three books and the other coded two books).

We then looked together at the material we had coded and discussed any passages that were coded differently, so that we could come to an agreement. The three of us also examined the coding frame to determine what changes were needed. I made the changes and consulted with the research assistants again until we were all satisfied that the coding frame was complete.

The next step was to analyze the rest of the books, first using the preliminary coding frame to identify relevant material, then coding the relevant material into the coding frame. Due to other commitments on the part of the research assistants, I completed this analysis on my own, coding the same books at different points in time (anywhere from 10 days to 6 months apart), rather than having the coding done by two different people.

Once all of the material was coded twice, I synthesized it, looking for patterns and themes. To do this, I created a comparative coding matrix. The matrix helped me to see the patterns and themes across books.

### **Instruments and Measures**

I developed two coding frames for this study. I used the first one to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant text segments in the books. The relevant text segments were added to a list, one list for each book, and irrelevant material was simply excluded. I then divided, when necessary, text segments into units of coding, each one expressing



only one idea. The text segments were then marked so I could identify the book and page number for each unit of coding (see Appendix A for an example).

The four research questions served as my dimensions (main categories) for my second coding frame. Under each dimension, I identified several sub-categories. I used both deductive and inductive methods to identify my sub-categories. They were derived from my understanding of the topic through my literature review, as well as from the texts (cases) themselves. I defined all categories and sub-categories by naming them and describing the decision rules for each one (see Appendix B for a list of sub-categories with descriptions and decision rules). I used this coding frame to find themes that related to my research questions within each book (see Appendix C for an example).

The third tool that I developed was the comparative coding frame. This coding frame was used to do a side-by-side comparison of the first and second codings, and to make final determinations about how to code units of coding that were not in agreement in the first and second codings (see Appendix D for an example).

The final tool that I developed was a comparative coding matrix. This coding matrix was used to compare the data from each book, so that I could look at patterns and themes across books (see Appendix E for an example).

## **Data Analysis**

Once I had completed the coding of the 22 books and made final decisions about units of coding that were not in agreement, I used the comparative coding matrix to find patterns and themes that were important in the texts. I counted how many units of coding were assigned to each subcategory in each book, and entered that information on my

matrix. I then added the number of units of coding assigned to a particular subcategory across texts. I was then able to see how often each subcategory topic was mentioned across the books. Looking then at my dimensions, which were derived from my four research questions, I was able to see which subcategories best illustrated each dimension. For example, the topic *strong emotions/mental health issues* was addressed in almost every one of the books. This topic was found under the umbrella of the dimension *How do the immigrants experience immigration?* The high numbers of units of coding assigned to this subcategory provided evidence that this was an extremely important issue related to the immigration experience among the immigrant characters in my books.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As a researcher doing a qualitative study, I recognize that there will be some element of bias in my results. I am the daughter of an immigrant, so immigration stories were part of my life growing up. I am also the wife of an immigrant, and I became the immigrant in the family when we moved to my husband's home country for seven years. My experience as an immigrant gave me the passion for this line of research, and like all qualitative research, I viewed my data to some extent through the lens of this experience.

Although I have experienced immigration, my experience was unlike that of many of the characters in the stories that I read. As a White European American, a member of the dominant society in the United States, I immigrated to Europe, where I was still racially part of the dominant society, and as I learned the Dutch language, I became more established in the dominant society. In addition, my time in Europe was spent in my

husband's hometown, where I had automatic acceptance as part of his large extended family and their friends and acquaintances in that town.

One reason that I chose this research project is that I understand, conceptually, the importance of students having access to books that reflect their race, culture, and experience. Growing up as a White American child, I could almost always find myself reflected in the books that I read, just as almost all of the other children in my school and neighborhood could. It never occurred to me as a child that this was not the case for all children in the United States. However, as I talk about my research with friends, immigrants from places like Ghana, Kenya, and Korea, who did not find themselves reflected in the books that they read as children or young adults growing up in the United States, I realize that this topic resonates with them in a way that, perhaps, it never can with me. Therefore, I will always need to use extra caution to overcome my cultural nearsightedness when selecting books for my classroom library, researching authors' backgrounds, and seeking out the insights of my racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse immigrant friends, so that my students can indeed see the books they read as mirrors in which they can see themselves.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to find out how immigrant characters are portrayed in recent young adult novels with immigration themes. It is important for immigrant characters in young adult books to be portrayed with the depth and complexity that reflects the real-life experiences of young immigrants. When immigrant students see themselves and their experiences in the books they read, it helps them to make a connection with the characters, and as a result, understand their own experiences better. When non-immigrant students read immigrant literature with authentically portrayed characters, it helps them to better understand and empathize with the challenges that immigrant students face (Bishop, 1990; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). While more young adult books with immigration themes are being published now than ever before, their numbers are far from reflecting the current immigration demographics of the United States (Cart, 2012). In addition, some of the books that are published do not reflect the real-life experiences of young immigrants. In the resulting books, characters may be stereotyped, and their portrayals are often shallow (Bousalis, 2016; Lowery, 2003).

Teachers need to be aware of how immigrant students are portrayed in the books they choose for their classroom libraries, so that they can provide students with books that will increase understanding rather than perpetuating stereotypes.

Through this study, I sought to answer four questions:

1. Who are the immigrant characters who come to the United States?
2. Why do they come?
3. How do they experience immigration?

4. How are they perceived or treated by other characters?

To answer these questions, I chose a qualitative content analysis methodology. This method allowed me to summarize data that I collected from a number of books and look for patterns and common themes. The purpose of this chapter is to present my data and to describe the themes that I found, which answer my research questions. I have organized my data around the dimensions of my coding frame that are based on my research questions.

### **Analysis of Data**

In any research study, it is important to have credible data to base one's conclusions on. Percentage of agreement is a measure that I used to determine the consistency of my coding frame as I compared codings across two different points in time.

Not only is it important to have credible data, the data must also be meaningful. By ranking the frequency distribution of my subcategories and noting co-occurring subcategories, I was able to see the importance of specific subcategories to the research questions and make connections between subcategories, such as sequencing, similarity, or cause and effect.

**Inter-coding reliability.** Inter-coding reliability is a criterion used to check the quality of the coding frame. Inter-coding reliability serves two purposes. The first purpose is to determine the extent to which the first and second codings are consistent, thereby confirming the extent to which the coding frame itself is free of overlap. Because I coded most of the material myself at two different times, the inter-coding reliability

shows the extent to which I interpreted the material consistently at two different points in time. The second purpose of inter-coding reliability is to illustrate that the meanings given to the classifications in the coding frame are actually present in the material that has been analyzed (Schreier, 2012). Tables 4.1 to 4.7 show the percentages of agreement between the first and second codings for each of seven dimensions before making final decisions about what category double-coded text segments would ultimately be classified under. The tables show the numbers of units of coding that were matched between the first and second codings, the total number of units of coding assigned to the subcategory, and the percentage of agreement.

When making final decisions about double-coded segments, I looked carefully at the sources of my coding disagreements and reflected on my different interpretations of the material. To resolve the differences, I reread the text segments in the larger context of the paragraph, chapter, or entire story. Sometimes, putting text segments back in context helped to clarify the meaning. I was then able to choose the interpretation that seemed more appropriate for each text segment.

Table 4.1

*Percentage of Agreement: Who are the Immigrants?*

	Name	Age	Origin	Destination
Matched units	53	68	71	67
Total units	53	70	82	81
% of agreement	100	97	87	83

Table 4.2

*Percentage of Agreement: Why do They Come?*

	Poverty	Oppression	Opportunities	Wealth
Matched units	24	210	52	0
Total units	33	226	73	3
% of agreement	73	93	71	0

Table 4.3

*Percentage of Agreement: Life before Immigration*

	Decision by self	Decision by family	Loss of parent	Happy life	Skilled labor	Unskilled labor
Matched units	8	24	108	64	0	8
Total units	16	30	119	80	6	11
% of agreement	50	80	91	80	0	73

Table 4.4

*Percentage of Agreement: The Immigration Journey*

	Left loved ones	Death in family	Fled or ran	Travel danger	Refugee camp	Boat	Air	Car, bus, foot	Docu ment issues
Matched units	114	12	26	90	56	22	60	42	186
Total units	154	17	33	117	90	25	66	54	224
% of agreement	74	71	79	77	62	88	91	78	83

Table 4.5

*Percentage of Agreement: Life after Immigration*

	Loss through death	Reunify	Resent or conflict	Poor living	Weather	Skilled labor	Unskilled labor
Matched units	14	22	354	162	54	30	218
Total units	16	25	409	181	56	46	252
% of agreement	88	88	87	90	96	65	87
	Fear of deport	Mental health	Happy	English struggles	Fluent English	Educate valued	School struggles
Matched units	362	726	12	72	40	196	30
Total units	455	920	21	94	52	232	39
% of agreement	80	79	57	77	77	84	77

Table 4.6

*Percentage of Agreement: Assimilation*

	Home traditions	American traditions	Tradition food	American food	Tradition clothing	American clothing
Matched units	156	8	214	66	30	38
Total units	168	15	221	73	39	45
% of agreement	93	53	97	90	77	84

Table 4.7

*Percentage of Agreement: Perceived or Treated by Others*

	Welcomed	Concern	Looked down on	Immigrant conflict	Abuse or bullying	Slave or prostitute
Matched units	696	174	42	18	322	44
Total units	796	235	61	30	410	49
% of agreement	87	74	69	60	79	90

Inter-coding reliability is not an all-or-nothing criterion, meaning that it is the extent to which it is reliable that is important in qualitative content analysis. To make meaning in qualitative content analysis, interpretation of text segments is necessary. The larger the number of subcategories, the more chance there is to interpret a unit of coding differently at two points in time. Reviewing each double-coded text segment in context was helpful as I worked to interpret the meaning of each segment.

**Frequency distribution.** The data were collected by assigning each unit of coding (text segment) in each book (unit of analysis) to one subcategory in my coding frame. The units of coding for each category were then tallied across units of analysis. The coding was conducted two times, results were compared, and final decisions were made regarding double-coded segments. Table 4.8 shows the frequency distribution of total units of coding assigned to each subcategory, from most to least frequent. This indicates how often a specific topic, or subcategory, was mentioned across all of the



books in the study. This information is helpful for understanding how intensively authors addressed each topic in the novels.

**Co-occurrences and relationships among subcategories.** In each book, there were several subcategories that occurred together with others. By examining these co-occurrences, I found a number of patterns of co-occurring categories. While some of

Table 4.8

*Frequency Distribution for Units of Coding*

Subcategory	Number of units of coding assigned to subcategory
Welcomed/befriended	780
Emotions/mental health	770
Resentment/family conflict	440
Abuse/bullying	410
Fear of deportation	380
Escape from oppression	270
Concern about immigration	266
Traditional food	238
Unskilled labor after immigration	226
Education valued	200
Home country traditions	194
Documentation issues	190
Inadequate living conditions	178
Loss of parent before immigration	162
People left behind	144
Language struggles	114
Dangerous travel conditions	110
Origin	77
Weather	74
Destination	73
American food	68
Happy home life before immigration	68
Travel by airplane	64
Seeking opportunities/jobs	62
Refugee camp	62
Traditional clothing	58
Fluent English	58
American clothing	52
School struggles	52
Skilled labor after immigration	50
Ran away/fled home country	48
Slavery/child marriage	44
Looked down upon	42
Escape from poverty	42

Travel by car/bus/on foot	42
Reunification after immigration	40
Travel by boat	34
Immigration decision made by family	32
Unskilled labor before immigration	30
Inter-immigrant conflict	28
Happiness about immigration	20
Loss in family after immigration	18
Death in family during immigration	14
American traditions	8
Immigration decision made by self	8
Seeking wealth	6
Skilled labor before immigration	6

these patterns are coincidental, others reveal relationships among different topics in the books that help to answer my research questions with more depth and that illustrate the complexity of the young protagonists' immigration experiences. When the same two categories co-occur in numerous books, this often indicates that the topic is significant to the experience of the immigrant characters. Table 4.9 shows the frequency of co-occurring categories for those that occurred three or more times. In my discussion in the section below, I explain the patterns that are most relevant to the research questions.

Table 4.9

*Co-occurring Subcategories*

3 Co-occurrences	4 Co-occurrences	5-6 Co-occurrences	7+ Co-occurrences
Escape oppression + refugee camp	Escape oppression + loss of family member before immigration	Escape oppression + emotions/mental health	Resentment/family conflict + emotions/mental health
Escape oppression + fear of deportation	Escape oppression + resentment/family conflict	Escape oppression + traditional food	Resentment/family conflict + welcomed/befriended
Escape oppression + education valued	Escape oppression + language struggles	Loss of parent before immigration + welcomed/befriended	Fear of deportation + welcomed/befriended
Opportunities/jobs + documentation issues	Escape oppression + concern about immigrant migration	Documentation issues + emotions/mental health	Emotions/mental health + welcomed/befriended

Opportunities/jobs + emotions/mental health	Loss of parent before immigration + resentment/family conflict	Documentation issues + welcomed/befriended	Fear of deportation + emotions/mental health
Opportunities/jobs + welcomed/befriended	Left people behind + dangerous travel conditions	Documentation issues + abuse/bullying	Emotions/mental health + abuse/bullying
Opportunities/jobs + abuse/bullying	Left people behind + language struggles	Fear of deportation + abuse/bullying	Welcomed/befriended + abuse/bullying
Loss of parent before immigration + dangerous travel conditions	Left people behind + traditional food	Emotions/mental health + education valued	
Loss of parent before immigration + fear of deportation	Left people behind + welcomed/befriended	Emotions/mental health + concern about immigrant migration	
Loss of parent before immigration + language struggles	Documentation issues + education valued	Home country traditions + traditional food	
Comfortable life before immigration + emotions/mental health	Resentment/family conflict + unskilled labor after immigration	Escape oppression + left people behind	
Left people behind + fear of deportation	Resentment/family conflict + fear of deportation	Escape oppression + dangerous travel conditions	
Left people behind + emotions/mental health	Resentment/family conflict + education valued	Escape oppression + home country traditions	
Left people behind + education valued	Resentment/family conflict + abuse/bullying	Escape oppression + welcomed/befriended	
Left people behind + home country traditions	Inadequate living conditions + fear of deportation	Loss of parent before immigration + emotions/mental health	
Left people behind + abuse	Inadequate living conditions + welcomed/befriended	Documentation issues + fear of deportation	
Dangerous travel conditions + traditional food	Unskilled labor after immigration + emotions/mental health	Resentment/family conflict + inadequate living conditions	
Documentation issues + resentment/family conflict	Fear of deportation + education valued	Inadequate living conditions + emotions/mental health	
Documentation issues + home country traditions	Fear of deportation + home country traditions	Emotions/mental health + home country traditions	
Documentation issues + traditional food	Fear of deportation + traditional food	Emotions-mental health/traditional food	

Resentment/family conflict + home country traditions	Fear of deportation + concern about immigrant migration	Traditional food + welcomed/befriended
Resentment/family conflict + traditional food	Language struggles + home country traditions	Welcomed/befriended + concern about immigration
Resentment/family conflict + concern about immigrant migration	Language struggles + welcomed/befriended	
Inadequate living conditions + education valued	Education valued + home country traditions	
Inadequate living conditions + abuse/bullying	Education valued + welcomed/befriended	
Weather + emotions-mental health	Education valued + abuse/bullying	
Unskilled labor after immigration + education valued	Home country traditions + welcomed/befriended	
Unskilled labor after immigration + home traditions	Home country traditions + concern about immigrant migration	
Unskilled labor after immigration + traditional food	Home country traditions + abuse/bullying	
Unskilled labor after immigration + welcomed/befriended	Traditional food + concern about immigrant migration	
Fear of deportation + language struggles	Concern about immigration + abuse/bullying	
Fear of deportation + American clothing		
Language struggles + traditional food		
Language struggles + abuse/bullying		
Education valued + traditional food		
Education valued + concern about immigrant migration		
Traditional food + abuse/bullying		
American clothing + welcomed/befriended		

## Presentation of Results

In this section, I describe my findings with regard to the ways in which my category topics were expressed in the books. I provide examples to show the distinctive features of each subcategory. I also explain the relationships between co-occurring categories. These co-occurrences show relationships between topics, such as sequencing, similarity and contrast, or cause and effect. Interpreting my categories in this way will give deeper understanding of the complexities of the young protagonists' lives, and will help to answer the four research questions that I have posed in this study.

**Question 1: Who are the immigrant characters who come to the United States?** This study is a critical analysis of recent young adult books with immigration themes insofar as it addresses the following questions: “Whose story is being told, who is telling it, and for what purposes?” (Luke, 2012). Because I wanted to know whose stories are being told, that is, who my characters are, I included this first dimension in the coding frame to collect demographic information about the characters in the books that I analyzed. Table 4.10 shows a summary of the demographics of the characters in the

Table 4.10

*Immigrant Character Demographics*

Novel	Protagonist's name	Age	Place of origin	Destination in the United States
<i>American Street</i>	Fabiola Toussaint	High School	Delmas, Haiti	Saint Cloud, Minnesota
<i>Angel de la Luna</i>	Angel de la Luna	15-16	Manila, Philippines	Chicago, Illinois
<i>The big fix</i>	George Choogart	18	London, England	New York
<i>Bridge</i>	Jose Gomez	19	Mexico (parents immigrated)	Benson, Minnesota
<i>Either the beginning or the end of the world</i>	Sophie (Sophea) Gear	16	Cambodia (mother immigrated)	New Hampshire
<i>Flowers in the sky</i>	Nina Perez	15	Samana, Dominican Republic	New York

<i>The gamble</i>	Leung		China	New York
<i>Game seven</i>	Julio Ramirez, Jr.	16	Matanzas, Cuba	Miami, Florida
<i>The go-between</i>	Camilla (Cammi) del Vale	16	Mexico City, Mexico	Los Angeles, California
<i>A home in America</i>	Eva Mueller	13	Russia (Volga German)	Hays, Kansas
<i>Joyride</i>	Carlotta (Carly) Jasmine Vega	16	Mexico (parents immigrated)	Houghlin County, Florida
<i>The land of forgotten girls</i>	Soledad (Sol) Madrid	12	Philippines	Giverny, Louisiana
<i>Lost girl found</i>	Lujana Paul Poni (Poni)	13-18 possibly	Chukudum, South Sudan	Denver, Colorado
<i>Out of nowhere</i>	Saeed	18	Somalia	Enniston (Lewiston), Maine
<i>Out of the Dragon's Mouth</i>	Nguyen Mai	14	Vietnam	Chicago, Illinois
<i>The radius of us</i>	Phoenix Flores Flores	18	Ilopango, El Salvador	Georgia
<i>Something in between</i>	Jasmine de los Santos	17-18	Philippines	Los Angeles, California
<i>The secret side of empty</i>	Montserrat (Monse) Thalia	17	Argentina	New York
<i>Through my eyes</i>	Zamzam		Mogadishu, Somalia	Saint Cloud, Minnesota
<i>Trafficked</i>	Hannah	17	Moldova	Los Angeles, California
<i>The Tyrant's Daughter</i>	Laila	15	An unnamed Middle Eastern country	Washington, D.C.
<i>Watched</i>	Naeem Rahman	18	Dhaka, Bangladesh	New York, New York

books. Categories include the ages of the protagonists, countries of origin, and destination regions in the United States.

**Age.** As Table 4.10 shows, all of the protagonists in the books are between 12 and 19 years old, an age range that young adult readers can relate to. These stories address real-life issues that young adult readers go through, and influence their identity development as they reflect upon complex issues in the lives of the characters in the books and their own lives (Dyer, 2014).

**Country of origin and destination region in the United States.** The protagonists (or their parents) immigrate from the following parts of the world: from North America:

Cuba (one), Dominican Republic (one), Haiti (one), Mexico (three); from South America: Argentina (one), El Salvador (one); Europe: England (one), Moldova (one), Russia (one); Asia: Bangladesh (one) Cambodia (one), China (one), Philippines (three), Vietnam (one), an unnamed Middle Eastern country (one); Africa: Somalia (two), and South Sudan (one).

The immigrant characters settle in numerous places in the United States: Florida (two), California (three), Colorado (one), Georgia (one), Illinois (two), Kansas (one), Louisiana (one), Maine (one), Minnesota (three), New Hampshire (one), New York (five), and Washington, D. C. (one).

*Question 1 summary.* While the data does not necessarily reflect the whole of current real-life immigration trends to the United States, the fact that every inhabited continent on the globe, except for Australia, is represented is an encouraging trend in the publication of YA books that address immigration. The Asian continent is the top source of immigrants to the United States (Cohn & Caumont, 2016), and this is reflected in the books in my study, with eight Asian protagonists. The numbers of immigrants from Africa are on the rise as well (Cohn & Caumont, 2016), and this is also reflected in my book list, with three African protagonists. Mexico continues to be a significant source of immigrants (Cohn & Caumont, 2016), which is also reflected in my book list, with three stories about Mexican immigrants. The majority of current immigrants to the United States come from These are the people whose stories are being told. The growing variety of countries represented in these books means that more young immigrant students will

have the opportunity to see their own lives and experiences reflected in the books they read.

**Question 2: Why do they come?** The second research question that this study addresses is: Why do the immigrant characters in the YA books come to the United States? The detailed answer to this question is as personal and as varied as the characters themselves. The text segments that dealt with reasons why immigrant characters come to the United States are classified into one of four categories: (a). To find wealth or adventure; (b). To escape poverty; (c). To seek opportunities for education, jobs, and so on; and (d). To escape oppression, violence, or war in the home country.

***To find wealth or adventure.*** Of the reasons why immigrant characters in young adult books come to the United States, only two books, *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014) and *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b) portray characters looking for wealth or adventure in the United States. Both of these books are historical fiction, set in the 1800's.

***To escape poverty.*** Text segments that deal with escaping poverty occur much more frequently in the books. *Angel de la Luna and the 5th glorious mystery* (Galang, 2013) tells the story of 15-year-old Angel, from the Philippines who, after the tragic death of her father, comes to the United States, quite against her will, to join her mother who had found a job as a nurse in Chicago. In the following segment, her mother tries to convince Angel that she decided to move the family to the United States to escape economic hardship.



“Even if I’m a nurse, they don’t pay nurses sa Manila. We couldn’t afford to keep you girls in school. And you and Lila working as maids—ang hirap naman iyon.

What kind of a life is that?” (Galang, 2013, p.177)

In this example Angel’s mother decides to move her family to the United States so that her children can have the kind of life that they could not afford to have in the Philippines. The decision to leave their home in the Philippines—and to leave one at a time—results in a great deal of conflict between the mother and daughter. The text segment illustrates that, while immigration provides the family with a more secure financial situation, it also leaves young Angel with a profound sense of grief and loss.

In *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), 17-year-old Hannah, the protagonist, is enticed to leave her home in Moldova to go work in the United States when she learns how desperate her family’s financial situation is. Her parents had been killed in an explosion the year before, and she lives with her grandmother, her Babulya, who trades vegetables at the market to earn enough money to live. In this text segment, Hannah learns from a woman named Olga that her Babulya is much worse off financially than she had realized.

“Well, I’m doing a favor for Valeria”, Olga said. “She told me last week your babushka got an eviction notice and she’s worried because she and Petru can’t afford to subsidize your income, not with two other children to care for.”

An eviction notice? ...It was true that money had gotten tighter in the last few months, but Babulya hadn’t said anything about an eviction notice...

Olga went on, “Ever since your uncle Vladi took off, Valeria says it’s been too much for your babushka, going back and forth to the village.” (Purcell, 2013, p. 65)

In this story, Hannah has to leave school to help her grandmother at the market. She does not see a future for herself if she stays in Moldova. Therefore, she is easily convinced by Olga, who is really part of a human trafficking ring, to accept the offer to go work as a nanny in the United States.

Escape from poverty is a significant reason for young immigrant characters to come to the United States. In addition to the examples described above, this theme is found in several other books as well: *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), and *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017). Whether the decision to move is made by the young person, a parent, or other relative, the determination to provide for one’s own physical, medical, and educational needs and the needs of the family is a theme that runs through several of the books in this study.

***To find jobs or opportunities.*** Closely related to the topic of immigrating to the United States to escape from poverty is the topic of seeking jobs or opportunities. To clarify the distinction that I want to make for the purposes of this research study, while all of the immigrant characters who come to the United States to escape poverty are indeed seeking jobs and other opportunities, most, but not all characters who seek jobs and opportunities come from poverty. Hannah, in *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), is lured into going to the United States by a promise that turned out to be far too good to be true.

“But do you really want to spend your life making carrot salad in the village and bringing it to the market every day? Or shall I tell them you are interested in starting an exciting life in Los Angeles?”

Hannah’s voice croaked. “Los Angeles?” ...

“They’ll pay four hundred American dollars every week.” Olga paused to let it sink in. “What do you think?”

*Four hundred dollars?* “It sounds wonderful,” Hannah said, although she was having a hard time believing it might really happen. (Purcell, 2013, p. 67)

This example highlights how quickly many of the characters in the books believe that life in the United States will be filled with good opportunities, there for the taking, to anyone who would come. Many of the characters and their family members are sorely disappointed by the realities that await them once they arrive in the United States.

Like Angel in *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), 15-year-old Nina in *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013) is a reluctant immigrant. Nina’s mother sends her from her home in the Dominican Republic to live with her older brother who had moved to New York several years earlier, so that Nina can have what the mother thinks will be a better life.

I did not want to leave my seaside home in Samana on the north coast where the humpback whales come every winter and fill Samana Bay with miracles and tourists. But Mami kept insisting. “Nueva York is better for you, *mi amor*,” she said matter-of-factly as she rearranged items on the shelves of our little grocery store. I knew that to Mami, better meant richer. (Joseph, 2013, p. 1)

“I told you, *chica*, you will lead a better life there. Good schools, mucho opportunities.” She rubbed her thumb and forefinger together—the universal sign for making money... “You will meet a handsome prince, *mi amor*, a rich baseball player who will marry you and take care of your mami as she gets old and can’t bend down to reach the cans on the bottom shelves.” (Joseph, 2013, p. 3)

In these examples, the mother sends her daughter to the United States with the hope that she will marry a rich man, and that the mother would also benefit from her daughter’s financial gain. Nina’s brother was already in New York, sending money to his mother every week. In several of the stories, characters in the United States earn enough money to send some back to relatives in the home country.

The immigrant characters who come to the United States in search of opportunities or jobs often find that the American Dream is not as easy to come by as they had hoped or expected. This usually leads characters to experience stress, disillusionment, regret, and mental health issues. The topics of coming to the United States in search of jobs or other opportunities and strong emotions or mental health issues are found together in three books in this study.

While the promise of opportunities and of riches is a tempting reason for several of the young protagonists to go or to be sent to be sent to the United States, all too often, the reality that awaits them is far from the dream that they or their families had anticipated. They find out in a very hard way that the cost of achieving the American Dream is very high indeed! In addition to the books mentioned above, this topic is found in the following books: *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013),

*The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), and *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014).

***To escape oppression, war, or violence.*** Financial security is not the only reason that the young immigrant characters and their families come to the United States. In fact, it is not the main reason. Of all the text segments that give reasons why the protagonists and their families move to the United States, the majority of them fall into the category of escaping oppression, war, or violence in the home country.

*Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), tells the story of Julio, a baseball-loving 16-year-old boy from Cuba, who escapes from his country by floating to the United States with his uncle, his cousin, and a man named Gabriel, in an old '59 Buick that has been converted to a boat. Julio's father, a professional baseball player known as El Fuego, had defected several years earlier. Julio still lives with the oppression that his father had managed to free himself from.

I sat alone on a dark staircase in our apartment building with a small transistor radio pressed against my ear, listening to every pitch thrown by the great El

Fuego—something the police could have punished me for. (Volponi, 2015a, p. 6)

Even listening to unauthorized programs on the radio is forbidden for Julio in Cuba. In the following example, Julio has come to realize that he will never be allowed to play for the Nacionales, the Cuban national team. As a result of his father's defection, the government does not trust him either. Therefore, staying in Cuba means that he can never achieve his dream. One day, he is faced with a life-changing decision, just as his father had years before.

I stood up and silently walked down to the shoreline, alone. I stared at the northern horizon, that distant point where the water and sky touch. I thought about what it would take to reach it. To be in a place where the higher-ups in Cuba didn't have control over me.” (Volponi, 2015a, p. 81)

For Julio, the oppression in his country is a heavy burden to bear. He wants to taste freedom, and to know what it is like to have control over his own life.

Julio and several of his family members believe freedom to be worth the cost, the risk of escaping from Cuba and leaving other family members behind. For some of the other protagonists, finding themselves the innocent victims of war compels them to flee their homelands. In *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), 15-year-old Laila, her mother, and her younger brother are brought to the safety of the United States by the government of the United States. Laila's father, who had ruled as a dictator in an unnamed Middle Eastern country, has been assassinated, and Laila and her family are sent into exile in the United States as civil unrest rages in their country.

But the day my father died, the guards began to vanish. One by one they slipped away from their posts... The end result was the same. We were alone. There were gunshots. Far more than usual, and closer than ever before. There was shouting and breaking glass, cars turned over and fires lit. It was unbearably loud and unbearably smoky, and the lone saucer-eyed guard in our living quarters was already inching toward the exit. I was paralyzed with fear. We all were.

(Carleson, 2014, pp. 173-174)

Laila's life, and that of her mother and brother are in danger, and their country is in turmoil. Being transported out of their country by the United States government is the only way that their lives can be saved.

Like Laila, Poni, the protagonist in *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), flees from the civil war violence that destroys her home. In this case, the violence is taking place in South Sudan.

I run out of the hut with my hands over my head as if they can somehow shield me from whatever it is falling down upon me. When I look up, the first thing I notice is the moon, fat as a cow's belly, but what I see next are the planes and the bombs that are falling out of them. So many bombs. It is as though they are coming from everywhere at once, as though the sky is raining down black eggs. Is the world ending? All around me people are screaming and some people are falling down upon the ground." (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014, pp. 61-62)

Unlike Laila in *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), Poni's family and the other people in her village have no part in the decisions in her country that are causing so much unrest. They are the innocent victims of other people's anger.

While Laila and Poni must flee from their homes because of civil war, crime and gang violence leads one of the characters to run away from his home country. Phoenix, the 18-year-old protagonist in *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2016), flees from his home country of El Salvador with his 12-year-old brother, Arizona (Ari), to seek asylum in the United States when a violent gang attempts to conscript his brother.

Honestly, how do you have a parole officer when all you did was bring your little brother to the US—because it's not safe where you live? Sally said that Phoenix and his brother fled El Salvador because their neighborhood was dangerous, and because there were people there who wanted them dead—that if they stayed, they almost certainly would have been killed. (Marquardt, 2016, pp. 97-98)

Phoenix finds himself under arrest after presenting himself to an official once he reaches the border of the United States. Ari is separated from him and taken to a detention center for children. While he is bewildered and frustrated over his treatment in the United States, he does not know what other options he had to keep Ari from being conscripted into the gang.

In the stories, there is a strong relationship between the topics of escape from oppression and emotions/mental health issues. These two topics co-occur in six books. The young characters and their families manage to escape from oppressive governments in their home countries, but they arrive in the United States with a great deal of emotional baggage. Some of the protagonists must endure life in refugee camps before finally coming to the United States, which only adds to their trauma about having to flee their countries.

In six stories of this study, the topic of escaping from oppression in the home country is interestingly related to the topic of traditional foods. Although the protagonists and their families have to flee from their countries, they still love their homelands. Cooking and eating traditional foods is a way of holding on to the culture that they know and love. Several of the protagonists even share traditional food with their mainstream



American friends as a way of sharing friendship and teaching Americans about their homelands. In a similar way, the topics of escaping from oppression and home country traditions are related. The immigrant characters bring religious observances and other traditions from the home country, keeping strong ties to their home culture. These topics occur together in five books.

Fleeing oppression, war, and violence is a theme found in a number of additional books in this study: *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), *Either the beginning or the end of the world* (Farish, 2015a), *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

**Question 2 summary.** The reasons that the young protagonists and their families immigrate to the United States are many but fall into four general categories: to find wealth or adventure, to escape poverty, to seek opportunities for education, jobs, and so on, as well as to escape oppression, violence or war in the home country. It is interesting to note that seeking opportunities, jobs, or education is never a stand-alone category in the books that were analyzed for this study. In other words, if a character immigrates to the United States to seek opportunities, that reason is always accompanied by another reason, occasionally to find wealth or adventure, but much more frequently to escape from severe conditions such as poverty, oppression, war, or violence in the home country. These conditions, which take many forms, often prevent the protagonists and their families from accessing education, jobs, and other opportunities. Young immigrants are not always happy about the decision to leave their homelands, leaving everything and

everyone that is familiar to them. Often the young immigrants or their parents have unrealistic ideas about what life will be like in the United States. Yet, to find safety, freedom, or economic stability, these families are willing to leave everything behind and begin a new life in a new land.

**Question 3: How do they experience immigration?** The third research question that I seek to answer in this study is, how do the immigrant characters in the novels experience immigration? Immigration is more of a lifelong journey than a one-time event. As I examined each novel, I looked for text segments that described the young immigrant's life. I summarize and give examples of what the books I examined say about the immigration experiences of the young characters. I describe the life that the protagonists knew before immigration, including their homes and families, their parents' jobs, and the loss of a parent either by death or abandonment. Looking at the immigration journey itself, I describe how the books represent the role of the people who made the immigration decisions for the protagonists, their means of travel, their escape from distressing or dangerous conditions in the home country, documentation issues, life in the refugee camps, and the death of a traveling companion during the immigration journey. With regard to life after the immigration journey, I show how the books portrayed the happiness about immigration that some of the characters experience, what it is like for the characters to be reunited with family, the loss of loved ones who were left behind in the home country, the skilled and unskilled labor that the protagonists or their parents find after immigrating, the inadequate living conditions that some of the characters experienced, their struggles to learn English or to be the voice for family members who

do not speak English, their desire for a good education and the struggles they have at school, and their adjustment to weather conditions. I also present what I learned about the characters' fear of deportation, the resentment and conflict that some of the protagonists engage in with their families, other strong emotions and mental health issues. Finally, I show how the characters find a balance between home country and American traditions, traditional and American food, and traditional and American clothing, hair styles, and appearance.

*Happy home life before immigration.* The homes that the immigrant characters leave behind are very diverse, from palaces and mansions to the humblest of dwellings. Some lead happy and carefree lives before conditions in their homelands become unacceptable. Others experience great loss, or struggle to have the resources to take care of their families. The following discussion examines a number of themes found in the novels analyzed in this study, painting pictures of what life is like before the protagonists immigrate, what factors lead to the decision to move, and who the decision makers are in the families.

Several of the protagonists experience a comfortable, if not luxurious life in their home countries. In *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), Cammi and her family move from their home in Mexico City to Los Angeles when her mother, a famous actress in Mexico, is cast in an American television show.

My parents were good at their jobs, so we lived in this amazing house—ten bedrooms, fourteen bathrooms, a pool, a tennis court, a guesthouse, a greenhouse, the works. We also had a massive staff.... (Chambers, 2017, p. 8)

Unlike the other immigrant characters, Cammi and her family leave their beautiful home only temporarily, as the mother needs a change of pace in her acting career. Knowing that her family will eventually return to Mexico makes this a different sort of immigration, yet not without its own set of challenges.

In *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), Mai, the protagonist in the story, also experiences a comfortable and carefree life in her home country of Vietnam.

The daughter of a wealthy rice exporter, she had spent her life on the Mekong Delta near Can Tho, playing with her brothers, Loc and Quan, and her two sisters, Tuyet and Yen, along the river. (Zeiss, 2015, p. 5)

It is when the political situation in her country becomes dangerous for her family that she must escape. Although she does not want to leave, her parents promise that they will eventually follow her.

For some of the young characters, having a comfortable life is not connected to money as much as it is the result of local fame. Julio's family in *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a) may not have a lot of money, but they have status.

Back then, every kid I knew was jealous of me. That's because baseball is practically a religion in my country. And Papi walked through the streets of our hometown, Matanzas, like a god, with me trailing behind. He'd been an all-star pitcher for almost a decade. Not only for the Matanzas Crocodiles, but also for the Cuban National Team—the Nacionales—in all the big international tournaments. (Volponi, 2015a, p. 2)

As a young boy, Julio enjoys the attention of the local baseball fans who see his father as their hero. It makes him feel important, which perhaps for him, creates the illusion of power and control over his future.

When the young characters have enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle before immigration it can come as quite a shock to them to be thrown into a living situation that is much more modest than they are used to, or one in which they struggle to learn how to negotiate life's twists and turns when they have never before known struggle. This bewildering situation evokes a multitude of strong, negative emotions in the young characters. These two topics, having a comfortable life before immigration and strong emotions or mental health issues are found together in three of the stories.

The theme of a comfortable life before immigration is also found in *American Street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016) and *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014). It should be noted that in two of these books, *American street* (Zoboi, 2017) and *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), the young protagonists are able to live comfortable lives in their home countries because family members in the United States send them money, enough to afford luxuries such as a private school education and English lessons.

***Skilled and unskilled labor before immigration.*** The topics of skilled and unskilled labor before immigration are found in a few of the books. In *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), even though 16-year-old Julio's father's career is focused on being part of a baseball team, he needs to support his family with another job. "There are no professional baseball players in Cuba. All the Nacionales have other jobs. Papi had been

given a good one, coaching baseball at a nearby school” (Volponi, 2015a, p. 6). However, after Julio’s father defects, he and his mother have to take on unskilled jobs to make ends meet.

But without his salary, we couldn’t afford to live in our house anymore. Instead, we had to move into a one-bedroom apartment with sinks that sometimes back up and a toilet that overflows. Now Mama works as a maid, cleaning tourists’ hotel rooms. And I stopped attending school this year to bus tables in the hotel’s restaurant. (Volponi, 2015a, p. 6)

Julio, never dreaming that he could expect more out of life than his restaurant job, works hard to help provide for himself, his mother, and his younger sister.

Even skilled positions do not always pay the bills for the young characters’ families. Like Julio’s father, Angel’s mother in *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013) has a skilled position. Shortly after the death of her father, Angel’s mother receives her nursing credentials. “‘Good,’ Mother Mary tells her. ‘You’re a certified nurse, ha?’” (Galang, 2013, p. 51). However, because their mother’s wages do not meet all of the family’s expenses, Angel and her younger sister, Lila, and even her grandmother must work part-time in unskilled positions, as cooks and maids at the convent.

“When you are ready, you come back to Manila with the girls. They can go to school half the day and if you want them to work at the convent, they can earn money too” ...

“Sige na nga,” my grandmother says. “I’ll go back and cook for the sisters. We can live at the house and ride the train to work.” (Galang, 2013, pp. 51-52)

Because they must work, Angel and Lila can only attend half days of school. For Angel's mother, seeing her daughters having to work and missing out on their education becomes a factor in her decision to move her family to the United States. She knows that as a nurse in the United States, she can earn a living wage.

In the home countries of a few of the young characters, skilled labor is hard to come by and uncertain, and does not guarantee comfortable living conditions. Unskilled labor is a necessity for the protagonists in these countries, and even children hold jobs to contribute to the family finances. Text segments classified under the theme of skilled labor before immigration were only found in the two novels cited in this section. The theme of unskilled labor before immigration is also found in *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013) and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Loss of a parent before immigration.*** The loss of a parent or parent figure before immigration is an important theme in many of the books. In *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), Julio loses his father when the father defects during an international baseball tour with the Nacionales. Angel, in *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013) loses her father in a car accident, and then also loses her mother when the mother leaves the family to immigrate to the United States, promising to send for the rest of the family one at a time. In both cases, the protagonists feel abandoned. The feelings of abandonment grow even stronger when the young immigrants arrive in the United States and realize that their parents had moved on and started new families.

In *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), set in the late 1800s, 13-year-old Eva, who has been raised by her great-grandmother after her mother died in childbirth, doesn't

know how she will be able to leave Great-Grandmother behind to move to the United States, even though the Russian army is conscripting young Volga German boys like her brothers into the army. Great-Grandmother is too old and too frail to make the long journey. After Great-Grandmother dies, Eva finally makes peace with the move to the United States.

I look back, my eyes seeking the cemetery situated on a slight rise of ground and I have this odd thought that Great-Grandmother loved me so much, she died so it would be easier for me to go to America. (Boeve, 2017, p. 60)

The loss of a parent or other family member before immigration, when the loss is due to abandonment or perceived abandonment, leads to resentment and conflict within the family. The losses that create resentment are not the ones due to the death of a family member, but rather, occur when a family member goes on ahead to the United States, unable to send for the young protagonist for a very long time. The young character feels that he or she has been abandoned by the parent. These two topics, loss of a parent or family member before immigration and resentment or family conflict appear together in four of the books in this study.

The loss of a parent or other family member before immigration leads to strong emotions and mental health issues. Several of the young protagonists arrive in the United States grieving the death of a parent or parent figure. Others grieve the perceived loss, feeling abandoned by a parent who has gone on to the United States ahead of them. These two topics co-occur in five books in the study.



The death or loss by abandonment of a parent before immigration is a prominent theme in the books, also appearing in *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016). This important theme is often a factor that plays into the decision to immigrate to the United States.

***The immigration decision makers.*** The decision to leave one's home and immigrate to a new land is a weighty and in some ways a gut-wrenching one. Immigrants leave behind friends, family, culture—everything that is familiar to them—to be immersed in a new culture and language that they must learn to navigate. Given the immensity of the transition, it matters who makes the decision. Families must carefully weigh the benefits against the drawbacks of such a life-changing move. In a few of the stories, the young protagonists make their own immigration decisions. In *Trafficked*, (Purcell, 2013), Hannah is deceived into believing that moving to the United States would give her opportunities that are unavailable to her in her home country of Moldova, so she goes. In *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), Poni has already lost her family and her home when her village was destroyed by bombs. When she is given the opportunity to go to the United States to study, she accepts.

When parents decide to transplant a young adult child from one country to another, if the young person is reluctant to leave the home country, it can cause stress, fear, or anger in family relationships and lead to a much more difficult transition. This is the case, as we have already seen, in *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013). Angel's

grandmother, who takes care of Angel and her sister since their mother immigrated to the United States, tries to help Angel come to terms with the transition.

“Your mommy says she’s been filing for your visa papers, Anak.” ...

“I know it’s hard,” she continues, “but you have to see that we are all going over one by one. First your mother, then you, and then Lila, and I will follow.” ...

“I don’t want to leave either,” Lola Ani says. “This is my whole life. But what can you do?”

“You can say something,” I finally speak.

“But your mother is the head of the family now, she’s the one making the decisions.” ...

“And this is what your papang would have wanted you to do. To obey your mother. To go to America. Can’t you be grateful, anak?” (Galang, 2013, p. 117)

Even though her grandmother pleads with her, Angel resists the idea of moving to the United States. Her lack of voice in the decision creates a deep rift in the relationship between Angel and her mother.

The thought of immigration is frightening for some young people, especially if it involves traveling alone, or fleeing danger in the home country. Fourteen-year-old Mai, in *Out of the dragon’s mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), has to escape the chaos as her home country of South Vietnam falls to the Communists. She accompanies her 19-year-old uncle Hiep, the only familiar person to her on her journey. Even though Hiep is with her, she does not want to go.

*Father, father, I don't want to go. You have to, he had told her. You have to go to survive. But what if I don't survive, she thought. You're not here to help me.*

(Zeiss, 2015, p. 2)

Mai, who has never been away from her family, does not fully understand how dangerous the political situation in Vietnam has become. She has no voice in the decision to escape from her country. Her parents, who do understand the danger, make the decision for her. While it is not a choice they want to make, it is the only way to keep her safe, because girls are also being conscripted into the military. ““You’re in danger too. Even fourteen-year-old girls like you are being forced into the army now”” (Zeiss, 2015, p. 5).

Eighteen-year-old Phoenix, in *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), must play the role of adult as he decides for himself and his 12-year-old brother Ari, that they must leave their home in El Salvador. While Ari does not understand the danger they face in their country, and therefore does not want to leave, Phoenix is painfully aware of it.

...she called to tell me that she had run into Ari at the community center, that he was sporting a big black eye and a broken wrist and telling anybody who asked how he wasn't going down without a fight. Stupid Ari thought he was gonna fight back. He thought he was a hero. I knew what would come next, and I was not going to let that happen. So I went back there, and I got him. Kidnapped him, basically—my own brother—and we headed north. Ari fought me the whole way, telling me I should live my own stupid life...Ari punched me in the gut, like, twice a day the entire time I was hauling him toward the border. (Marquardt, 2017, pp. 48-49)

At the young age of 18, Phoenix must be the decision maker for himself and his brother. Ari is the only family that Phoenix has left, and he is determined to keep Ari safe, even when Ari fights him about it.

The decision to permanently move from the home country to the United States is not made lightly by any of the characters in the books included in this study. Usually the parents or parent figures make the choice. However, when the young protagonists are not involved in the decision-making process that will have a major impact on their lives, the result is often conflict and reluctance. In addition to the books cited in this section, the following books included the theme of parents making immigration decisions for their children: *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), and *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016).

Life before immigration is happy and carefree for many of the young protagonists. Even if their families are not wealthy, children know the security of being surrounded by loving families. Sometimes, the death of a parent or other family member becomes the unsettling catalyst that sweeps away that sense of security, leading to the decision to seek a new kind of security by moving to the United States.

The journey from the home country to the United States is one both of hope and of grief. Virtually all of the protagonists leave family members or friends behind. The travel experiences of the young immigrants and their families are as varied as the characters themselves are. For some, the airplane ride to the United States is the easy part of the journey. For others, it is a long, uncomfortable ride on a boat, train, or by foot.

Some of the characters encounter danger along the way. Others travel in luxury. For some, getting out of their home country is terrifying and dangerous. For some, entering the United States without proper documentation is the more frightening and risky part of the journey. Several of the young protagonists endure life in refugee camps on their way to a better life in the United States. A few lose family members somewhere along the way to the United States. The following discussion will examine these themes.

***Leaving loved ones behind.*** Leaving family members and friends behind is one of the hardest parts of immigration for the young protagonists. While the pain is similar, the separation looks different for each character. Sometimes the characters get to say good-bye before they leave. Hannah, in *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), bids her beloved *babulya* farewell before she boards a bus in Moldova. Similarly, Mai in *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015) says good-bye to her family before she sneaks out of Vietnam. In *Watched* (Budhos, 2016), young Naeem must leave the grandparents who raised him in Bangladesh for several years until his father earned enough money to send for him. Julio, in *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), is only able to say a brief farewell to his mother in a phone call when he decides to defect with his uncle and cousin. He does not get to say good-bye to his sister, Lola.

Other characters do not get to say good-bye to their loved ones. In *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), Zamzam and her mother and siblings run from their village, not knowing the fate of her cousin. Poni in *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014) is separated from her entire family and must make the long trek to the refugee camp in the company of strangers. In *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), Carly and her brother do not get to say

good-bye to their parents when the parents are deported back to Mexico. Although Carly and her brother are United States citizens, the parents are not. Similarly, in *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), Fabiola, a United States citizen by birth is separated from her mother as they pass through immigration at the airport in New York. Fabiola's mother, a Haitian citizen, had overstayed her visa years before when Fabiola was a baby. The authorities are concerned that she will try to overstay her visa again, and therefore send her to a detention center in New Jersey. Fabiola must make the rest of the journey on her own, to go live with her aunt and cousins in Detroit.

“Ms. Valerie Toussaint, I need you to come with me,” the man had said. His voice was like the pebbled streets in Delmas, rough and unsteady as they pulled Manman's hand from mine; as they motioned for me to continue through the line with Manman's desperate pleas trailing behind me—*Alé, Fabiola! Go, Fabiola! Don't worry. I will meet you there!*—and as I got on the connecting flight from New York to Detroit. (Zoboi, 2017, p. 2)

Fabiola fears that her mother will be deported. She feels helpless to do anything to bring her mother home to Detroit, and turns to her faith to find comfort in the midst of her uncertainty and fear.

In *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), 12-year-old Sol and her younger sister Ming are brought to the United States by their father and stepmother. When their father returns to the Philippines, they do not realize at first that he is abandoning his family, so they do not get to say a proper farewell. In *The secret side of empty* (Andreu,

2014), 17-year-old Monserrat had left all of her relatives behind in Argentina when she and her parents immigrated, but she was too young to understand at the time.

When loved ones are left behind and the protagonists will not see those people for a long time, if ever, emotions such as loneliness and homesickness well up inside of them. These two topics, leaving loved ones behind and emotions or mental health issues are found together in three of the books.

In each of these situations and in other books in this study, whether or not the young protagonists get to say good-bye, the leaving is difficult and the characters experience a sense of grief. When they do not get to say good-bye, they may experience anxiety about not knowing what has happened to their loved ones or why they have been abandoned. Even those who do get to say good-bye often face fear and stress when their family members are left behind in a dangerous situation or are aged and frail. In summary, leaving family and friends behind leaves multiple wounds in the hearts of the young characters. The theme of leaving friends and family behind is also found in the following books: *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), and *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016).

***Means of travel.*** The protagonists use many different means of travel to come to the United States. For some, different parts of the journey are made by different means. Knowing how the protagonists travel is a significant part of understanding their physical and emotional conditions upon arrival in the United States. While airplane and bus or car travel is relatively easy, those characters who make the journey, or part of the journey by

another means may experience exhaustion, illness, cramped quarters, danger, and other forms of distress or trauma. The topic of means of travel is closely tied to the topic of dangerous or distressing travel conditions for those immigrant characters who travel by train, boat, or by foot. Therefore, it makes sense to discuss them together.

In most of the books set in our current time period, airplane travel is used for at least part of the journey to the United States. The topic of air travel is found in the following books: *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), and *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014).

A few of the characters make at least part of their journey by bus, car, train, or on foot. The bus ride itself is relatively safe and uneventful. It is the uncertainty that awaits them at the end of the ride that unsettles them. In *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), 16-year-old Carly and her older brother Julio work hard to earn enough money to have their parents, who were deported and young siblings, who they have never met, smuggled across the border from Mexico to Texas. However, the smuggler betrays them, so when the parents arrive in Austin, they are taken into custody. In *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), Poni runs away from the refugee camp and takes a bus to Nairobi, in search of Sister Hannah, who provides a safe place to live for refugee girls who are willing to work hard. She spends the last of her money on the bus fare, so if Sister Hannah does not take



her in, she does not know how she will survive. In *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), Hannah rides a bus from Moldova to Romania, where she is to meet the man who will drive her to the airport to go to Los Angeles. Unbeknownst to her, a young woman on the bus, Ina, is actually sent by the traffickers to watch over Hannah, to make sure she arrives safely in Romania without telling the authorities anything about her travels. At this point, she does not yet realize that she is being trafficked.

When bus travel is part of the journey for the young characters or their family members, the ride itself is generally safe and reasonably comfortable. This is not the case for those immigrant characters who travel by train, boat, or by foot.

Train travel is used by the characters in two of the books. In *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), which is set in the 1800s, Eva and her family travel by train across Russia from the Volga River to the Baltic Sea to reach the port where they meet the boat that will take them to Germany, the first stop on their journey. The train ride is long and uncomfortable.

A week passes. A week that has left us almost numb, we are so tired, so dull-headed with lack of sleep, noise, and people everywhere, and all around us.

Pressed together in crowded train cars, we lean against each other to keep from bumping the strangers beside us on the swaying, jolting trains. (Boeve, 2017, p. 64)

In this example, train travel is the only means of transportation available to Eva's family. The trains are dirty, smelly, and full of lice and bedbugs.

Phoenix, in *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), and his brother Ari, also travel by train. Their experience is very different, riding on top of the train known as *la Bestia* or the beast, from El Salvador, through Mexico to the United States border.

It's like *la Bestia*'s barreling through my chest. Where I'm from, people always say the road to the American Dream runs through the Mexican Nightmare, but it's not a road. It's a train track, and if you're poor and stupid like me, the only way through that Nightmare is on the back of *la Bestia*. If you're lucky—if you find the tracks after you cross into Mexico, if you get space up on top of the train and something sturdy to grab on to, if you have a strong enough grip to stay on the road when the Beast jolts to a start and the wheels begin to squeal, if you're awake enough to hold on through the night, or if you're smart enough to have remembered a belt or rope to tie yourself on, if you survive the rain and the sunburn and the bandits and the kidnappers, *la Bestia* will take you all the way to the border—all the way to the edge of the Promised Land. But if you're not lucky, if you let go for even a second, you're done. Crushed under the rails. Or worse.

Torn apart, limb from limb. I've seen it. (Marquardt, 2017, pp. 37-38)

For Phoenix and Ari, the train ride to the United States border is traumatic. Having no money and no other family members to help, this is the only way that Phoenix knows of to keep Ari safe.

Some of the young characters make at least part of their journey by boat. In *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), set in the 1870s, 18-year-old George Choogart sails from his home in London to New York to take a job. Compared to other characters who travel by boat,

George does not seem phased by his journey. As he views the New York shoreline, his thoughts are all about what his new adventure will be like. While George does not describe conditions aboard his boat, Eva, in *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), describes what it is like as she and her family sail from Germany to New York.

I wake to the constant throbbing of the ship's engine carrying us through the nights and days to America and I feel a kind listlessness. It is, I think, as if I no longer care if we ever get to America. But I do, of course. I want to be out of this smelly, overcrowded, noisy room more than anything I can think of right now.

(Boeve, 2017, p. 75)

Boat travel to the United States from Europe in the late 1800s was usually unsanitary, uncomfortable, and brought with it the risk of disease from being in cramped quarters with many other people for days on end, at least for those passengers who rode third class.

There are many similarities in the books between the travel conditions that Eva experiences and those that Mai goes through in *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015). Mai travels from Vietnam, across the South China Sea to the refugee camp at Pulau Tengah, an island off the coast of Malaysia.

The darkness covered Mai like a burial shroud. She huddled in the small space allotted her, crushing her knees to her chest, struggling to breathe. The sickly smell of diesel fuel and the stench of human sweat engulfed her. Around her pressed a mass of human shapes, and a heat so heavy she thought she would faint. Soft moans and nervous whispers sifted through the stagnant air.

Mai's discomfort is compounded by the fear of being discovered by the authorities as she and the others on the boat try to escape from Vietnam. They finally make it safely past the patrol boats, but she must still endure the overcrowded, unsanitary, smelly conditions aboard the boat.

Some of the protagonists make part of their journey by foot. In three of the stories, the protagonists describe how they walked through the hot African desert to reach refugee camps in Kenya, their only hope of survival during civil wars in their countries. In *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), young Zamzam and her family must walk from their home country of Somalia to the refugee camps, in hopes of being able to come to the United States.

There are just certain things we don't talk about, like how we walked for weeks to get to a refugee camp. The scorching heat and the hot, dry wind that kicked up dust as we were walking. I remember being constantly thirsty. The bottoms of my feet hurt so badly because they were burned from walking on the hot sand. I didn't have a choice but to keep walking if I wanted to live. (Wilson, 2016, pp. 38-39)

Similarly, Poni, in *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), walks from her home country of South Sudan to the refugee camp in Kenya.

The soles of my feet are burnt from the hot earth. I am wearing sandals made from tires, but they are so worn that I can feel the skin of my feet burning away and thorns poking through... Weeks go by. As we walk, people sometimes fall

down dead. As for me, my mouth gets so dry that my tongue splits down the middle. (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014, pp. 67-69)

While Zamzam is able to travel with her family, Poni loses hers in the chaos, the night that her village is bombed. She must travel to the refugee camp in the company of strangers, not knowing whether her family is alive or dead. Another book, *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), also addresses the topic of walking to refugee camps in Kenya.

Encountering dangerous or distressing travel conditions is associated with the topic of escaping from oppression in their homelands. When the characters must flee to get away from violence or oppression in their homelands, they often endure dangerous or distressing travel conditions. From sitting for weeks on crowded smelly trains to riding on the top of fast moving trains through territories governed by gangs, from hiding in the holding tank of a fishing trawler to floating across the sea in a refurbished old car, from running for their lives, dodging falling bombs to sitting for years in disease-infested refugee camps with barely enough food to stay alive, the protagonists who had to flee their homes had to endure many dangers and discomforts on their way to the United States. The topics of escaping from violence or oppression and dangerous, distressing travel conditions co-occur in five books in the study.

The means of travel for the characters is relevant to understanding their state of mind upon arrival in the United States. Those who travel by airplane or by bus enjoy a relatively quick and comfortable immigration experience. But for the characters who must spend part of their journey traveling by train, boat, or on foot, the adventure can be distressing, or even dangerous.

*Escaping dangerous or distressing conditions.* Among the characters who leave dangerous or distressing conditions in their homelands, several have to either run away or sneak out of their countries. Saeed, in *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), tries to explain in broken English to his American friend, Tom, what it was like to escape from his village.

“There is men. With guns? Who kill peoples outside our house. My uncle? He get killed. My friend? He get killed. I see this. With my eyes”... “And my mother,” he continued. “She just say run! We go...out window. In back of house. And we run! Fast. And all the time we run we hear guns.” (Padian, 2013, pp. 96-97)

Saeed’s account is strikingly similar to the escape stories told by Poni in *Lost girl found* (Bassoﬀ & DeLuca, 2014), and Zamzam in *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016).

As we have already seen, Mai, in *Out of the dragon’s mouth* (Zeiss, 2015) is smuggled out of her home country of Vietnam in the bottom of a fishing trawler. In *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), Julio, his uncle, cousin and the man Gabriel, face arrest if they get caught trying to leave Cuba without permission. Uncle Ramon explains the escape plan to Julio.

“Julio, you see that man with his family over there?” asked Gabriel, pointing about forty yards away. “He’s not here by accident. Twenty minutes before sunset, he’s going to walk off this beach. He’ll bring back my vessel and leave it in a small clearing past those thick bushes. Then his family will pile into my car and take it home to keep.” (Volponi 2015a, p. 84)

When the protagonists must run to avoid the bombs falling on their villages, or when they sneak out of their countries under cover of darkness, they become separated

from family members. Occasionally, they are reunited, but some of the characters do not see their loved ones again. The topics of running away to escape from violence or oppression and leaving loved ones behind co-occur in five books in the study. Similarly, some of the characters who escape from oppressive and dangerous situations in their countries carry with them grief from the loss of family members who had passed away earlier. These two topics occur together in four books in the study.

For some of the young protagonists, escape is a matter of survival. For others, running away or sneaking out is the only way out of an oppressive situation in the home country. All of these young immigrants face fear and trauma as they run from conditions that they can no longer bear. This trauma has an impact on the characters' adjustment to life outside of their homelands. The topic of running away or escaping from the home country is also found in *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017) and *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014).

**Documentation issues.** While getting out of their country is a challenge for some of the young protagonists, getting into the United States is the test for others. Some of the young protagonists or their parents arrive in the United States without proper documentation. In *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), 15-year-old Nina's brother obtains a fake visa for her so that she can come to the United States. Not wanting to come to the United States in the first place but being compelled by her mother to do so, it is with regret that she uses her documents.

I knew that I was going to have to pretend to be something I wasn't in order to travel to a new world. Within days I had a passport and a visa stamped inside that said I could travel to the United States. I was on my way. (Joseph, 2013, p. 20)

Nina's fake documents get her entrance to the United States without difficulty.

Hannah, in *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), is given fake documents by her traffickers, who have tricked her into trusting them. She is nervous as she stands in the immigration line waiting for her turn to approach the counter where the immigration officer would check her documents.

The line slid forward like a slow escalator, pulling her closer to the grim immigration officers who sat on stools behind a long white counter, separated into glass booths. They were examining people's documents, searching for fakes like hers. They waved most of the people through a large white archway into America, but they sent some through a door with a tiny unbreakable window, which she was sure led to an interrogation room... The line moved forward. In a few minutes, it would all be decided. If she could get a kind immigration agent, she might make it through, but none of them looked all that kind. (Purcell, 2013, pp. 2-3)

Hannah comes to regret the fake documents and the betrayal of her trust that they represent when she experiences abuse at the hands of her "employers."

In *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), Carly and her brother pay a large sum of money (sixty thousand United States dollars) to *El Libertador* (the Liberator), a man whose identity they are not supposed to find out, to smuggle their parents across the border from



Mexico. *El Libertador* wears a clown mask when meeting with Carly and Julio, to keep his identity a secret.

“Your parents will be given safe passage across the border. Customs won’t bother them. My men will meet them in the desert and bring them as far as Austin. It’s up to you to transport them the rest of the way.”

“And the passports?”

The clown face nods. “The passports will be provided to them as soon as they cross the border.”

“What if they get caught?”

The question isn’t from Julio. It’s from me. And Julio is just as horrified as I am. Still, I press on. “Well,” I say defensively, “we’re paying this man a lot of money. What if he fails? Then what?” (Banks, 2016, pp. 189-190)

Getting falsified immigration documents is expensive for Carly and her brother, and they come to realize during the course of the story how badly they have been taken advantage of. The people who are being paid to ensure her parents safe passage scam her and her brother instead.

In all of these cases, the characters or their parents know that trying to enter the United States legally would be a long and complicated process, and in the end, would probably not be successful. They use whatever means they can to get to the United States so that they can be safe, take care of their families, or participate in the American Dream.

The topic of documentation issues is significantly associated with several other topics in this study. Some of the young protagonists’ parents come to the United States in

search of jobs and other opportunities. After a time, some of them lose their work visas, yet they continue to live in the United States, not wanting to transplant their families out of the only home that they have known. They must live as undocumented immigrants, under the radar. The topics of documentation issues and coming to the United States to seek jobs or other opportunities are found together in three of the books.

Closely related to these topics is the relationship between documentation issues and fear of deportation. Nothing stresses the protagonists' parents more than being undocumented and worrying that the family will be discovered and deported. The topics of documentation issues and fear of deportation co-occur in five books in the study.

Documentation issues are also connected to strong emotions and mental health issues. These topics occur together in six books in the study. Being undocumented means that the young protagonists and their families must live life below the radar. This causes the young characters, and often their parents as well, great stress. Anything they do that could draw attention to themselves is risky because it means that their illegal status could be discovered and they could be deported.

Sometimes this stress leads to emotional, verbal, or even physical abuse of the protagonist. The topics of documentation issues and abuse/bullying co-occur in six books in the study.

In several of the stories, the protagonists keep their legal status a secret from even their closest friends, due to the shame and fear that goes along with being undocumented. As their lack of documentation becomes a high-stakes issue, for example, when they want to apply for college, their stress escalates and causes their friendships to be tested.

Fortunately for the characters, they have friends who are sympathetic to their dilemmas and help them deal with their documentation problems. The topics of documentation issues and being welcomed or befriended occur together in six books in the study.

The topic of documentation issues is also found in *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), and *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016).

**Refugee camps.** Life in refugee camps is hard. The protagonists spend their days standing in long lines waiting for food, hoping that they get to the front of the line before the food runs out. Healthcare is minimal, disease and despair are prevalent. Conditions are often unsafe, especially for women and children.

Poni, in *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), describes what it is like to live in a refugee camp.

Inside the camp I see so many too-thin children. Hunger comes and grabs each morsel of flesh that it can find. Some of the children no longer have any buttocks, the last bit of flesh to go. They can no longer sit comfortably since there is nothing to protect their small tailbones. So they lie sideways, lie on mats near their mothers, or sometimes on the ground itself. Some of them are so still that I can barely see them breathe. (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014, p. 79)

The experience of living in the refugee camp is in many ways traumatizing for Poni. She is abused by the foster mother assigned to her, who wants to marry her off to collect the bride price. Poni had promised her mother years before that she would not

marry young, and that she would continue her studies. To avoid the unwanted marriage and have a chance to keep her promise, Poni runs away from the camp.

Conditions are not much better in the Pulau Tengah refugee camp in Malaysia, where Mai and her Uncle Hiep in *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015) must wait for relatives in the United States to sponsor them to go to the United States. They befriend Lan, who becomes like an older sister to Mai, and helps to break up the monotony of the dreary days in the refugee camp.

Lan had helped her survive life on the island, where the days dragged by with a dreary sameness she had not anticipated, a dreamlike existence of work-filled mornings drawing water and standing in line for food and hotter-than-she could-bear afternoons spent languishing in her hammock, even the flies too hot to circle above her. (Zeiss, 2015, p. 181)

In the refugee camp at Pulau Tengah, hopelessness seems to be almost as pervasive as the heat and the flies. Even Mai finds it difficult to hold on to hope.

What would become of them? She didn't know if she could bear to wait several years to leave this island, as some of the others had. She thought of the ones who had given up hope. Suicide. A young man whose pregnant wife and three children had drowned on the journey across the ocean had only lasted a month on the island. Alone and depressed, he had walked into the sea at night two weeks ago. (Zeiss, 2015, pp. 96)

Back in Vietnam, Mai's father had spoken harshly, blaming a man who had committed suicide for bringing dishonor upon his family. As she finds herself surrounded by despair in the refugee camp, she has not forgotten his words, but she questions them.

Mai remembers these words, but she finds it hard to be hopeful, and she understood how easy it would be to give up. Maybe, in some cases, suicide was not as wrong as Father had said, but she could never do anything that would dishonor her family. (Zeiss, 2015, pp. 96-97)

While the topics of refugee camps and emotions or mental health issues occur together in only two of the books in this study, the refugee camps are traumatizing for the young characters who must live in them. They wait, often for a very long time, holding onto hope that they will be sponsored to go to the United States where they can start a new life. The camps are the only hope for the young protagonists, yet they are not hopeful places. The conditions are so bad that many refugees who make the journeys to the refugee camps with the protagonists never make it out of the camps.

The topics of life in a refugee camp and running away to escape from violence or oppression co-occur in three of the books. This makes sense because the characters who end up in the refugee camps all have to flee from their homelands when conditions there become too dangerous. The topic of refugee camps is also found in *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013) and *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016).

The immigration journey is long and difficult for some of the young protagonists and their families. In three stories, the characters endure the loss of family members during the journey. Leung, in *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), set in the 1870s, is being raised

by his uncles because his parents are dead, his mother having died on the journey from China. Zamzam, in *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016) loses her *aabbe*, her father, when he dies from cholera from drinking dirty water in the refugee camp. Mai's Uncle Hiep dies in the refugee camp after contracting hepatitis.

***Death during the immigration journey.*** Death occurring during the immigration journey is difficult for those left behind, especially for the protagonists, who are young and who lose a parent, or in Mai's case, an uncle. Fortunately for the characters, death of a loved one during the immigration journey only occurs in three of the books.

The immigration journey for the young protagonists is not an easy one and is not taken without cause. The characters grieve the loss of family and friends. They travel in conditions that are often unsafe and unhealthy. They must sometimes have themselves smuggled out of their countries or into the United States. Those who come without proper documentation worry about what might happen to them at the border. Some of the protagonists spend considerable time in refugee camps, holding onto hope that they will get to come to the United States. A few of the characters who start out on this journey do not survive to cross into the United States. Many of the young characters would have preferred to stay in their own countries, but it is the parents who make the decision to move their families. They are willing to endure these hardships so that they can live in safety, enjoy freedom, and give their children opportunities that are not available in the home countries.

The immigration experience does not end for the young protagonists once they arrive in the United States. In many ways, it is just beginning. Although a few truly

rejoice as they enter the United States, most have mixed feelings. Some are reunified with family members, but the reunions are not always happy ones. Others grieve the death of a loved one left behind in the home country. The characters must redefine themselves, making sense of their new identities, finding the balance between holding onto the culture of their birth and assimilating into American society. Sometimes, the reality of life in the United States is disappointingly different from what they or their parents had expected. Some families struggle to find jobs that will allow them to make ends meet and provide a decent home for their families. Young immigrants often struggle with language and struggle to fit in at school. Several of the young protagonists must adjust to weather conditions that are completely different from those that they knew in their home countries. Immigration takes an emotional toll on several of the young protagonists, and they deal with strong and sometimes overwhelming feelings. Those who are undocumented live in fear of being discovered and deported. A few of the young protagonists harbor resentment toward parents who brought them to the United States against their will. This leads to conflict within the family. Almost universal is the stress of adjusting to life in a new language and culture.

There is an expectation among the young protagonists and their families that life will be better in the United States than it was in the home country. In many ways, this becomes true. Yet, the immigrant characters face many challenges as they adjust to life in the United States.

***Happiness about immigration.*** A few of the characters express heartfelt happiness about immigrating to the United States. Seventeen-year-old Jasmine in

*Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), recalls her first night in the United States.

“Falling asleep on a mattress on the floor my first night in America, snuggled up to Danny, his little toddler’s body warm against me. I was scared, but I was also so excited to begin a new life” (De la Cruz, p. 69). Similarly, Julio in *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a) describes the moment he realizes that he has made it to the United States after defecting from Cuba in an old converted ’59 Buick: “I couldn’t believe it. I was actually here, alive and in one piece. It was like being reborn. Every breath seemed new, and even the sun felt different on my skin” (Volponi, 2015a, p. 169).

Arrival in the United States gives several of the young immigrants a sense of relief and excitement as they anticipate the new life that they are embarking on. For others, there is no other life that they remember. Monserrat, in *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), came to the United States as a baby, so this country is the only home that she knows. “But I’ve only ever been here. This feels like home to me” (Andreu, 2014, p. 49).

Happiness upon arrival in the United States is a minor theme in most of the books in which it occurs. In addition to the books mentioned above, this theme is found in *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013) and *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016).

***Reunification with family members.*** For some of the immigrant characters, arriving in the United States means being reunited with family members they have not seen for a long time. In *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), Eva and her family are reunited with her uncle and aunt when they arrive in Kansas after the long trip from Russia. “Welcome to America, Uncle Johann says, his face beaming with pleasure as he



grasps Father's hand (Boeve, 2017, p. 84). In *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), Nina's mother sends her to live with her brother in New York. She is reunited at the airport with her brother, whom she has not seen in years.

I looked up and saw my big brother—handsome and strong and silent...

“Darrio?”

My brother looked down at me with a stranger's eyes. Then, suddenly, a smile broke over his face.

“Ni-na? That can't be you?” He laughed and threw his arms around me. Then he stepped back and looked me up and down, reaching out and rumpling my hair.

(Joseph, 2013, p. 33)

Reunification signifies for these characters that they have reached the end of their journey, that they are “home.”

Reunification is not a happy moment, however, for all of the protagonists. Angel, in *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), is reunited with her mother at the airport in Chicago. Her mother immigrated first and is sending for the rest of the family one at a time. Angel feels abandoned by her mother and is resentful about being taken away from the home that she knows and loves.

Ináy embraces me, whispering so many things in my ear, but she is too close and the tears are so wet. I don't understand anything but my name. Suddenly, I'm reciting definitions in my head again, trying hard not to fall under her spell. I am still mad at her. I hate her. (Galang, 2013, p. 169)

Because of her intense resentment toward her mother and her feelings of abandonment, Angel is angry about being reunited with her mother, and she makes the rest of the family miserable as well.

Family reunions trigger a range of emotions, from relief and hope to anxiety and resentment for the weary immigrant travelers. Other books in which the theme of family reunification is found include *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Loss of loved ones back in the home country.*** One of the challenges that the immigrant characters face is dealing with the loss of a loved one back in the home country. This grief is especially profound not only because the immigrants know that they will never see their loved one again, but because they were not there with their loved one during their time of need. While this is a minor theme in the few books in which it occurs, it has a deep impact on the young immigrant characters. This theme is found in *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), as Leung grieves the loss of his father, who had been murdered five years earlier in the Chinese massacre of 1871 in Los Angeles. The theme is also found in *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), as Hannah learns that her beloved grandmother, her Babulya, had died back in Moldova before Hannah could earn enough money to give her the surgery that would have restored her eyesight. In both of these cases, the loss brings about a flood of emotions, including desire for revenge, and guilt.

***Skilled and unskilled labor after immigration.*** Some of the young protagonists or their parents are able to find skilled jobs when they come to the United States. In *The go-*

*between* (Chambers, 2017), Cammi's mother lands an acting job in an American television series, so the family moves to Los Angeles. Her father, also in the entertainment business, finds work doing Spanish voiceovers for some major children's movies. In *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), Angel's mother immigrates to the United States to take a job as a nurse at a hospital in Chicago. George Choogart, in *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), sails to the United States with a promise of a job with a New York newspaper. Monserrat, in *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), tutors her classmates and others while in high school.

While the theme of skilled labor after immigration is a minor one in the books, unskilled labor after immigration is much more prevalent in the families of the young immigrant characters. Even for parents who have documents to work in the United States, unskilled jobs are often the best that they manage to find. In *Either the beginning or the end of the world* (Farish, 2015a), 16-year-old Sophie's Cambodian-born mother works as a housekeeper in a hotel. In *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), Sol and Ming's stepmother, Veal, finds work in a convenience store after she and the children are abandoned by the children's father.

It is not always the parents who must go to work to support the family. Sometimes the young protagonists must find jobs to help pay the bills. José, the 18-year-old protagonist in *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), stocks shelves in a grocery store to be able to afford to go to college. Sixteen-year-old Carly, in *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), works in a convenience store to help support herself and her brother, and also to earn money to smuggle their parents across the border from Mexico. Carly and her brother have been on

their own for several years, ever since their parents, who are not United States citizens, were deported back to Mexico.

The theme of unskilled labor is closely tied in some of the books to the theme of fear of deportation, which we will explore in a later section of this chapter. For example, in *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), Monserrat's father works as a waiter in a restaurant. Her mother finds work as a housekeeper at the Catholic school. Monserrat's parents are terrified of being discovered and deported back to Argentina. Similarly, in *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), Jasmine's father drives a bus, and her mother works as a cleaning lady at a hospital. For these immigrants without documents, accepting unskilled jobs is the only way that they can keep a low profile and remain in the United States.

The topic of unskilled labor after immigration is associated with several other topics in the books. In four books, the protagonist's resentment toward a parent, or family conflict, is related to the parent's unskilled labor after immigration. This is usually due to the stress that a parent feels about not being able to adequately provide for the family. When parents take out their frustrations on the young characters, resentment and conflict result.

Similar to the topics above, unskilled labor after immigration and strong emotions or mental health are two topics that are connected in a cause and effect relationship. Unskilled, menial jobs do not pay enough for the young characters' parents to provide well for their families. This leads to stress and depression on the part of the parents. These topics are found together in four of the books.

Unskilled labor after immigration and education being valued are two topics that also have a cause and effect relationship. The young protagonists hold menial after-school jobs, which makes them realize that they do not want to be doing menial work for the rest of their lives. So they are highly motivated to get an education and find a good career. These two topics appear together in three of the books.

The theme of unskilled labor after immigration is also found in *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Inadequate living conditions.*** When the young protagonists' parents cannot afford decent housing, the family must make due with inadequate living conditions. The young immigrants and their families struggle to provide the basic necessities of life, such as a roof over their heads, food on the table, and medical care. Sol, in *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), lives with her sister, Ming, and her stepmother, Veia in an "affordable housing" apartment with wobbly furniture and rats that can be heard scurrying through the walls at night.

After she leaves, the room is quiet except for the steady breathing of my youngest sister, Dominga—who everyone calls Ming—and the sound of rats in the walls of Magnolia Towers, which is the name of the apartment building where we live.  
(Kelly, 2016, p. 2)

For Sol and Dominga, a more comfortable home might have been a possibility if their father had not abandoned them after moving to the United States. However, with only their stepmother's meager wages, the rat-infested apartment is the best home that they can afford.

Montserrat and her family in *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014) also live in affordable housing. Even so, it is a struggle for her parents to feed their family.

"What's for dinner?" my father asks.

My mother looks a little more wrung out than five minutes ago. "Lentils," she says.

"Lentils again?" he groans...Damn lentils. Another meal brought to you courtesy of a ninety-nine cent bag of beans. (Andreu, 2014, p. 22)

Because he is undocumented, Montserrat's father is only able to get menial work as a waiter at a restaurant. His wages are insufficient for meeting his family's needs.

In *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), when José's father has an accident at the roofing job where he works and receives a traumatic brain injury, his parents do not have medical insurance to pay for health care. The foreman at the worksite is uninterested in helping José's father. José, who is only 10-years-old at the time of the accident, is put in the position of being the translator between his Spanish-speaking mother and the English-speaking foreman.

*"She says he doesn't drink. She says it's your job to keep him safe. How is tripping his fault?"*

*The foreman just looked away and shook his head, which struck José as odd.*

*“¡Ambulancia!” José’s mom yelled.*

*“And who has the pesos for an ambulancia?” the foreman said. His tone made José nervous. (Jones, 2014a, p. 36)*

Medical care in the United States is not inexpensive. Although desperate to get help for her husband after he experiences a traumatic brain injury, José’s mother simply cannot afford to pay for an ambulance to come to take him to the hospital, so she drives him there herself.

Inadequate housing is strongly related to a number of other topics in this study. Inadequate living conditions and education being valued are topics that relate because the young protagonists see education as the best way out of their dismal housing conditions. These two topics are found together in three of the books.

Sometimes, the young protagonists are resentful that their parents brought them into a situation in which their living conditions are less than adequate. The young characters often do not understand why they have been brought into situations in which they are living in rat-infested apartments, or having the electricity disconnected because the parents did not pay the bills. These two topics co-occurred in five books.

The topics of inadequate living conditions and fear of deportation are linked when the parents are unable to find more than menial jobs because of their undocumented status and therefore are unable to provide decent housing for their families. These topics appear together in four of the books in this study.

Living in inadequate living conditions leads to strong emotions and mental health issues for the characters. This makes sense when seen in light of the connections between inadequate living conditions and unskilled labor after immigration. When the characters or their parents are unable to find skilled work that pays a good wage, and that allows them to have decent and adequate housing, the result is often stress. These two topics occur together in five books in the study.

Not all of the young immigrants live in inadequate housing, but in one way or another, many of their families struggle financially. The theme of inadequate living conditions is also found in the following books: *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Language struggles.*** One of the major adjustments that most of the young immigrants have to make is that of learning to communicate in English, a language that many of them don't know when they arrive in the United States. In *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), Eva's father, determined that the family should not lose their heritage, forbids Eva to learn English.

"No," Father says, "We will stick to the old ways, Leah, my children and I. We lived in Russia our whole lives and did not learn to speak Russian. We will not speak English in America." (Boeve, 2017, p. 90)

Eva's father knows that if his children learn English, they will integrate into American culture and possibly reject their Volga German heritage. If the children do not know



English, they are less likely to stray from the old ways of their forefathers. Her lack of English skills becomes a difficulty when she finally starts to attend school. There, she learns English, and at a moment when her family is in crisis, she becomes the hero by being able to reach out for help.

Zamzam, in *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), is frustrated by her lack of English ability at school.

I try to fit in at my new school, but some days are overwhelming. There is so much to take in. It's really frustrating when I want to say something, but I don't know Enough English to get the right words out. (Wilson, 2016, p. 41)

It takes time and effort for Zamzam to develop her English skills enough to express herself confidently in class.

For the young characters, learning English well is an essential part of integrating into American life and being successful in school and in other life situations. Other stories that address the topic of language struggles are *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), and *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013).

***Fluent English.*** In some of the stories, the young members of immigrant families speak better English than their parents. They attend American schools from a young age, and therefore have many more opportunities to learn English than their parents. Because of their greater English fluency, these young characters are sometimes called upon to

interpret for their parents or siblings. In *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), Jasmine expresses the stress she feels about being the family interpreter.

I read somewhere that a lot of kids of immigrants grow up quickly and are given more responsibility than other kids. Their parents tend to depend on them, mostly because the kids can speak the language better and can act as a conduit to mainstream American society. The child becomes the parent, and the parent, the child. I feel a little like that now, like I'm older and wiser than my mom. (De la Cruz, 2016, p. 155)

Not only does Jasmine interpret between her parents and the outside world, but as the oldest child in the family she must also facilitate communication between her parents and her younger brothers, in other words, facilitate communication across cultures and generations.

Since I'm the oldest, I've always felt more pressure to be successful. I have to show them the way. And I also have to act like a bridge between them and my parents. Danny and Isko are pretty much 100 percent American. It's as if my parents are first-generation immigrants and they're second generation. But I'm stuck somewhere between both of them, trying to figure out how to help them understand each other. (De la Cruz, 2016, pp. 36-37)

Because of her fluent English skills and understanding of American culture, Jasmine must take on some adult roles as communication facilitator, both within the family and outside of it. This is a big responsibility for Jasmine, who is already stressed as she focuses on her academics in hopes of getting a scholarship to go to college.

José, in *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), is called upon to interpret for his mother one day when he is only 10 years old. His father has had an accident at work, and José must explain to the English-speaking medical staff what has happened, even though he does not quite understand it himself. One word that he translates in error keeps his father from getting the immediate medical care that he needs. It is an error for which José blames himself for years to come.

*“Your father suffered a concussion, which led to bleeding in the brain and resulted in a coma,” the doctor explained. José tried his best to understand the doctor’s words. “The good news is that he should come out of it. But when he does, things won’t be the same. He fell on his left side, so when he wakes up, there will be damage to his right side. What I don’t understand is why he wasn’t treated here immediately.” The doctor paged through the notes in his dad’s patient file. “Looks as though the nurse thought you were saying he was intoxicated. If we would’ve understood you, we could’ve treated him sooner, and the damage would be less.” (Jones, 2014a, pp. 62-63)*

At 10 years-old, having the responsibility of facilitating communication for his family is too big of a responsibility for José. Knowing enough English to be successful in fourth grade is not the same as being able to interpret in adult situations. Having made an interpretation error, he carries the guilt of this mistake with him for the next 10 years.

These examples demonstrate what a tremendous responsibility it is on the shoulders of the young immigrant characters when they are called upon to help people from different languages, cultures, and generations to understand each other. The theme

of fluent English was also found in the following books: *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013).

***Education valued.*** One benefit for the young immigrants of being in the United States is having the opportunity to get a good education that will lead to a better life. The realization that education is the key to a better future for the young immigrants is a theme found in many of the books.

To benefit from the educational opportunities available in the United States, the protagonists must have enough proficiency in the English language to comprehend what is being taught. Hannah, in *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), is excited on her first night in the United States. As she rides from the airport to the house where she will be working, she dreams about her plans, to become fluent in English and then continue her education.

All the signs on the street were in English. No more Russian. Good. Her plan was not easy, but she knew she could do it. First, she'd take English classes at night and during the weekends. Once she understood everything, she'd finish her last year of high school at a night school in Hollywood that she'd read about on the Internet at Katya's house. She'd get top grades and then she'd get a student loan to go to medical school, and she wouldn't have to be a nanny any more. (Purcell, 2013, p. 15)

Hannah has planned from the beginning how she will take advantage of the opportunity to learn English. She knows that if she can master the language, she can make many friends in the United States and accomplish her dream of going to medical school.

Most, if not all, of the young immigrants understand the importance of learning English. For recent arrivals, it is essential to fit in and pursue educational opportunities. For those who came to the United States as young children, knowing English means that they often become the interpreters for their families, taking on many responsibilities and making it possible for their families to manage their lives in the United States.

In addition to knowing English, many of the young protagonists aspire to go to college as a means of building a better life for themselves and their families. A number of the protagonists work hard, either by having after-school jobs or by excelling in classwork with the hope of earning a scholarship, all with the goal of going to college. Having a college degree for these immigrants means getting a good job and being able to take care of their families. José, the protagonist in *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), is determined to do just that.

“Going to college is my top priority,” José said. “Nothing else matters but that.”

His parents’ hard lives, with little education, had committed José to his dream of graduating from college. (Jones, 2014a, p. 15)

For José, going to college and getting a good job is the way out of poverty for himself and his family. Yet he struggles to find a balance between pursuing his long-term goal and meeting the immediate needs of his family. To earn money for college, he stocks shelves at a local grocery store. Having long hours at the store means that he comes to

school exhausted, and therefore struggles to earn the credits that he needs to get his high school diploma.

In *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), Carly must decide between giving into family pressure to take a second after-school job or to keep up her studies and earn a scholarship to go to college so that she can take care of her family.

She wants me to find a job with more hours, to save more money, to get her here sooner. But more hours means less time for homework. Less time for homework means my grades get flushed. I'm not the kind of student who can pass without studying. I'm the kind of student who barely holds on by her teeth and almost cries when she gets an A. The Breeze Mart keeps me on the honor roll, in a way. And without the honor roll, I'm not getting any scholarships. Without scholarships, I don't get to be the first person in my family to go to college. All I have to do is survive this thing called high school—and keep up my grade point average while doing it. One day, with a degree, I'll be able to provide for my entire family. (Banks, 2016, p. 59)

Like José, Carly shows great determination, both to provide for her family and to achieve her dream of continuing her education. These two protagonists, not unlike others in the stories, are caught in a tug-of-war between their long- and short-term goals. Given very adult responsibilities, they must struggle to be successful both for now and for the future.

One of the greatest barriers to a college education for the protagonists is the lack of documentation. When Jasmine, the protagonist in *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), learns that she has won the National Scholarship, she is ecstatic, until her parents

tell her that she cannot accept the scholarship because she is undocumented. Lack of documentation also holds back Monserrat, in *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014). Although she is one of the top students in her class, and desperately wants to further her education, Monserrat does not make plans to go to college, because applying for the scholarships that she would need to reveal her undocumented status.

“Yeah, college, I mean, who cares, right? More indoctrination, being told what to read and what to think. I think I want to get out there and live, you know what I mean?”

Even I don’t know what I mean, but I think I put on a pretty convincing performance. I mentally pat myself on the back for using a big word when lying about not wanting any more education. (Andreu, 2014, p.11)

Fortunately for José, the Dream Act of Minnesota (2013), would allow him to apply for college scholarships. Monserrat, is able to go to college thanks to DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, 2012). Jasmin and her family receive a stay of deportation, and receives a scholarship to Stanford, and Carly, being a United States citizen, is able to go to college after visiting her deported parents and new brother and sister in Mexico.

The topic of education being valued by the young protagonists is related to a number of other categories in this study. Education being valued and resentment or family conflict occur together in four of the books in this study. Often it is because the young protagonist wants to help the family by pursuing an education and getting a good job, but family members are pressuring the young character to work long hours and make

earning the money to meet the family's immediate needs more of a priority. These two topics occur together in four of the books.

The topics of education being valued and documentation issues appear together in four of the books in this study. This is due to the fact that the young immigrants want to go to college, but realize that, because they are undocumented, they will not be able to pursue their dreams.

The relationship between education being valued and fear of deportation can be seen in the fact that the young characters who want to go to college feel that they are unable to apply to schools or to apply for scholarships because their legal status will be discovered and their entire families will be deported. These topics appear together in four of the books.

Education being valued, along with strong emotions and mental health issues are found together in six books in the study. This makes sense in the context of undocumented immigrant protagonists who want more than anything to go to college and make a better life for themselves and their families, but who are constrained from doing so because of their legal status.

The importance of education for the young immigrants is a theme that is also found in the following books: *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).



*School struggles.* While the young immigrant characters do see education as an important means of achieving the better life that they or their parents had hoped to find when they first came to the United States, many of them find adjusting to school in the United States to be challenging. Sitting in classes taught in English when they might not be fluent in the language, adjusting to the United States education system, and navigating the social aspects of American school can be problematic for the protagonists. In *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), Tom, the American protagonist who befriends the Somali students on his soccer team describes the impact of the influx of Somali refugees at his high school.

There had been a few of them in town for years, but this was different. Every day in school you saw more of them in the guidance office, these black kids who barely spoke English. They would wander, lost, through the halls, trying to figure out the whole concept of changing classes. (Padian, 2013, p. 9)

Tom sees the distress of the Somali immigrants at his school. Throughout the story, he learns more about Somali culture, Islam, and refugee camps, and grows in his understanding of why adjusting to the American school system is so difficult for the Somali students.

It is clear that adjustment to school is an overwhelming experience for the Somali refugee characters. But orienting themselves to the expectations of school can be complicated for the other recently arrived immigrant characters as well. Fabiola, the protagonist in *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), learns quickly that her Catholic school in the United States has quite different academic expectations than her private school back

in Haiti. Fabiola is shocked at the critique from her teacher, Mr. Nolan, as he hands her back an assignment.

“You were supposed to write a research paper, not a personal essay,” he says, handing me back the homework. “There are some interesting ideas here, but they’re unsubstantiated. You need to gather some sources, use quotes, and add a ‘Works Cited’ page. Use textual evidence”...

I stare at all his markings, comments on the sides, question marks, whole sentences crossed out. I feel attacked because I wrote down everything I knew about the Haitian revolutionary hero Toussaint L’Ouverture and why he is important to me. But Mr. Nolan thinks everything I said was all wrong. (Zoboi, 2017, pp. 118-119)

Fabiola is bewildered by her teacher’s critique of her paper because she had often written papers and poetry in English at school back in Haiti. To succeed in this school, she must figure out what her teacher is asking and how to prepare assignments that meet those expectations.

Although the theme of adjustment to school is a minor one in the books, it is important in that it shows how significantly the immigrant and refugee characters struggle to make sense of American schooling when sufficient supports for them are not in place. The topic of difficulty adjusting to school is also found in *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Adjustment to climate.*** Another minor, but interesting topic found in the novels is that of adjusting to a new climate. Most of the immigrant and refugee characters come

from countries where the weather is typically warm, such as the Philippines, Somalia, or Haiti. When they end up in places like Maine, Minnesota, Chicago, or New York, they must learn to adjust to cold winters. José, the protagonist in *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), clearly articulates his dislike of Minnesota winters.

As he scraped the windshield, he wondered why his parent had left the warmth of Mexico for the cold of Minnesota. At school he'd always wanted to ask the Somali, Hmong, and other Latino students the same question: What were the parents thinking, moving to this icebox? (Jones, 2014a, p. 8)

Even though he was very young when his parents immigrated to the United States, the Minnesota winters are hard for José. The cold makes him wonder what it would have been like if his family had stayed in Mexico.

Living through northern United States winters is bearable for the immigrant characters when they have adequate winter clothing. But for those who do not, winters can be miserable. In *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), Tom, the captain of his Enniston, Maine high school soccer team, notices how cold his Somali teammates are as they sit on the bench at a game.

I didn't have the heart to give Saeed the *ça mache* advice just then. Mike had told me all the new kids were having a hard time getting used to the cold. One guy had even tried smearing Vaseline all over his arms and legs to stay warm. I watched as Saeed hopped from foot to foot and pulled a team windbreaker from his pack.

They were crappy plastic jackets, more like Ziploc bags...Saeed wore his all the

time. I'd seen him with it around school. Around town. I wondered if he owned another coat. (Padian, 2013, p. 91)

The Somali students at the high school do not have the resources to handle the bitterly cold Maine winter. Fortunately, there are volunteers in their community who help to provide the basic necessities to these immigrant characters.

Adjusting to the climate, along with emotions/mental health are two topics that are found together in three of the books. The young protagonists who move to the United States from warm regions of the world sometimes have difficulty adjusting to the cold, windy, snowy conditions in the cities that they move to, places like Chicago and St. Cloud, Minnesota. The weather causes the protagonists stress, and may also lead to homesickness and depression.

For the immigrant protagonists who remember the warmth of their home country climates, dealing with harsh weather conditions in their new homes is just one more difficulty that they have to put up with in their new homes. In addition to the books mentioned above, the theme of adjusting to a new climate is found in *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), and *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014).

***Fear of deportation.*** In several of the stories, the young immigrant character's parents bring their family to the United States legally, but then stay after their visas

expire. As we saw in an earlier section, Fabiola's mother in *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), had overstayed her visa. In three additional stories, *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), and *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), the young protagonists face immense stress as they carry around the knowledge that they are undocumented. The tension between having undocumented parents and a school that wants his parents to participate in his education causes José, in *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a) a great deal of distress. His teacher has asked his parents to review a document in which José promises to keep up with his schoolwork. But he knows that his parents cannot read the document, and even if they could, the official sound of it would frighten them.

They hadn't read it because it was in English. Besides "contract" sounded like a legal document, something his undocumented parents would want nothing to do with. (Jones, 2014a, p. 12)

José knows that his parents need to keep a low profile to avoid being deported back to Mexico.

In *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), 17-year-old Monserrat has known for years that her family is undocumented. She remembers overhearing an argument that her parents had many years before about having her start kindergarten.

It went something like, "No, Jorge, we can't just keep her home! That's crazy! You're crazy!"

"I'm not crazy! You're crazy! You want us all to get deported? Go then! You go to the school! Tell them you have a kid with no papers that you want to enroll! I'll pack your suitcase and have it ready! Because I'm not going, do you understand

me? They're *government* schools. They check your immigration status with the *government*. You want to get us deported? You can go by yourself!" screamed my father

*Because...yeah. We're illegal.* (Andreu, 2014, pp. 24-25)

As we will examine in a later section, Monserrat's father dreads the thought of being discovered and deported back to Argentina. His anxiety is so overwhelming that he becomes physically abusive toward his daughter. Monserrat, having grown up in fear of being found out and fear of her father's abuse, is driven to the point of contemplating suicide.

In *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), 17-year-old Jasmine does not know that she and her family are undocumented until after she wins the National Scholarship. Her dreams of going to college are shattered when her parents tell her the truth and tell her that she cannot accept the scholarship. Her parents seek the help of a lawyer to try to obtain legal papers, but the family is threatened with deportation back to the Philippines instead. "I'm terrified. It's true that our family doesn't have documentation, but how can the judge not even give us a chance to state our case first?" (De la Cruz, p. 307).

The ones who manage to cross the border without documents and the ones whose documentation expires must maintain a low profile, which often leads to stress within families.

Fear of deportation is strongly related to several other topics in this study. Resentment or family conflict and fear of deportation are two topics that are found together in four of the books in this study. The resentment or conflict is usually seen as a

result of the stress placed on the parents or on the young protagonists themselves as they try to live under the radar and keep their immigration status a secret, knowing that it could have dire consequences for their entire family if it is discovered.

The topics of fear of deportation and emotions/mental health occur together in seven books in the study. For the protagonists and their families, worrying about being deported causes a great deal of stress, depression, and other mental health issues.

Fear of deportation and abuse or bullying co-occur in six of the books. While the link between fear of deportation and bullying from mainstream Americans is not so clear, the idea that fear of deportation, with all of the mental health issues that come along with it, occasionally leads to abuse within the family.

In each of these stories, the theme of being undocumented is closely tied to the themes of stress/anxiety and family conflict, both of which we will examine in more detail later in this chapter. For the undocumented characters, their worlds threaten to fall apart if they are discovered. They fear authorities such as school personnel, employers, medical professionals, and especially the police. Everything that they and their parents have worked so hard for to make a better life for themselves hangs in the balance. With one false move, they could lose it all. The issue of documentation is also discussed in *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a) and *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Resentment toward parents or other family members.*** The young immigrant characters' resentment toward parents or other family members is one of the major themes in the books. The young protagonists grapple with resentment toward their

families for a number of reasons. For those who were brought to the United States as young children and do not currently have immigration papers, lack of documentation leads to resentment. The characters who are undocumented must live below the radar. They do not get driver's licenses like their peers do, and they have difficulty applying for college. In addition, the daily worry about getting caught and being deported leads to stress and resentment, because the young protagonists did not choose this life.

Jasmine, the protagonist in *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), only learns of her undocumented status (her family had come to the United States from the Philippines legally, but their work visas expired when the business they were working for closed and they could not find another sponsor) after she has won a prestigious National Scholarship. Because attempting to accept the award would reveal her family's undocumented status, she must decline the scholarship. Jasmine is angry at her parents for not telling her about her family's status, and because she had worked so hard and given up so many typical high school experiences to qualify for the award.

Why didn't they tell me earlier? Did they not trust me? "Please tell me you're joking." I just can't accept this. This can't be the truth...I pull away. I know they tried their best, but their best isn't enough in this case. This is my future, what I've worked so hard for, and I'm furious. (De la Cruz, 2016, p. 50)

The knowledge that she is undocumented has negative effect on Jasmine. Her grades in school start dropping. She becomes depressed and stressed, worrying that her family will be found out and deported. Her relationships with her friends change as she tries to hide her deepest secret with them. Even more significantly, her relationship with her parents



changes, as she participates in activities that she knows her parents would never approve of, and as she carries the burden of being co-protector with her parents of the family secret.

In *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), Monserrat has always known that her family is undocumented. She has lived her whole life under the radar and in the shadow of her father's fear of being caught and deported back to Argentina. This fear so stresses Monserrat's father that he becomes physically and emotionally abusive toward her. Her mother's failure to protect her angers Monserrat as much as her father's abuse does. It is because of their undocumented status that her parents have only menial jobs, and she must live in poverty while her friends and classmates enjoy considerable affluence. The situation that her parents put her causes her to be hateful toward them. For example, when her father discovers the money that she has earned by tutoring, he takes it away from her in a rage, smacking her multiple times in the face. Monserrat can barely contain herself.

I am in a supernova fury when my mother walks into my room. I feel the overwhelming urge to throw something at her. In this moment, I hate her more than I hate him. Something about letting all of this happen, and then walking in here wrapped in a cloud of her own powerlessness as her excuse. (Andreu, 2014, p. 58)

Monserrat's relationship with her parents continues to deteriorate, becoming so bad that she comes to a point where she contemplates suicide.

For Jasmine and Monserrat, as well as other undocumented characters in the stories, the feelings of resentment, because their parents have put them in a situation in which they do not have choices and have no way out of their dilemma, deeply damages family relationships. The circumstances in which the young protagonists find themselves are weighty, and for a number of the characters, lead to hopelessness, depression, and a host of other mental health issues.

Another reason for resentment toward family members is the abandonment that some of the characters feel when parents immigrate ahead of them and then send for them later, or send them away to go live with relatives in the United States. During the time when the young characters are separated from their parents, they miss the emotional support that young people typically receive from parents. The resentment is especially hard to remedy if the parents have moved on emotionally and started new families before the young characters are reunited with them.

Angel, in *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), directs her resentment toward her mother. After the death of her father, Angel's mother, wrapped up in her own grief, becomes emotionally unavailable to Angel. Before they can be reconciled, Angel's mother takes a job in the United States and leaves, promising to send for Angel, her sister Lila, and her grandmother, one at a time as she earns enough money. When Angel is sent for and arrives in the United States a couple of years later, she finds out that her mother has remarried and had a baby. This only causes Angel to hate her mother even more.

It is as if I am just missing her, walking into spaces still warm with her breath.

She leaves me notes and lists of things to do. When I discover them, I crumple

them up, the anger rising from a place I cannot tame. At least when she abandoned us for the States, we were able to set her memory aside and live a life without her. At least back then I found ways of forgetting. Now she has taken me from my life, dumped me in her house, and left me again. This was not the plan, I want to shout, but I can't talk to her for five minutes—let alone tell her what I'm thinking. She charges me with her child, who speaks half-words with her accent, who mimics her insane laugh. In this way, she is ever present and never here.

(Galang, 2013, p. 189)

Angel, still grieving the death of her father back in Manila, remembers how her mother, wrapped up in her own grief, was unavailable when she needed her the most. Her mother's move to the United States and the new life that she started only escalates her resentment toward her mother.

Sofie, the protagonist in *Either the beginning or the end of the world* (Farish, 2015a), also feels abandoned by her mother. Sofie's mother is a Cambodian refugee who met her father in the United States and gave birth to Sofie at the age of 16. Because her mother was unprepared to parent a child, she left, leaving Sofie to be raised by her father. When her father has to go away for several months for his work, and her mother comes to stay with her, Sofie's resentment toward her mother flares up. "*My mother is coming to live with me, after all my life of forgetting she has me*" (Farish, 2015a, p. 26). "I thought by sixteen, I'd be over her" (Farish, 2015a, p. 35).

Sofie resists her mother and rejects her Cambodian heritage, just as she feels that her mother had rejected her when she was a baby.

Separation of families occurs frequently in the novels that are included in this study. For these young characters, and those in other stories in which families are not together for a time, the separation takes an emotional toll on the young characters. The feelings of abandonment are intense, and even though physical reunification may take place, emotional reunification is a long and complex process.

A third reason that the young characters find themselves resenting their parents or other family members is that they did not have a voice in the decision to immigrate, and they miss their homeland, the old way of life, and the people left behind. This is the case for Nina in *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013). Nina's mother sent her from her home in the Dominican Republic to live with her older brother in New York, hoping that she would find a rich man to marry. Her mother had started making arrangements for her to go the week after she saw a German tourist giving Nina attention. Her mother was furious with Nina, implying that Nina had been behaving like a prostitute. In New York, Nina's mother asserted, she would find the "right" kind of men and be able to marry a rich man. Nina had no desire to leave her beautiful home by the sea and the garden that she loved.

I leaned my forehead against the plastic window and watched as the green mountains of my beloved island slipped away...I was leaving my country for all the wrong reasons. Like being sentenced for a crime I never committed. How long would it be before I saw Samana again? Or the blossoming of my new ginger lilies? And what about my sunflowers? (Joseph, 2013, p. 21)

Just as her mother had done, Nina's brother failed to trust that she could handle herself around young men. He opposes the friendship that she had struck up with the green-eyed barber that she had met in the neighborhood soon after arriving in New York.

"You what? Are you crazy? I was wondering why Mami thought you were on the verge of getting yourself in trouble back home. But now I see. I didn't think you'd do the same thing in New York."

"The same what?" My blood was boiling.

"You think these men only want to *talk* to you, Nina?"

"That's what Luis and I do. We talk, we laugh, and we tell each other about our day. It's not a big deal. Mami was wrong, you know. I wasn't anything close to being a *puta*!" I spat the word out. The anger I'd been keeping tamped down since the day Mami dragged me out of that chair rose up and flowed out of me like lava.

"How could you even think that about me? And Mami, too? She's determined to marry me to a rich man. Isn't that treating me like a *puta*?" (Joseph, 2013, pp. 124-125)

For the young characters like Nina, being denied a voice in the decision to immigrate to the United States creates a rift in the relationship between the young immigrant and the adult who made the decision. For Nina, her resentment is compounded by the fact that her brother does not trust her any more than her mother had, and her anger toward her mother spills over on her brother.

The characters who are resentful toward their parents because of immigration are also likely to have mental health issues, such as stress, depression, feelings of

abandonment, grief over loss of family members, and suicidal thoughts. The topics of resentment and family conflict and strong emotions or mental health issues co-occur in eight books in the study.

There are numerous reasons why the young protagonists feel resentment toward their families and why they and other family members engage in conflict. Three prominent reasons have been discussed here, but these are not the only reasons why resentment and conflict occur in the families of the immigrant characters. In addition to the books described in this section, the theme of resentment and conflict within immigrant families is found in *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Strong emotions and mental health issues.*** The books in this study portray the immigrant characters as experiencing many deep, difficult emotions, including grief, homesickness, loneliness, regret, fear, anger, depression stress, and anxiety. As a researcher, living these emotions with my young characters while reading the books was perhaps the most challenging aspect of this entire project. The depth and seriousness of the characters' mental states emphasizes how problematic the immigration experience is for many of them. Because so many different emotions are involved, and often the same character experiences multiple emotional states, it is impossible to find a common trigger for these feelings. We have already briefly alluded some of these emotions, but in this section, we will examine them in more depth.

Some of the immigrant characters learn very quickly that adjusting to a “normal” life in the United States is no simple matter. In *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), Cammi, the Mexican telenovela actress’ daughter, had hoped to find a measure of anonymity in her new private school in Los Angeles, but she finds it challenging to navigate the social scene and make friends. “I had thought it would be easier in America” (Chambers, 2017, p. 105).

Like Cammi, Laila, in *The tyrant’s daughter* (Carleson, 2014), finds it difficult to adjust to life in the United States. She had enjoyed great privilege back in her country, before the revolution that claimed the life of her father, the ruler of the country. Now she is in exile in the United States, and must not only deal with grief over the death of her father and the homesickness for her former life, but she must also adapt to a less affluent life in a country far different from the one she had known as home.

I’ve been underwater for nearly a month. That’s what it feels like here—a life submerged. Wave-tossed and sand-scoured. Voices around me in school sound muted and distorted; faces are out of focus. I’m experiencing my new life through fathoms of water, making everything seem dreamlike and unreal, as if my brain can only accept so much change before it drowns. (Carleson, 2014, p. 61)

Laila’s words express the sensory overload that she feels as she acclimates herself to a new country, with a new language, new sights, sounds, foods, expectations, and ways of being. Indeed, many of the young protagonists experience similar feelings of disorientation as they adjust to their new lives.

For some of the young characters, homesickness becomes an obstacle to a smooth transition to life in the United States. Fabiola, in *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), grieves for her mother, who was separated from her and sent to a detention center upon arrival in the United States. “My belly hurts,” I lie. What I want to say is that my heart hurts for Manman (Zoboi, 2017, p. 148).

Other characters find life in the United States. to be a tremendous disappointment. Nina, in *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), feels the sting of betrayal, when she discovers that the money her brother had been sending home to the Dominican Republic for years was gained through illegal means. “I felt like Prometheus chained to a rock, with pieces of my soul eaten away by deception” (Joseph, 2013, p. 170). Everything her brother has is being bought with money gained through the sale of stolen goods. She wonders if her mother knows the trouble that her brother is in.

Immigration changes people, and the young characters are learning this. The longing to have life back the way it used to be, and the realization that it will never happen is a reason that many of the protagonists grieve as they transition to life in the United States.

Some of the protagonists find themselves overwhelmed with adult responsibilities at a very young age, and this leads to stress and anxiety. José, in *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), turns his anger inward as he deals every day with the consequences of an error that he had made when interpreting between his mother and the doctors when he was only 10 years old. His father, who had been injured in a work accident ended up becoming permanently disabled as a result of a traumatic brain injury.



José blamed himself but also the nurses for not knowing better; and the police. They were just like his dad's foreman; they all seemed to assume his dad was drunk. José overheard how people talked: he was Mexican, after all, he must be drunk to be acting that way. José hated Benson, hated Minnesota, and hated the United States. He hated everything, but mostly himself. (Jones, 2014b, p. 73)

The responsibility of interpreting in adult situations was too much for José to deal with as a child. At only 10 years old when his father's accident occurred, he did not even understand all of the words that the doctor was trying to say to his mother. He did not yet have the English proficiency to know that the word *intoxicado* should have been translated as *nauseated*, not *drunk*. He blames himself for the error and for his father not getting the help he needed right away.

Carly, the protagonist in *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), is excited to show her brother, Julio, the money that she has earned at her new job as a waitress, but her joy diminishes when Julio reminds her of the weight of her responsibility toward her family. At 16, family members pressure her to keep up two after-school jobs to earn enough money to bring her parents, who had been deported to Mexico several years earlier, back to the United States.

"Imagine how much you can make with both jobs," he says. "You'll be up there with me, no?"

And that's when the guilt settles in and becomes a part of me. I am smaller than a molecule. A molecule is twice my size.

Because I'm toying with the idea of cutting my shifts at the Breeze. (Banks, 2016, p. 132)

Carly wants to help get her parents across the border so their family can be reunited. But keeping up her grades and having two jobs is exhausting for her. In addition, she carries with her the secret that she is working so hard to earn money so that her parents can be smuggled across the border from Mexico. She feels disloyal and guilty for even considering cutting back her hours at the Breeze Mart, where she works.

Phoenix, the protagonist in *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), is wracked with fear and guilt, knowing that being deported back to El Salvador would mean a death sentence for him, and wishing he could have done more to protect his 12-year-old brother, Ari, from the gang that they had run away from. When Phoenix had gone to drag Ari away from the gang, the leader "green-lighted" them, meaning that he had ordered them dead. Phoenix had run with Ari to the Guatemala border, eventually making their way to the United States border, where Phoenix presented himself to a border guard and asked for asylum. Instead of being granted asylum, Phoenix was arrested and Ari was taken to a center for undocumented child immigrants. Now a judge has ordered Phoenix to be deported back to El Salvador, where the gang is certain to carry out the green light order. He can no longer do anything to help Ari, and he feels remorseful, even though he had done everything in his power to take care of his brother. "I tried to protect my little brother, but I failed. *Oh Christ, how I failed*" (Marquardt, 2017, p. 152).

When adult responsibilities such as interpreting for their parents, supporting the family, or caring for other family members are put on the shoulders of the young

characters, it often causes anxiety. They know that the tasks they are being asked to do are high stakes. Their help is needed for the family to survive, yet sometimes situations are out of their control. The demands can be exhausting for the young characters, and lead to feelings of guilt and depression when they do not feel that they are performing their tasks as well as others expect them to.

Living as undocumented immigrants is the most prominent cause of mental health issues among the young protagonists and their families. They must live under the radar, avoiding any attention that could lead to them being discovered and deported. Living in the United States without immigration documents means that the young characters' parents can only obtain menial jobs, which keep their families on the brink of poverty. Keeping their documentation status secret is so critical that even their best friends are not people that they are able to completely trust.

Jasmine, in *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), has a dilemma. She has recently learned that her family is in the United States without current documentation. Although she tries hard to find ways to help her family gain legal status, she is frustrated. "I thought we were here legally, and to think that we're as good as criminals in the eyes of the law...it's stomach-churning. I feel so helpless" (De la Cruz, 2016, p. 88). Her family places their hope in an immigration reform bill that would allow them to apply for green cards. When the bill fails to pass, Jasmine is devastated.

If the bill had passed, at least my family would have been able to apply for green cards and then citizenship. We could have become real Americans at some point. Now it feels like everything is spiraling out of control. Like everything I've been

trying to do with my life, including dating Royce, is getting grounded before it even has the chance to take off. (De la Cruz, 2016, p. 88)

The family's undocumented status is exposed when Jasmine's parents turn to a lawyer for help. Unfortunately for the family, the lawyer does not have their best interest at heart, and as a result, the family is ordered to be deported. Jasmine is so desperate to find a solution to her family's problem that she and her boyfriend make a plan to elope, so that she can stay in the United States.

Like Jasmine, Monserrat, in *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), is undocumented. She has lived in the United States for as long as she can remember, and has known about her family's secret since she was a little girl. She is one of the top students in her class, but her grades start to deteriorate when she realizes that, because she is undocumented, she will not be able to go on to college or get a decent job. It hurts because she sees all of her classmates preparing to go to college.

Already I've started to feel the utter pointlessness of continuing to try in school when there is no hope of any more school in my future. I finally understand the question: *when am I going to need this in real life?* Passing school is not real life when you are going to go on to a life where you think and what you know doesn't matter. (Andreu, 2014, p. 171)

Monserrat's life takes a downward spiral as her father continues to beat her, venting his own frustration on her. Because she is undocumented, she knows that reaching out for help would reveal her family's illegal status, and lead to deportation back to Argentina, a country that she barely knows. She feels hopeless until she listens to a song called

“Seventeen Ways to Say I’m Leaving.” The song points her to what she thinks is a solution to her problems.

I have racked my brain for a way out, for solutions. Treading water. Trying to keep from going under. Exhausted. I just want some rest. This song finally makes it feel so simple. I can’t believe it’s never occurred to me until now. I can make it all stop. Take action. I can finally have peace. No more smacks. No more empty future. No more friends leaving...Nothing anymore. No more being afraid or tired or ashamed. I play the song in a loop over and over again. This is the first time in a long time I have felt someone has been pointing to the answer...I get up and go to the drugstore. I need a razor blade. It’s what I’ve always needed. (Andreu, 2014, pp. 212-213)

Monserrat’s anxiety and depression is so severe that the only way out that she can think of is to commit suicide. She cannot reach out to anyone, even her best friend, for fear of being exposed as an undocumented immigrant.

A special case among the undocumented protagonists is the character who is brought to the United States through the process of human trafficking. In *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), Hannah lives every day in great distress. She has come to the United States thinking that she has found a job working as a nanny for a family. Without realizing it, she has been trafficked, and is now being used as slave labor. The money that she had been promised is not being paid to her. In addition, the family has taken her airplane ticket away from her, so she has no way to return to her home in Moldova. The family that “employs” Hannah continues to remind her that she is “illegal” and uses fear

of jail as a weapon to keep Hannah in the house and out of sight of neighbors, to keep their trafficking crime a secret. In reality, her imprisonment in the home where she works is worse than anything that she would face at the hands of the United States authorities. She is given an impossible work load, verbally abused, beaten, forbidden to have contact with the outside world, and threatened to be sent to a brothel to be forced to work as a prostitute if she does not comply. In addition, her abusers, members of the trafficking ring, have started threatening her family and friends back in Moldova. Her situation is desperate.

Paavo's face turned to stone. *We know where your babushka lives...your old boyfriend, Daniil...that pretty little friend of yours, Katya.* Hannah never should have come to America. Not only had she put herself at risk, but she'd put everyone she loved in grave danger. (Purcell, 2013, p. 272)

Hannah is desperately lonely, she misses her beloved grandmother, her Babulya, and she lives under the daily threat of verbal and physical abuse from Lillian, the woman of the house, as well as the unwanted attention from Sergio, the man of the house. Because she has no legitimate immigration documents, Hannah has nobody that she can reach out to, nobody that she can trust.

Most of the topics in this study relate, either directly or indirectly to the idea of strong emotions and mental health issues. This is an indication that the authors of these books have sought to write stories that show depth and complexity in the lives of their immigrant characters. This should also give educators who work with immigrant learners

incentive to keep an eye on these students for any signs of mental health issues, and point them toward resources that can help if the need arises.

Under the best of circumstances, immigration is stressful for the young characters, as they strive to fit in and establish a new support system. Under the worst of circumstances, the emotional impact of the immigration experience is life-threatening. For the young protagonists, events related to their immigration experience triggers strong emotions, such as homesickness, anxiety and stress. It also leads to mental health issues, such as depression and suicidal thoughts in some of the characters. The theme of strong negative emotions and mental health issues occurs in almost every book in this study. Only in one book, *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), was this theme not found.

In addition to the lifestyle and emotional adjustments, the recently arrived immigrant protagonists must make a number of cultural adjustments. The food, clothing, and traditions in the United States are very different from what many of the young immigrants are used to. As they interact with mainstream Americans and learn about American culture, they find that there are some aspects of this new culture that they want to embrace, but they also want to hold onto many of the traditions that they have brought with them. They find themselves caught in the tension between the old and the new, and they must choose what they find to be the best aspects of both cultures. They must figure out who they are in United States culture and create for themselves new identities, built upon the foundation of two distinct cultures.

***Home country traditions.*** Samira and her brother Saeed, in *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), are fairly new to the United States. Because many Somali refugees have

settled in the town where they now live, they are more easily able to hold onto their most cherished home traditions. On the other hand, having a close-knit Somali community makes it more difficult to assimilate to American life. Tom, the American protagonist of this story, wonders if Samira would refuse to shake his hand like many other Somali girls would, and asks their mutual friend, Myla about it. “‘Seriously? Samira wouldn’t shake my hand?’ ‘We should ask her. I’m curious. Samira’s...unpredictable.’ Myla’s voice trailed off. ‘I think there’s still a lot she’s still trying to sort out’” (Padian, 2013, p. 195).

After an incident in which Tom, not fully understanding Islamic rules regarding touching, hugs Saeed’s sister because he is concerned when he runs into her at the hospital as she is searching for her missing brother, Saeed tries to explain to Tom, what Somali people value most. “‘But for Somali peoples is one most important thing. And that is religion.’... ‘In Islam, it say a woman must not show hair, or the skin, to man outside family. Woman must not touch man outside family’” (Padian, 2013, pp. 295-296). In other ways as well, Islamic rules govern the everyday lives of Saeed and the other Somali Muslim characters in this story. For example, when the most important high school soccer game of the season falls during Ramadan, Tom, the captain of the team, worries that his Somali teammates will not have the strength to compete.

Living in a large community of people from their homeland who have had similar lives and experiences, Samira and Saeed maintain much of their Somali Muslim tradition. In *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), Fabiola, stands alone as she clings to her *Vodou* culture, which she had learned from her mother back in Haiti. It is her belief, her faith in her spirit guides, that gives her strength to navigate the difficult transition to the United



States after her mother was separated from her at the airport and sent to a detention center.

Upstairs, I find a near-empty shelf in Chantal's room, move the books aside, and start taking my mother's things out of her carry-on bag: a small statue of *La Sainte Vierge*, two tea candles, the beaded *asson* gourd, a small brass bell, a white enamel mug, a cross, and a piece of white fabric... It smells of Manman's magic—our *lwas*, our songs, our prayers... I call my spirit guides to bend the time and space between where I'm standing and wherever my mother is. (Zoboi, 2017, pp. 29-30)

Throughout the story, Fabiola turns to her spirit guides to help her when difficulties arise, and most of all, to help her reunite with her mother.

Even as she holds fast to her *Vodou* culture, Fabiola embraces some new American traditions, among them a Thanksgiving celebration. She even prepares an entire Thanksgiving dinner for her aunt and cousins.

Today is Thanksgiving—a day for families to come together and give thanks, my cousins tell me. I remember how my aunt and cousins used to call us in Haiti to wish us a happy Thanksgiving. We never knew what it meant, so we just replied, “Oh, *mesi*. Same to you!” (Zoboi, 2017, p. 228)

Celebrating Thanksgiving is one among a number of new experiences for Fabiola as she transitions to life in the United States. Her American cousins, draw her into mainstream American culture in school and in the friendship circle that her cousins had already established.

The topics of home country and American traditions are also addressed in the following books: *Either the beginning or the end of the world* (Farish, 2015a), *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Traditional and American foods.*** For the young protagonists and their families, the tension between holding onto the old ways of the home country and assimilating to American culture is perhaps most clearly seen in descriptions of the cultural significance of food. Food that is prepared according to the recipes of the home country connects people to their family and homeland traditions as they enjoy the sights, smells, and tastes of home. Clothing, hair style, make-up, and so on, often carries with it an identity statement. When a person wears traditional clothes, that person is identifying with a particular lifestyle, culture, or religion. For these reasons, food and clothing are important aspects of the cultures that the young immigrant characters or their family members bring with them to the United States.

In *Either the beginning or the end of the world* (Farish, 2015a), Sofie, the protagonist, has felt abandoned by her Cambodian mother for as long as she can remember. Her mother, a Cambodian refugee, was only 16 years old when Sofie was born, and so Sofie was raised by her fisherman father, although she would occasionally visit her mother and grandmother. Cambodian food, such as the aroma of lime and garlic, the taste of sticky rice, and the methods used to prepare Cambodian recipes connect Sofie

to her Cambodian roots, even as she fights to deny her Cambodian heritage. She remembers visiting her mother and grandmother in the apartment where they lived at Christmas when she was nine years old.

Mostly I remember my grandmother demanding, “You come. You the daughter.”

I took my father’s big, calloused hand to ward her off, terrified that she could make me. I would not take the cup of sticky rice that she tried to jam in my chest. But my father took it, and under his stern eyes, I ate...

I was a fisherman’s daughter from Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Nothing to do with these people.

But against my will, all the time I missed the smell of the room where I wouldn’t talk to my mother...I remember the surprising sweetness of the rice. (Farish 2015a, p. 35)

Although Sofie’s feelings of abandonment and her anger at her mother cause her to try to deny her Cambodian heritage, she comes to a point of realizing how deeply engrained it is in her, as she tries to help her boyfriend, an army medic, cope with his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

“I’ll bring rice” ... “Rice is good for nightmares.” How do I know this? “With ginger. Ginger is for pain. I’ll bring gingerroot to get through the night.”

I am telling remedies that somehow I know...

“Turmeric is also for pain,” I tell him. “Garlic for earaches.” (Farish, 2015a, pp. 98-99)

Sofie surprises herself by knowing the medicinal properties of these traditional Cambodian foods. Realizing that she had to have learned these things from her mother and grandmother, she is forced to accept her Cambodian background a little bit more.

For Nina in *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), who lives with her brother in New York, the traditional foods available in her neighborhood help to make her feel close to the home in the Dominican Republic that she misses so dearly. “‘The *sancocho* is *delicioso* here,’ said Darrio. ‘We can come here sometimes if you want.’ I nodded, remembering the smell of Mami’s *sancocho*” (Joseph, 2013, pp. 51-52). For, Phoenix, in *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), the smell of traditional food triggers childhood memories.

I catch the scent of the *curtido* and I feel tired, suddenly. That smell—vinegar mixed with cabbage, and the earthy aroma of the masa—it takes me right back to my *abuela’s pupusa* stand down by the lake. It’s like I’m standing behind the *comal* with her, a scrawny kid who wishes he were out climbing rocks with his friends, but he’s helping his *abuela* instead, because he hasn’t got any choice in the matter. (Marquardt, 2017, p. 110)

In contrast to the warm feelings that the young characters associate with foods from their home countries, many of them have difficulty adjusting to American foods. In *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), Fabiola describes her first taste of American food.

I open the fridge to find bottles of soda and ketchup and hot sauce and mayonnaise and bread and eggs and too many plastic containers...My stomach is so empty, it’s touching my back now. I grab a slice of orange cheese wrapped in

plastic. I jump as Pri comes into the kitchen... As I follow her, I stuff the slice of cheese into my mouth and I can't believe that this is the very first thing I eat in America. It tastes like a mix of glue, chalk, and salt. (Zoboi, 2017, p. 21)

Fabiola misses the delicious foods that she left behind in Haiti, and is amazed that her cousins do not eat these traditional dishes. It is very difficult for her to adjust to the tastes of American cuisine.

Zamzam, in *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), has mixed reactions to the food in the United States, which is very different from the food she enjoyed back in Somalia. "I have tried a lot of new foods since I have lived in Minnesota. Although most of it is nasty, I must say my favorite new food is pizza. I love cheese pizza!" (Wilson, 2016, p. 43).

The topics of traditional food and home country traditions occur together in six books in the study. Many of the home country traditions that are mentioned in the stories are related to religious practices, especially Islamic customs. Foods are an integral part of some of these practices. The protagonists eat foods that are prepared according to Islamic dietary laws and follow eating practices such as fasting during Ramadan.

Trying new foods is part of the process of assimilating to life in the United States. Most of the young immigrant characters eat American food and even enjoy some dishes, they almost always find comfort and satisfaction when they have the opportunity to eat traditional foods from their home countries. For these characters, traditional foods that they had grown up with connected them with their past and with the country of their heritage. The theme of traditional foods is also found in *American street* (Zoboi, 2017),

*Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Traditional and American clothing, hair, and appearance.*** The clothing that the young protagonists wear, and the appearance that they project, when it is clearly different from the clothing that is worn in mainstream United States culture, identifies the characters as culturally diverse. In the stories, this is most often the case for the characters who are followers of Islam. In *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), Zamzam is struck by the difference between her own appearance and that of Americans as she walks through the airport upon arrival in the United States.

There are people everywhere in the airport. I don't understand what anyone is saying, and they are staring at me. For the first time in my life, I feel very different. I have never been a minority. As I walk through the crowd toward the baggage claim, I notice that no one is wearing a hijab, and their skin is light.  
(Wilson, 2016, p. 25)

Seeing people who look so different from herself, and feeling very different in her new country makes Zamzam feel uncomfortable.

In *Watched* (Budhos, 2016), Naeem, who dresses like a typical American on most days, wears his traditional clothing for Muslim holidays. "I dig out one of my long kurtas and put it on over jeans. I never do that on regular days—only for family events. It feels

weird. But when I look at myself in the mirror, I like what I see: my hair combed back with gel, a little mustache and goatee starting to grow in. Maybe I'll let it stay" (Budhos, 2016, p. 108). After a time of rejecting it, Naeem is beginning to embrace Islam, the religion that he was raised in. By dressing in traditional clothing for a holiday, he identifies himself with his Bangladeshi Muslim community.

Samira, in *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), blends her traditional Somali clothing with American clothing as she struggles both to fit in and to hold on to her home traditions. However, assimilating American dress is not looked favorably upon by some members of the conservative Somali community that she lives in. Mr. Alden, the school's cultural liaison, tries to explain this to her friend, Tom.

"You say she is religious, but some days I would see her at school not wearing *hijab*, only a small scarf. Sometimes she had on big gold earrings. One day I saw her with a jacket I thought was a boy's." (Padian, 2013, p.319)

Although Samira and her Somali community are now living in the United States, there are certain cultural standards, especially those related to religion, that they are expected not to compromise on.

In *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), Laila's mother actually encourages her to dress in more western styles, now that she and her mother and brother are exiled to the United States, and out of the reach of her radically conservative Muslim uncle back in her home country. For a school dance, Laila's new American friends dress her up. Her friends, like too many other people in her new life, want her to trust them.

"Trust me, you look *amazing!*" Emmy, too, wants my faith.

“You really do, Laila,” Tori echoes. “You look good in red.”

Morgan scavenges through Emmy’s jewelry box, still unsatisfied with the details of my transformation... She pulls out a pair she finds suitable and holds them up, triumphant, before Emmy can answer. “Perfect!” They’re costume pieces, garish and cheap; the painted metal is already peeling. (Carleson, 2014, p. 77)

The next morning, Laila’s mother comments on her dress. ‘You looked beautiful last night’ (Carleson, 2014, p. 97). Laila replies to her mother,

“It felt strange to be so bare. Can you imagine if I had dressed like that back home?” ...

“Bah.” She wrinkles her nose. “You looked exactly the way a girl your age should look.” (Carleson, 2014, p. 98)

Laila’s new look helps her to fit in at school and in her new community.

In each of these examples, there is a tension between traditional and American clothing and appearance. For some of the young characters, maintaining traditional clothing is a cultural expectation, dictated by a community of immigrants. The characters are aware that they look different from their peers, and this sometimes makes them feel uncomfortable. For others, dressing and looking like a mainstream American feels normal, and it is the wearing of traditional clothing that seems strange. Finally, for some of the characters, dressing like a mainstream American takes some getting used to, although it is a welcomed change.

In addition to the examples above, the themes of traditional and American clothing, hair styles, and appearance are found in the following books: *American street*



(Zoboi, 2017), *Either the beginning or the end of the world* (Farish, 2015a), *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), and *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013).

After arriving in the United States, the young protagonists face many challenges. Most of them must learn a new language, navigate a new school system, take on adult responsibilities to help their families survive, and deal with the emotional upheaval that comes with being transplanted. While there are many opportunities for the characters in the United States, they must, especially if they are undocumented, keep a low profile to keep from drawing uninvited attention to themselves. They learn that their immigration journey is not over when they arrive in the United States. It is just beginning.

***Question 3 summary.*** For the characters who move to the United States, the process of immigration is long. It begins in the home country, as the young protagonists, or more often an adult in their family, decides that this is the best choice for the family. Most make plans, obtain the necessary documents (legally or otherwise), and arrange their travel. For a few, the process involves running for their lives from their home countries, often spending considerable time in refugee camps on the way to their new home. For some, the transition is forever embedded in their memories. For others, it happened when they were so young that they have never really known any other home.

Once they arrive, the work of fitting in among their classmates and friends is just beginning. Learning English, trying new foods and ways of dressing, taking on adult responsibilities such as interpreting for their parents, are all part of their new lives. Life is often very stressful for the young immigrants. The less than ideal living situations of many of the immigrants motivate them to work hard and make a better life for

themselves. But they often find that the opportunities that their mainstream American peers take for granted are often not as easily available to them. All of these factors cause them to live in a state of continuous tension as they strive to define themselves identifying both with their home culture and American culture.

**Question 4: How are they perceived or treated by others?** The stories in this study portray the young characters and their families as being met with a wide variety of responses in the United States. From being welcomed, befriended, and loved, to raising eyebrows of concern, or being resented, bullied or abused, the characters must learn to navigate the attitudes of others while dealing with the many other complexities of immigrant life.

***Welcomed or befriended.*** Being welcomed or befriended in the United States is one of the major themes in the books in this study. In some of the stories, the immigrant characters have significant friendships with mainstream American peers. Other books illustrate how mainstream American characters reach out to help the immigrant characters as they struggle to get their bearings in their new country.

In *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), Jasmine is able to lean on her friends to help her as she comes to terms with the idea that she and her family are undocumented and are likely to be deported. Her friend Kayla has always been there for her. “Kayla will always be my best friend” (De la Cruz, 2016, p. 277). Along with her best friend, Jasmine has the support of her boyfriend, the son of a powerful senator.

Royce had offered to help with my situation from the beginning, and I kept turning away his help. I thought I was being practical, that I didn’t want to burden

him with my problems when really I was too proud to accept his help. Too self-absorbed to accept his love, because love means letting other people love you too.

(De la Cruz, 2016, p. 325)

Jasmine's fear and shame with regard to her documentation status keep her from reaching out for help as her family faces deportation. It takes time for her to learn to trust.

Phoenix, the protagonist in *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), is amazed when two women, Amanda and Sally, reach out to him as he sits in jail after requesting asylum at the United States-Mexico border.

I had no clue who'd sent her to me, but somehow those eyes told me it was okay to do what I was about to do. So I did it. I cried like a goddamned baby. I cried and cried, and I told her our sad, sad story... Anyway, when the guard showed up to tell her to leave, Sally went straight out to hire a lawyer, just because she wanted to do me and Ari a favor. I mean, that stuff really happens. Who knew?

(Marquardt, 2017, p. 11)

Beyond lending a listening ear and finding a lawyer for Phoenix, Sally and Amanda invite him to live in the large basement in their home.

Phoenix is befriended by Gretchen, who becomes his girlfriend. In addition, he becomes friends with a tattoo artist, Bo, and his wife, Barbie, when Phoenix seeks out their help to remove a tattoo that had been placed on his chest by the gang in El Salvador. The gang had tried to recruit Phoenix several years before, and the tattoo marks him as a gang member, although he wants nothing to do with the gang. At the end of the story, Bo offers Phoenix a solution for the tattoo problem.

Phoenix—

That piece-of-shit tattoo is part of you, man, whether you like it or not. Don't go through the pain of getting it taken off. You don't need to do that.

Take this design to Danny and Ink Wizards in Fullerton. I made it special for you. He knows you're coming. He'll fix you up. It's gonna look kick-ass, and nobody will know what's under there.

I know what you're thinking, asshole. Don't worry about the stupid money. I got the bill covered. You earned it.

And one more thing. Barbie wants me to tell you that Gretchen's real good for you. She says don't let that one go.

—Bo. (Marquardt, 2017, p. 287)

When Gretchen shows Phoenix and his brother, Ari the design, she turns to Ari, "Do you know what it is?" Gretchen asks Ari. He shrugs. "A bird?" "It's a Phoenix, she says," "rising from the ashes" (Marquardt, 2017, pp. 287-288).

Phoenix is fortunate to have people in his life who care deeply about him and advocate for him. In *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), the Somali immigrants in Emmiston, Maine have a friend in Tom, the American protagonist of the story. Tom defends his Somali soccer teammates after his uncle speaks about them with contempt.

"Don't start running the Somalis down. It's bullshit, Uncle Paul"...

"I think, Tommy, that I know something about--"

I cut him off.

“You don’t know anything about Saeed,” I told him. “He’s not just a great player. He’s a team leader. And even though he’s had to deal with more shit in his short life than you, me, and Don combined, he still manages to be a good guy. And he happens to be my friend. So drop it, Uncle Paul.” (Padian, 2013, p. 314)

The friendships that Tom has developed with Saeed and the other Somalis on his high school soccer team teach him a lot about Somali culture and refugee life, and Tom develops a deep respect for his Somali teammates.

It is not only friends who reach out to welcome immigrants. In *Game seven* (Volponi, 2015a), Julio describes the moment when, after sailing from Cuba for days in a converted ’59 Buick, he finally reaches the Miami shore.

I was closer to the shore than that boat was to me. I was choking and gagging now. Someone grabbed me around the shoulders and started dragging me in...Before I knew it my chest was out of the water, and then my waist. I staggered onto the dry sand, falling to my knees...The applause and the motor were ringing in my ears. (Volponi, 2015a, p. 168)

The people on the beach cheer Julio on and come to his aid, offering water and other assistance. Even the officer who meets up with him on the beach says that he was not going to stop him from reaching the shore. Because he manages to make it to the shore, Julio can officially request asylum in the United States.

The topics of resentment/family conflict and being welcomed or befriended co-occur in eight books in the study. Although the characters have disagreements with their

families, they have strong friendships, and these friendships help to get them through the difficulties that they endure in their lives.

The topics of fear of deportation and being welcomed or befriended are found together in eight books in the study. The relationship between these two categories is usually seen after the undocumented protagonist reveals his or her legal status to a friend. Friends rally around the protagonist, doing whatever it takes to help solve the problem.

Similar to the way the protagonists' friends rally around them when the friends learn of their legal status dilemmas, they also rally around them when they see them being bullied or abused. Friends from the mainstream American culture frequently stand up to defend the protagonists and their families, or find ways to help them meet their needs. These two topics occur together in seven of the books read for this study.

The topics of strong emotions or mental health issues and being welcomed or befriended co-occur in 11 books in the study. This is an indicator of how other characters, sympathetic to the challenges that the protagonists face, step up to help meet their needs and offer them friendship. Related to these topics are being welcomed or befriended and concern or resentment about immigrant migration. When people in the community express displeasure about the large numbers of immigrants and refugees moving into their neighborhoods, friends of the immigrants stand up to defend them. These two topics co-occur five times in the study.

Many of the protagonists experience the kindness of Americans in many ways. While not all mainstream American characters in the books in this study are sympathetic toward immigrants, many of them show kindness in very tangible ways, meeting their

needs for friendship, advocacy, and the basic necessities of life. The theme of being welcomed or befriended also occurs in the following books: *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Angel de la Luna* (Galang, 2013), *The big fix* (Sacks, 2014), *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), *Either the beginning or the end of the world* (Farish, 2015a), *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014), *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Concern or resentment about immigration.*** Not all of the mainstream American characters in the stories are happy about the influx of immigrants into their neighborhoods. Some American characters show great ignorance about immigrants, drawing upon stereotypes to inform their views. In some of the books, mainstream Americans openly express their resentment.

In *The go-between* (Chambers, 2017), when Cammi, the daughter of a famous Mexican telenovela actress, enrolls in an exclusive private school, her classmates assume that she is a scholarship student and an undocumented immigrant.

“So,” Willow said. “Can I ask you a question? Do a lot of Mexican girls have blond hair?”

I shook my head. “Some do. But I’m a bottle blonde.”

Tiggy peered at me over her Chanel cat's-eye shades. "So what's up with that?

Are you running from the law? Witness protection?"

No, I told her.

"Did you ever work as a drug mule?"

No. (Chambers, 2017, pp. 90-91)

Cammi's classmates conclude that she is poor, undocumented, and involved in some kind of illegal activity, based on their stereotypes of Mexicans in the United States. The classmates are indiscreet enough to voice their stereotyped assumptions.

Leung, the protagonist in *The gamble* (Jones, 2014b), is a good boxer and knows that he can use his boxing skills to bring in money for his family. Mr. Mayflower, the man in charge of the Woodrat Club where Leung has agreed to fight refuses to give him equal pay with white boxers. His Uncle Nang, however, realizes this, and intervenes on Leung's behalf.

Nang faced Mayflower. "My brother says Leung gets paid as much as other fighter, and--"

"Out of the question," Mayflower said. "If people found out that I paid a Chinaman as much as a white man, they'd never come back to the Woodrat. I'll give him double what he got last time. And if he should win, I'll give triple—but only we know about it. Agreed?" (Jones, 2014b, p. 84)

Mayflower is interested in Leung's talents because they bring in money for the Woodrat Club. Although it was probably a common practice to pay non-White people less than White people for the same services back in the late 1800s, this story underscores the



discrepancy between pay for White and non-White employees, and the discrimination that brings it about.

In *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), the town of Enniston, Maine (based on Lewiston, Maine) is overwhelmed with Somali refugees. Service providers, including educators, are scrambling to figure out how to meet the needs of the refugees.

But not everyone was laughing. People are mad. Worried. Especially teachers. Who didn't know what to do with hundreds of kids who just showed up and didn't know English. Hell, a lot of them couldn't even read and write in their own language (Padian, 2013, p. 10).

The massive influx of Somali refugee students is a source of burnout for teachers in the fictional town of Enniston, Maine. Beyond the drain that the refugees put on services, some people in the town resent the drain on the city's budget. Tom, the American protagonist of the story has an uncle who resents having so many refugees move into his town.

"I mean, I'm just a taxpayer who works for a living, so what do I know?" he continued. "But it seems to me that the mayor is on to something. Like, why are we giving handouts to illegal aliens who would have been better off staying put in their own country and getting jobs?" (Padian, 2013, p. 143)

In the story, Tom's Uncle Paul is not the only mainstream American who is bitter about having so many refugees move into his town. Even the mayor wants to curb the flow of immigrants, and publishes a letter asking them to stop moving to Enniston (this is actually based on a real-life event in Lewiston, Maine, see: Raymond, L. T., 2002).

Carly, the protagonist in *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), is frustrated by the local sheriff's lack of humanity toward Mexican immigrants such as her parents. The situation is made even more complicated by the fact that Carly is dating the sheriff's son. He insults her Mexican heritage and makes racist comments when he realizes that Carly and his son have formed a friendship.

I think of Mama and Papi and the struggles they go through to put food on the table back in Mexico. They basically live in a shed—our trailer is luxurious compared to their little shack. We all work so hard for one another, to make something better for ourselves, for our family. We are people, and Sheriff Moss looks at us like we're rats. I saw his face. The disgust there when he looked at me. Like his son had just kissed roadkill. How can such a hateful man have persuaded so many people to give him this much power? (Banks, 2016, p. 167)

The sheriff is a powerful man in town, and threatens to have Carly's parents deported again if they make it across the border, because he does not want his son to date a Mexican girl.

The topics of emotions or mental health issues and concern or resentment about immigrant migration occur together in six books in the study. Some of the characters and their families move to parts of the United States where large numbers of immigrants from their countries are settling. The influx of immigrants in their town is not always appreciated by the local people. The immigrants feel this in the way that they are denied jobs and housing or in the way that they are watched or followed by worried government officials, and they experience stress as a result of the discrimination.

Home country traditions and concern or resentment about immigrant migration are two topics that are found together in four of the books. Usually in the stories, the home country traditions involve public displays of religious observances that may not be familiar to the mainstream American characters, and that the mainstream American characters find disturbing. These topics are found together in four of the stories.

The topic of concern or resentment about immigrant migration also occurs in *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), and *Watched* (Budhos, 2016).

***Looked down upon by relatives or fellow immigrants.*** While much of the discrimination that the young characters face comes from mainstream Americans, some of it actually comes from other immigrants, including relatives. In *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a), the young protagonist, José, feels that his own cousin looks down upon him and his parents. José's parents are undocumented, and his father is unable to work, due to a workplace accident several years earlier. Carlos's father married an American and obtained his immigration papers in that way. His family is well off financially.

"You still at Rondo?" Carlos asked. It seemed to José that when he said the word *still* there was an edge to it.

"Yes, but this time, I'm sticking with it." ...

"That's good," Carlos said. "The world doesn't need more uneducated and unemployed Latinos making all of us look bad."

*You're talking about my dad, José thought, and I know it.*

"You still working too?"

José nodded.

"That's hard, but I know all about that."

José looked at his cousin's hands. Not a scratch on them. He laughed to himself.

(Jones, 2014a, p. 44)

For José, his cousin's superior attitude is painful. As he looks at all of the comforts that Carlos enjoys in his home, he becomes restless and begins to wonder if it would be better for him to pick up an additional job right now, rather than finishing school and going to college to make a better life for himself and his family.

In *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), Hannah is looked down upon by her "employer," Lillian, and her employer's Russian friend, Rena. One day, she overhears them talking about her in less than favorable terms. Rena tries to convince Lillian that Hannah is shady and has poor judgment.

"I don't want to say it, but Maggie is a beautiful child. If the wrong man saw her, I don't know, maybe he could talk to the girl, become friends with her, you know. Then your Maggie, she would be in danger." ...

"Rena, the girl isn't all that bright, but she wouldn't sell a child" Lillian said, sort of defending her. (Purcell, 2013, p. 146)

Hannah has been brought to the United States to work as a housekeeper and nanny for Lillian's family. Lillian and Rena constantly insult Hannah, who is Moldovan, not Russian, calling her a "stupid village girl."

In some of the stories, the people who are the most hurtful to the young protagonists are, surprisingly, relatives or others who would be seen as having the responsibility to care for the young characters and help them adjust to life in the United States. The topic of being looked down upon also appears in the following books: *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *Out of the dragon's mouth* (Zeiss, 2015), and *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016).

***Inter-immigrant conflict.*** Not only do the immigrant groups in the stories insult each other, they sometimes engage in outright conflict. In *Out of nowhere* (Padian, 2013), the American protagonist, Tom, witnesses the physical and verbal fighting among different groups of refugees at his high school.

But a lot of what's going on is actually between the immigrant kids. Old fights they brought with them from Africa. Sudanese kids versus Somalis. Somali Bantus versus ethnic Somalis. I mean, they're all Somali, but some are, like, *Somali* Somali (ethnic) and came to Maine a while ago, while others, Somali Bantus? These are the dudes showing up more recently. In big numbers (Padian, 2013, p. 67).

While all of the groups that Tom describes share refugee status, this does not unify them. Instead, they carry with them the conflicts from their home countries. These inter-immigrant conflicts do not endear the refugees to the mainstream Americans in the town where they have settled.

In *The tyrant's daughter* (Carleson, 2014), a different kind of inter-immigrant conflict is at play. Laila, the protagonist, is the exiled daughter of the former dictator. During her time in her United States home, she gets to know some people from her

country who were oppressed by her father's regime, and who project their hatred for the dictator onto Laila and her mother. Laila's mother is a master manipulator, and introducing Laila to these people is part of her self-benefit plan.

Even so, she looks relieved to see me. "Laila, there you are. You're late. There's someone here I want you to meet" ... "Laila, this is Amir. He goes to your school" ...

Amir does not move from his chair. He just sits there. Still as a statue. Only his eyes give any hint that he has heard my mother's introduction.

His eyes are full of hate.

It's hard to describe what hate looks like, but so easy to spot it. To feel its heat.

His eyes are narrowed and licked onto my own—the trajectory of his hatred unmistakable. (Carleson, 2014, pp. 51-52)

Although her interactions with her countrymen are less than warm and friendly, she does come to learn a lot about why these people hold so much animosity toward her late father and his regime.

The topic of inter-immigrant conflict also appears in *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014).

***Abuse and bullying.*** A few of the young characters endure physical, emotional, and verbal abuse in their homes. In *The land of forgotten girls* (Kelly, 2016), Soledad, the protagonist, and her sister, Dominga, are treated badly by their stepmother after their father abandons the family and goes back to the Philippines without them. "The other day she poured cold water on me and pinched my nose so hard that I thought it would break.

Sometimes she spits in my hair” (Kelly, 2016, p. 100). The embittered stepmother, Veá, continues to find ways to vent her frustrations on defiant Sol.

In one swift, angry motion, she tipped the rice cooker forward and hurled the kernels in my face. They hit me like thousands of armored seeds. Let them prick my skin. I didn’t flinch.” (Kelly, 2016, p. 264)

Sol and Dominga endure verbal, emotional, and physical abuse from Veá. The cycle of abuse and defiance, fueled by abandonment, poor living conditions, and an inadequate income is a major theme in this book.

While some of the characters are being abused at home, others face bullying when they step outside. In *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013), Nina, who is newly arrived in New York from the Dominican Republic finds some of the Dominican girls in her neighborhood to be particularly unfriendly to her. Unfortunately for Nina, she must walk past them on occasion with her brother, Darrio, who has been in New York for several years, and who is oblivious to the way the bullies are treating his sister.

My stomach grumbled at the idea of the delicious stew, but my heart dropped at the idea of going to the Latin Star. Those girls were always hanging out front and the teased me relentlessly, calling me “*princesa*” and “little flower girl.” They made fun of my island clothes. I hated to walk past them, and now Darrio wanted to take me right into their little hornet’s nest.” (Joseph, 2013, p. 84)

It is interesting to note that Nina is bullied by people from her own country, while the mainstream Americans that she meets in school are kind to her and befriend her. The

bullies see themselves as established in the United States, while Nina is a newcomer. It is the differences between themselves and Nina that they make fun of.

In some of the stories, mainstream American characters who are concerned about the influx of immigrants into their neighborhoods bully or abuse the immigrants. These two topics are found together in four of the stories.

Emotions or mental health issues and abuse or bullying occur together in seven books. The bullying and abuse that the young characters endure is hurtful and leads to depression, loneliness, stress and regret about ever having come to the United States.

Closely tied to this are the themes of resentment or family conflict and abuse or bullying. These topics co-occurred four times. While not all of the abuse and bullying occurs in the home, when the characters' parents physically, verbally, or emotionally abuse them, the result is conflict and deep-seated resentment. Abuse within the family often occurred as a result of a parent's stress.

While abuse and bullying happen across all racial, social, and economic groups, some of the characters are abused or bullied *because* of their immigration status. Others are treated badly, especially at home, because of the many stresses inherent in the immigration experience. The topic of abuse and bullying is also found in *American street* (Zoboi, 2017), *A home in America* (Boeve, 2017), *Joyride* (Banks, 2016), *The secret side of empty* (Andreu, 2014), *Something in between* (De la Cruz, 2016), *Through my eyes* (Wilson, 2016), *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013),

***Slavery, prostitution, or child marriage.*** Modern-day slavery is a topic that occurs in two of the books in this study. In *Trafficked* (Purcell, 2013), Hannah is lured



into a human trafficking situation by the promise of a better life in the United States. However, the promises that her traffickers make to her are not realized, and at several points in the story, her traffickers, Paavo and his wife, Rena, try to get Lillian, her “employer” to sell her to them to turn her into a prostitute.

“She’s illegal and she’s gorgeous. Those eyes?” ...

“You don’t really think a girl like that is going to want to clean and watch children for very long, do you?” ...

“Maybe not,” Lillian agreed.

“Paavo would pay a lot of money for her,” Rena said. “And you know, it’s dangerous to have an illegal working for you right in your home. If the police come...”

Couldn’t Lillian see what she was doing? This horrible woman wanted Hannah to work for them so they could make money off of her. (Purcell, 2013, pp. 146-147) Hannah is in an extremely vulnerable position. She is verbally, emotionally, physically, and sexually abused, and has nowhere to turn for help. Her “employers” create in her a sense of fear that she would be arrested and sent to a horrible jail, and use that fear to keep her compliant and out of sight.

In *The radius of us* (Marquardt, 2017), Phoenix describes how he and his brother, Ari are conscripted into service by a gang as they travel through Mexico on their way to the United States border. His friends, Bo and Barbie ask him about the trip.

“How long did it take you, baby?”

“Too long—like a couple of months. We ran into some assholes that made us work for a while before we could keep going.”

I thought slavery was a thing of the past—until Mexico. A bunch of thugs gathered us up and made us work for nothing. Could’ve been worse, though. All they made us do was harvest their crops. Pretty little flowers. I don’t even wanna know what that stuff was. Probably to make heroin. They didn’t bother us, though. As long as we did our work. The girls—they had it bad. (Marquardt, 2017, p. 169)

Phoenix and Ari are able to escape from their captors and continue their journey to the United States. They endure incredible danger and distress as they flee from certain death in their home country, in hopes of finding a welcome in the United States.

***Question 4 summary.*** Our understanding of the immigration experiences of the characters is not complete without knowing how they are viewed and how they are treated by various groups in the United States. Mainstream Americans show a wide spectrum of responses to the immigrant characters. From befriending the characters and even falling in love with them to being suspicious of them, to wielding power to make immigrants’ lives miserable in an attempt to send them away, the Americans that the protagonists and their families interact with make them respond with caution to the people around them. Among immigrant groups, many of the characters in the stories bring attitudes and grudges with them from the home country to the United States, making it difficult for them to get along with each other, although they come in search of the same thing, to make a better life for themselves and their families.

## **Interpretation of Findings**

In the last section, I presented findings from the analysis of my research data. In this section, my goal is to provide explanations of what my data might mean with regard to my four research questions.

Qualitative research is, by its very nature, an interpretive inquiry process. Another researcher, doing the same study as I have done, could come up with different interpretations and conclusions, and both of us could still be “right.” The interpretations I present here are based on my perspective of what factors are important in understanding the immigrant experience. I now turn to a discussion of my four research questions, focusing on the data that I have analyzed, information about the authors who wrote the books that I examined, and findings from previous similar research studies, to uncover what my data means.

**Question 1: Who are the immigrant characters who come to the United States?** In my study, eight protagonists are from Asia (including the Philippines), six from North America (including Mexico), three from Africa, three from Europe, and two from South America. This is a fairly good reflection of recent immigration trends. Currently, most recent immigrants coming to the United States are from Mexico and Asian countries (Lopez & Bialik, 2017), with a growing number coming from African countries (Anderson, 2017) and South America (Zong & Batalova, 2016). Immigrants from Europe and Canada make up only a small portion of the immigrants. This is also consistent with the findings from previous research studies on immigrant characters in children’s and young adult literature. Lowery (2000) and Brown (2010) found that the

protagonists in books set between 1965 and the present (third immigration wave) came primarily from Asia, Central America and Latin America.

Mexican immigrants to the United States were well represented (three protagonists) in my study. Among Asian immigrants, those from the Philippines were well represented (three protagonists), while India, which sends more immigrants to the United States than Mexico (Lopez & Bialik, 2017), was not represented. Possible reasons for the absence of Indian voices in recent young adult immigrant literature include the possibilities that authors are not writing about Indian immigrants or those books were not on the Amazon.com bestseller for young adult books on immigration at the times that I selected books for my study (Amazon.com updates its bestseller lists hourly).

The relatively high number of protagonists from Europe can be easily explained by noting that two of the three novels were set in the late 1700s, when the largest numbers of immigrants to the United States were from Europe.

The absence of protagonists in my study who came from Australia (Oceania) is most likely explained by the fact that few people immigrate from Australia to the United States. In fact, it was difficult to find any statistics on immigration from Australia to the United States.

In my study, four of the protagonists are followers of Islam, two are Catholic, one is Protestant, two are followers of Buddhism (actually, the mother of one is the practitioner of Buddhism), and one practices Haitian Vodou.

Knowing about the authors of the novels in my study is a way to better understand whose stories are being told, by whom, and for what purposes. I include this section

because knowing about the authors, and how the characters they create are often a reflection of their own lives, helps to make the characters' experiences, emotions, and decisions more believable and understandable. Table 4.11 summarizes the biographical information of the authors of the books in this study, and their stated purposes for writing books about young immigrants.

Table 4.11

*Authors' Biographical Information*

Author	Book	Biographical information
Maria E. Andreu	<i>The secret side of empty</i>	Born in Spain, lived in Argentina for two years, and crossed the border from Mexico to the United States at the age of 8 as an undocumented immigrant. Story bears resemblance to author's own experiences.
Anna Banks	<i>Joyride</i>	Young adult book writer. Lives in Florida.
Leah Bassoff	<i>Lost girl found</i>	American writer, teacher, and former editor. Wrote to give voice to untold story of lost girls of Sudan.
Marina Budhos	<i>Watched</i>	American English professor and writer who is part of the Indo-Caribbean community. Grew up in Jackson Heights, Queens, New York. Lives in New Jersey. Researched NYPD's Muslim Surveillance Program.
Eunice Boeve	<i>A home in America</i>	Grew up in Montana. Lives in Kansas where many Volga Germans settled after leaving Russia. Story is based on oral and written accounts of those immigrants.
J. C. Carleson	<i>The Tyrant's Daughter</i>	American writer who worked as an undercover CIA officer. Takes inspiration from her experiences with espionage.
Veronica Chambers	<i>The go-between</i>	Born in Panama, raised in Brooklyn NY. Writes about her Afro-Latina heritage.
Melissa De La Cruz	<i>Something in between</i>	Immigrant to the United States from Philippines. Grew up in Manila and immigrated to the United States at age 13. Story reflects author's own experiences as immigrant from Philippines.
Laura DeLuca	<i>Lost girl found</i>	Anthropology professor. Teaches courses on Africa and refugees. Has done fieldwork in East Africa. Worked with Sudanese refugees. Wrote to give voice to untold story of lost girls of Sudan.
Terry Farish	<i>Either the Beginning or End of the World</i>	Worked for Red Cross in Vietnam during war. Father was a veteran. She writes about what she most seeks to understand.

M. Evelina Galang	<i>Angel de la Luna</i>	Filipina-American. Feminist writer who researched the comfort women of World War II. Wrote to give voice to the stories of silenced girls and women.
Patrick Jones	<i>Bridge; The gamble</i>	American writer. Former librarian for teens. Writes books for reluctant teen readers. Worked in juvenile detention and juvenile alternative settings.
Lynn Joseph	<i>Flowers in the sky</i>	Writer. Born in Trinidad, West Indies. Moved to Baltimore at age 10. Lives in New York and Bermuda.
Erin Entrada Kelly	<i>The land of forgotten girls</i>	Filipina-American. Born in the United States and grew up in Louisiana. Teaches children's writing.
Marie Marquardt	<i>The radius of us</i>	American writer. Stories come from experiences living in the United States South. Researcher, advocate, and service provider for immigrants from Latin America.
Maria Padian	<i>Out of nowhere</i>	Daughter of Spanish mother and Irish father. Grandparents immigrated to the United States. Grew up in New Jersey. Lives in Maine.
Kim Purcell	<i>Trafficked</i>	Writer, journalist, ESL teacher. Went to Moldova to research for this novel. Lives in New York. Inspired by immigrants' challenges to write novel.
Nathan Sacks	<i>The big fix</i>	American writing instructor and author of fiction and nonfiction.
Paul Volponi	<i>Game seven</i>	Italian American writer and teacher who grew up in New York City. Developed friendships with Cuban refugees. Played baseball as a child.
Tammy Wilson	<i>Through my eyes</i>	Elementary school principal in school with high Somali population. Wrote book to represent Somali children in literature.
Joyce Burns Zeiss	<i>Out of the Dragon's Mouth</i>	American retired junior high school teacher, interested in plight of refugees. Based novel on experience of fellow teacher. Donates all royalties to refugee relief.
Ibi Zobio	<i>American street</i>	Born in Haiti, immigrated at the age of 4 years. Lives in New York.

Several authors, Andreu, De la Cruz, Zobo, and Zeiss, wrote from their own childhood experiences, or the experiences (Andreu, 2018; De la Cruz, 2018; Kreyolicious, n.d.a) of someone they know (Zeiss, n.d.). Other authors, Bassoff & DeLuca, Carleson, Chambers, Farish, Galang, Jones, Marquardt, Purcell, Volponi, and Wilson, did extensive research on their topics or worked with immigrants and refugees (Carleson, n.d.; Chambers, n.d.; Farish, 2015b; Galang, 2017; Groundwood Books, 2014; Jones, 2018; Marquardt, 2018; Purcell, 2017; Volponi, 2015b; and Wilson, 2016. Their characters are composites of people whose stories they heard through their work or

research. A few authors, Banks, Boeve, Budhos, and Padian, based their stories on immigration-related historical occurrences in the places where they live (Banks, 2018; Downing, 2012; Budhos, 2018; Padian, 2015).

Some authors, Bassoff and DeLuca, Chambers, Galang, Jones, Marquardt, and Zoboi, wrote their stories to humanize and give voice to disenfranchised groups of people or to break down stereotypes (Bassoff, 2018; Galang, 2017; Kreyolicious, n.d.b; MacGregor, 2015; Marquardt, 2018; Quiñónez, 2017). Other authors, Andreu, De la Cruz, Purcell, and Zoboi, wrote to raise awareness or advocate for specific groups of immigrants: (Cary, 2017; Mason, 2016; Molinas, 2013; Savage, 2014). A few authors, such as Jones, Joseph, Kelly, and Sacks, wrote because they saw a shortage of books representing immigrants from their home countries, to advocate for authors writing across races and cultures as long as they do their research, to cross racial, cultural, and language barriers with heart and truth or to write books for reluctant readers (Grabarek, 2016; Jones, 2018; Joseph, 2014; Sacks, n.d.).

The authors, for example, Kelly, Farish, Carleson, and Chambers, used their characters to convey messages that they considered important, such as showing “the power of hope in the darkest of circumstances” (Grabarek, 2016), demonstrating that immigrants can survive war and build a life after it (Farish, 2015b), illustrating that behind every newspaper headline about war there are people with stories to be told (Book Nook Reviews, 2014), and understanding that true wealth comes from heritage and culture, not from money (Quiñónez, 2017).

The information found in my data, the research literature, and author information offers us a rich and in-depth answer to the question, who are the immigrant characters who come to the United States. They are Asians, mostly from the Philippines, but also from West, Southeast, East, and South Asian countries. They are North Americans, from Mexico and the Caribbean. They are Africans, Europeans, and South Americans. The protagonists are people of faith: Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Vodou. They are reflections of the lives of their authors or composites of groups that their authors have researched extensively. They are voices of the voiceless, humanization of mere statistics, advocates for the disenfranchised, representatives of the underrepresented, protectors of cultural identity, and message bearers of hope.

**Question 2: Why do they come?** The reasons that the young protagonists and their families immigrate to the United States are many but fall into four general categories: To escape war, violence or oppression, to escape poverty, to seek opportunities or jobs, or to find wealth or adventure.

The stories in my study reflect the real-life flight of people from countries that are plagued by political oppression (Chuang & Gielen, 2009), or violence, war, or other social strife in the home country (Abrego, 2014; Chuang & Gielen, 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

In earlier studies on immigrants in children's and young adult books, running away from violence or oppression was a major factor in immigration to the United States (Levy, 2000; Lowery, 2000). The protagonists in my study leave their homes primarily to escape civil war, oppressive regimes, or gang violence. Books in earlier studies



sometimes portrayed immigrants leaving their homelands to escape anti-Semitism and other forms of religious oppression (Bousalis, 2016; Parsons, 2016). In the novels in my study, although religion plays a major role in the lives of the immigrants, the protagonists are rarely portrayed as fleeing religious oppression. They are actually more likely to find negative attitudes toward their religious beliefs and practices once they arrive in the United States. One reason that the current young adult books with immigration themes in my study only rarely discuss religious discrimination as a factor in immigration could be that anti-Semitism or anti-Catholicism are more likely to be addressed in historical novels rather than in books that reflect the personal experiences or research of current authors.

Escaping poverty is an important reason why immigrant characters in the stories I analyzed come to the United States. In the books in my study, the loss of a parent, especially through death, is the factor that plunges the family into poverty. It is this poverty that, in turn, motivates the family to immigrate to the United States. This is consistent with findings from earlier studies about children's or young adult books with immigration themes (Brown, 2010; Levy, 2000). In real life as well, escaping poverty in the home country is a major reason why people immigrate to the United States (Abrego, 2014; Chuang & Gielen, 2009).

Another reason that the protagonists and their families come to the United States is to seek jobs and opportunities for education, and so on. Immigrant protagonists in earlier novels also came in search of opportunities (Bousalis, 2016). Real-life immigrants sometimes come to the United States to build a better future for themselves and their

families (Abrego, 2014; Chuang & Gielen, 2009; Solo Huerta & Perez, 2015, Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Finally, a few of the protagonists come to the United States in search of wealth or adventure. In earlier studies of immigrants in young adult novels, wealthy immigrants came in search of new business opportunities (Bousalis, 2016). In real life, some immigrants come to the United States to satisfy their wanderlust (Solo Huerta & Perez, 2015).

Of these four reasons, the one most frequently found in the books that I analyzed was escape from war, violence, or oppression. This differs somewhat from the finding in earlier studies on immigrant characters. In those studies, the most common reason that characters in children's and young adult books came to the United States was to escape poverty (Brown, 2010). There are several possible reasons for this difference. It could be a reflection of a real-life change in reasons for immigration, that perhaps the world is becoming more violent and oppressive and more people are seeking refuge. It could be that the flight from dangerous and oppressive parts of the world has gained more media attention in the past few years than it had in the past. Alternately, it is possible that the authors who have been researching the stories of those who flee from violence and oppression in their home countries are just recently completing and publishing their novels.

It is interesting to note that seeking opportunities, jobs, or education is never a stand-alone category in the books that were analyzed for this study. In other words, if a character immigrates to the United States to seek opportunities, that reason is always

accompanied by another reason, occasionally to find wealth or adventure, but much more frequently to escape from severe conditions such as poverty, oppression, war, or violence in the home country. These conditions, which take many forms, often prevent the protagonists and their families from accessing education, jobs, and other opportunities. Young immigrants are not always happy about the decision to leave their homelands, leaving everything and everyone that is familiar to them. Research shows that in real life, many immigrants wish that they could stay in their homelands, but see immigration as the only way out of dire situations (Abrego, 2014).

In summary, the reasons that the young characters and their families immigrate to the United States are that: they are afraid for their lives because of violence in their home countries, they seek relief from oppressive regimes, they do not want spend the rest of their lives in poverty, and occasionally, they are looking for a good adventure in the United States. It is the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that bring the characters in the novels to the United States, just as these ideals have attracted immigrants from the time of this country's founding.

**Question 3: How do they experience immigration?** Earlier research studies on immigration-themed novels for young adults tell relatively little about the lives of the characters before immigration. By looking at the reasons that they came to the United States, one can reasonably conclude that they experienced poverty, violence, and lack of opportunities. In real life, some people reach high levels of education and enjoy professional careers before coming to the United States while others receive very little formal schooling in their home countries (Suárez-Orozco, 2013).

The books in my study paint a slightly more detailed picture of the pre-immigration lives of the young characters. Some protagonists enjoyed happy and carefree childhoods in comfortable homes with loving families and abundant financial resources. Often, this all changed when violence or oppression found their way into the lives of these protagonists. Others, while benefitting from strong family, community, and religious supports, struggle with poverty. As mentioned earlier, poverty often befalls the characters' families as a result of the death of a parent or the emigration of a parent from the home country ahead of the young protagonist.

Immigration stories analyzed in earlier studies often portray characters coming to the United States from Europe on ships. These stories illustrate the horrific conditions for steerage passengers aboard the ships (Bousalis, 2016; Brown, 2010). In the stories analyzed for this study, only two protagonists and families come from Europe on boat. These are both historical fiction novels. However, my study includes a story of an immigrant character making part of the immigration journey (an escape from Vietnam) on a boat. The conditions aboard this vessel are at least as bad, if not worse than what the European immigrant characters endured.

Aside from those characters who arrive in the United States by airplane, travel is treacherous for the young protagonists. My findings mirror those of earlier research studies (Boatright, 2010; Brown, 2010; Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011) with regard to the perils of travel. Similarities include sneaking out of the home country or being smuggled into the United States (Lowery, 2000), facing deportation (Cummins, 2013), and dealing with anxiety about crossing borders without proper documentation (Clifford &

Kalyanpur, 2011). In reality, however, more immigrants are likely to come to the United States through legal channels and overstay their visas, rather than attempting to cross the border illegally (National Research Council, 2013). My study includes several examples of immigrant families arriving legally in the United States but later losing their legal status.

One topic that is featured rather prominently in the novels in my study, yet seemed to be absent in earlier research studies is that of refugee camps. The stories I read describe in gory detail the horrors of travel for weeks on end by foot across burning desert sand to arrive at refugee camps where food is scarce and disease is abundant. There are several possible reasons for the absence of refugee camp stories in the earlier studies. One possibility is that in recent years, refugees have received more attention than ever before in the United States media and government policy. Another reason might simply be that the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide is skyrocketing (UNHCR, 2018), and people who work with refugees are beginning to tell their stories.

The authors of books in my study did not shy away from addressing difficult topics, such as acculturation shock, language issues, underemployment, lack of documentation, or mental health issues. Similarly, young adult books in earlier studies have tackled the struggles that young immigrants face in the United States (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). Acculturation shock is very real, and can lead to other difficulties, such as mental health issues (Berry et al., 2002).

According to Hos (2016), acculturation shock is especially hard on refugees. Previous research studies on the portrayals of immigrant characters are consistent with

this finding (Levy, 2000). While this makes sense, because refugees often witness unimaginable horrors, this was not apparent in the novels in my study. Mental health issues in the novels I read are more prominent in immigrant characters who are undocumented and fearful of getting caught and deported than in refugee characters. In addition to the fear of deportation, the undocumented characters live with the frustration of not having the opportunity to secure good jobs or pursue a college education. This was also found to be the case with characters in earlier novels (Bousalis, 2016). Perhaps this mirrors real life (Cummins, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008) in that more services and opportunities are available to refugees than to undocumented immigrants, or that undocumented immigrants, because of their status, fail to reach out for services and opportunities that are available.

According to (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), young immigrants are more likely to adopt the lifestyle and values of American youth rather than holding on to the culture of their homeland. This trend was reflected in novels in previous studies (Brown, 2010). In the books I researched, this is true, but only for the immigrant characters who came to the United States as babies or young children. For more recent immigrants, holding onto their cultural identity is either a personal choice or an expectation of their immigrant community. Cultural identity is expressed in activities such as participation in religious observances, the eating of traditional foods, and the wearing of traditional clothing. Eating traditional foods was a means of maintaining ties with the home country in novels from previous studies as well (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2015). These activities

often provide a sense of security for the young immigrants, bringing comfort in the face of overwhelming acculturation stress.

My third research question asks, how do the immigrant characters in the novels experience immigration. For the majority of the young protagonists, life is at least happy, if not financially comfortable, before a crisis occurs in the home country. This crisis often takes the form of a death or other loss of a parent, or the initiation of violence or oppression in the young character's home country. The crisis leads to the decision to leave the homeland and head for the United States. Unless the immigrant travels by airplane, the journey can be quite treacherous. Those who must flee their home countries may spend considerable time in refugee camps. Virtually all of the immigrant characters, except for the ones who come to the United States as very young children, experience some degree of culture shock. For those without proper immigration documents, fear, anxiety, and frustration over lack of good jobs or educational opportunities can lead to serious mental health issues. Newer immigrants turn to their home culture, such as religious observances and traditional food and clothing to maintain their identity in the face of acculturation stress. Without exception, immigration is a long and difficult transition for the young protagonists, one that merits the empathy of their readers.

**Question 4: How are they perceived or treated by others?** My final research question addresses the attitudes and behaviors of other characters, both mainstream Americans and other immigrants, toward the young protagonists, their families, and their communities. Immigration research shows that there is a wide spectrum of attitudes and behaviors toward immigrants in the United States. Asian and European immigrants are

generally well thought of by mainstream Americans, while attitudes toward African immigrants tend to be neutral and attitudes toward immigrants from Latin America and the Middle East are often negative (Pew Research Center, 2015). In my study, individual immigrant characters have strong and loyal friendships. Many characters in the stories reach out to help the immigrant protagonists, their families, and their communities. Racist attitudes are often prevalent in places where large groups of immigrant characters settle, but are seldom discussed where immigrants settle separately from others in their cultural groups. However, many immigrants in real life face discrimination (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

In my study two groups of characters are more likely than any others to experience racism. Muslims characters, especially those who settle together in large numbers raise the concern of the mainstream American population. This appears to reflect a growing uneasiness in the United States toward people of diverse faiths, especially Islam, paralleling the rising numbers of Muslims coming to the United States. The other group of characters who are most likely to experience racism are the Mexicans and other Latin Americans. Whether they are in the United States legally, come as asylum seekers, or are in the United States without documentation, these immigrants are likely to be seen in a negative light by the mainstream American characters.

One very serious concern with earlier children's and young adult stories with immigration themes has been the problem of stereotyping. This can easily occur when stories are written by people unfamiliar with a culture and who only superficially know the values, traditions, and behaviors of a group of immigrants. In my study, the people



who authored the books had extensive experience living in the target country, or researching and getting to know the people. Many interviews were conducted in the formation of these novels. The result is stories with depth and complexity that reflect the lives and experiences of real people. Perhaps what I found in the books that I read reflects a growing, positive trend toward more authentic representations of immigrants in young adult literature.

My fourth research question asks how immigrant characters are perceived or treated by others. The individual characters in the stories I read are well liked, and even loved, by some mainstream American characters. They have loyal friends who stay by their side through the toughest difficulties. There are also people in their communities who reach out to the immigrant characters. On the other side of the coin, racist attitudes are very strong among some mainstream American characters, especially in locations where large groups of immigrants have settled.

Taking a step back from the ways that the characters are perceived by other characters, there appears to be a growing trend for authors to create more accurate and complex portrayals of immigrant characters in recent young adult novels, as compared with the more stereotyped portrayals of immigrants in earlier children's and young adult literature.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Qualitative content analysis is, by nature, an interpretive approach to literary research. In this study, my choices of dimensions and subcategories are subjective, based

on my own perceptions of what topics were important in the books that I analyzed. In addition, my decisions concerning how I chose my text segments, where each one starts and ends, and how much information is contained in each one, and whether or not overlapping topics are included in each text segment, are subjective. I am certain that I did not select every single text segment in each book that related to a category in my study. This inadvertent omission of text segments as potential units of coding is a limitation of the study. Finally, my own biases based on my personal experiences with immigration, the ways that I personally view immigrants and immigration, add an element of subjectivity to this research study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

Young adult students who have immigrated to the United States from other countries comprise an increasingly large percentage of the middle and high school population in United States schools (Sadowski, 2013). When these students can have access to books that reflect the complexities of their cultures and immigration experiences in an authentic manner and that present positive views of people like themselves, they are more likely to read and be successful in school and beyond (Bishop, 1990, Lamme et al., 2004). However, there is a shortage in young adult literature of books that portray characters from diverse backgrounds. Even when these books can be found, they do not always represent immigrant characters in an authentic manner. The purpose of this study is to learn how immigrants to the United States are represented in recent (published between 2013 and 2017) young adult novels. Specifically, the goal is to find out the answers to four research questions:

1. Who are the immigrant characters who come to the United States?
2. Why do they come?
3. How do they experience immigration?
4. How are they perceived or treated by other characters?

Using a qualitative content analysis methodology, I looked for commonalities and patterns across the books in the study. In the following sections, I discuss what my findings mean and their implications for educators.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

In the previous chapter, I presented the data from my analysis of 22 young adult novels. The cultures and experiences of these characters are very diverse, yet there are many commonalities. My results reveal that immigrant characters from all continents except for Australia (Oceania) and Antarctica are represented. They and their families come to the United States primarily to escape violence or oppression in their homelands, or to escape from poverty. Rarely do they come purely to take advantage of opportunities or to seek wealth or adventure.

Many immigrant characters have comfortable and happy home lives and families who love them before immigration, that is, before the situation in their home countries makes it dangerous for them to stay. Others live in relative poverty before making the journey to the United States. Unless they enter the United States by flying, the travel experiences of these young immigrant characters are often distressing, disease-ridden, and dangerous. The young characters endure harsh conditions, such as being crowded for days in hot, crowded, smelly trains or boats. Some have extended stays in refugee camps. Others are abused along the way. The dangers are extreme to the point that some of the characters who seek a better life in the United States die along the way.

Once the characters arrive in the United States, they must learn to balance being both part of American culture and members of their home cultures. Often, they find that life in the United States is harder than they had expected, especially if they do not have immigration documents. While there are many opportunities for the characters in the United States, they must, especially if they are undocumented, keep a low profile to keep

from drawing uninvited attention to themselves. They learn that their immigration journey is not over when they arrive in the United States. It is just beginning.

Some of the young immigrants are resentful toward their families about having been brought to the United States without having a voice in the decision. They are unhappy because they have left loved ones behind, they may be living in sub-par housing, or they feel abandoned by their parents. Many of the young protagonists or members of their families become overwhelmed by life in the United States, and several develop serious mental health issues such as stress, depression, or suicidal thoughts as a result. Mental health issues among the characters in these stories are related to life circumstances, such as undocumented status, abuse or bullying, lack of adequate living conditions, or the inability to get a job that pays enough to support a family. For many of the young immigrant characters, holding onto traditions, such as practicing religious observances and eating traditional foods help them to hold onto their home cultures. However, a number of the young protagonists are willing to try out American clothing and hair styles as a way of fitting in with their American peers.

Finally, mainstream American characters and other immigrants show a wide spectrum of responses to the immigrant characters. Some mainstream Americans dislike, or even hate the immigrants. The immigrant characters experience bullying, verbal, emotional, physical abuse, both from mainstream Americans and other immigrants. But the young protagonists usually manage to find friends who are fiercely loyal to them and who help them deal with the many issues that are part of immigrant life. Often the young immigrant characters or their parents have unrealistic ideas about what life will be like in

the United States. Yet, to find safety, freedom, or economic stability, these families are willing to leave everything behind and begin a new life in a new land.

### **Situated in the Larger Context**

Authors who have in-depth knowledge of the cultures that they write about are well represented by the books in this study. In many ways, the characters appear to be reflections of the authors' own experiences or the experiences of people that they have come to know well. By growing up in the target culture, working or studying in the target country, or working with immigrants from the culture that they wrote about, the authors of these books were, for the most part, able to create believable characters in realistic situations with real and complex problems and strong emotions. Books that are born out of authors' personal experiences or careful research, are the kinds of books in which young immigrant students will find mirrors that reflect their own lives and help them to make sense of their immigrant experience. Books that have a high level of authenticity can also help young non-immigrants to better understand and empathize with their immigrant and refugee peers.

The authors of the stories in my study used their books to send their audiences important messages. Immigration is hard, very hard! Young immigrants will experience strong and confusing emotions. Family ties may be stressed. The opportunities they had hoped to find may be harder than expected to achieve.

But there is hope!

Immigrants who have given so much to find their way to the shores of the United States are a resilient group, and should view themselves as such. For those who have

survived war, violence, and oppression, the books convey a message that there is a life to be built and appreciated. For those who have suffered poverty in their home countries, the books send the message that there is great wealth in their family and community ties and in the cultures and traditions that they bring with them to the United States. For those who are not immigrants, especially those who have never gotten to know an immigrant, the books send the message that immigrants are more than statistics or news stories. They are individuals with names, families, hopes, dreams, and struggles. Non-immigrant students will enrich their own lives as a result of stepping through the sliding glass doors and walking virtually in the footsteps of immigrant characters.

The novels that I analyzed in this study are not biographies, they are fiction. It is part of the writer's craft to create characters that evoke the emotions of the reader and create empathy with the protagonist. Yet, the stories have a basis in reality. Authors included details from their research or their own experiences with immigration as they crafted their stories. Every good novel contains a problem that needs to be resolved, and perhaps it is for this very reason that immigration stories lend themselves so well to the YA novel. Although the end product of the authors' work is fiction, one must remember that these stories are often written at the expense of someone's pain.

### **Implications**

In 1990, Rudine Sims Bishop wrote an essay describing children's and young adult literature as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. As mirrors, the stories that students read reflect their own lives back to them. As windows, they offer students a way to witness the life experiences of people who are different from themselves. As sliding

glass doors, the stories that students read beckon them to enter into the world of the “other,” to see, hear, and feel what it is like to experience life from another person’s perspective.

The books that students read convey messages about the “other.” They help to form people’s attitudes toward others in our increasingly diverse world. This is why it is so important that diverse characters be portrayed authentically, with the depth and complexity of real-life people from diverse backgrounds.

When immigrant authors use their own experiences as a basis for their stories, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors can be conveyed with a great deal of authenticity. While these stories are set in the background of a specific culture, they tell of unique individuals within that culture. Readers can then virtually walk beside the character through both triumphs and challenges.

Similarly, when authors of books with immigration themes base their novels on in-depth research of people from specific countries or people with specific experiences, such as asylum seekers from El Salvador or victims of human trafficking from Moldova, they can develop characters that genuinely portray what the immigration experience is like for those groups of people. Generally, these authors interview many people and may even spend time living in the target culture while doing their research.

Teachers who desire to give their students novels that portray the immigration experience authentically can take several steps to make wise book decisions. First, teachers can ask good questions about the books they are considering for their classroom libraries. Do the books portray immigrants authentically, or are they stereotyped?



(Lamme et al., 2004). Are the books written from the perspective of the immigrant, or from the dominant society? Are the portrayals sympathetic toward immigrants or are they critical of them? (Mullen, 2004). Do the books convey the importance of diverse home cultures, or do they only celebrate immigrants' assimilation into the dominant American culture? (Clifford & Kalyanpur, 2011). These questions can help teachers screen books and select those that merit inclusion in their libraries.

Another step in selecting excellent books about immigrants and immigration is by learning about the authors' backgrounds and their reasons for writing the stories. Many young adult book authors have websites, and literacy interest groups and media outlets post transcripts of interviews with authors of recently released novels. Information about most authors is readily available online, and is very helpful to teachers who want to build excellent classroom libraries.

Diversity in books for young people is becoming more widespread. This is a positive trend. Authors from diverse cultures are writing about those cultures. Authors from many parts of our society are carefully researching cultures other than their own to achieve realistic pictures of people from those cultures, and are then writing to portray those people's lives. The resulting books give diverse students access to more mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990).

There is still a great need for more books with immigration themes for children and young adults. Noticeably absent on my inclusion list were books written about immigrants from India, books about present-day immigrants from China, and books about immigrants from Canada, three of the four top countries that the United States

currently receives immigrants from (López & Bialik, 2017). Immigrants from these and other countries should be encouraged to write about their experiences, and people who work with disenfranchised immigrants and refugees should be encouraged to give them a voice by telling their stories.

My research revealed four reasons why immigrant characters in recent young adult novels seek entrance into the United States. One of the top reasons in the books that I read, was to escape from war, violence, or oppression. Several of the young characters and their families had to flee their homelands to simply survive, to have life. They believed that the United States would be a safer place for themselves and their families. Other characters came so they could get out from under the oppression of governments that wanted to restrict their movements and even their thoughts, control the information that they had access to, or conscript them into military service to fight for causes that they did not believe in. Freedom, these immigrant characters believed, could be found in the United States. The other two reasons that the immigrant characters came to the United States were to seek jobs, education, or other opportunities, or, occasionally, to find wealth or adventure. These immigrants, or the families who sent them, wanted the young immigrants to have a better life than they would have had in the home country, and they believed that they could find it in the United States.

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America refers to these same reasons why people would choose to make a break with their homelands or home governments. In the Declaration of Independence, these reasons are referred to as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the same ideals that our founding fathers sought to

enjoy when they were yet subjects of an oppressive government. One must ask, are these ideals exclusively the birthright of those who are fortunate enough to have been born within the borders of the United States? Or, as the Declaration of Independence refers to them, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness “unalienable rights” that are endowed to *all* men by their Creator. To call ourselves Americans, should we not at least embrace the ideals of our founding fathers? If indeed, we are willing to agree with our founding fathers that all men are created equal, and that all are endowed with these rights, and that these rights are given, not a mere government, but by some Higher Power, then what should be the response of American people to those who come to our shores in the hope of enjoying a life, a better life than could be found in the countries of their birth? Will we as Americans turn away the ones who need help the most, without regard to the hardships that they endure in their home countries or on the journey to our shores? Or, will we open our doors and our arms to welcome them, so that they too can experience life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Will we, as American educators, allow ourselves to perpetuate negative stereotypes about immigrant students, making it even more difficult for them to attain the better life that they hope to find in this country, or will we seek to foster empathy between immigrant and non-immigrant students by providing *all* of our students with authentic representations of people who are different from themselves, representations that illustrate the depth and complexity of the lives of other people?

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness— (US, 1776).

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## Appendix A

### Preliminary Coding Frame Example

Table A1 is an example of a preliminary coding frame. In the preliminary coding frame, relevant text segments are identified, divided into units of coding, and labeled. This example is taken from the book, *Bridge* (Jones, 2014a).

Table A1

#### *Preliminary Coding Frame Example*

BRIDGE
PJ7Jose turned the key.
PJ7working second shift...at Rainbow Foods
PJ7-8bridgeand handling whatever...up at home.
PJ8He thought about...for a ride,
PJ8bridge He was jammed...was always something.
PJ8bridge Except my life...years, Jose thought.
PJ8bridge As he scraped...parents had left
PJ8bridge the warmth of...to this icebox?
PJ9-10bridge Jose picked up...for his family.
PJ10bridge As he thought...under the pressure.
PJ11bridge Do we understand...your last chance.
PJ12bridgeTwice he'd dropped...job at Rainbow.
PJ12bridgeHe'd grown stronger...go to college.
PJ12bridge I know you're...was in English.
PJ12bridge Besides, "contract" sounded...to do with.
PJ14bridgeHe felt he...people at home.
PJ14bridgeAnother silence. Then...of to say.
PJ15bridge With the Dream...many years ago.
PJ15bridge Going to college...into college somewhere.
PJ15bridge Jose would be...a better life.
PJ16Hey cuz, Tony...his extended family.
PJ18bridgeJose struggled to...the first day.
PJ18bridge In his bag...be different now.
PJ19bridgeAfter the teacher...for ten years.
PJ20bridgeHis last fight...insulted his heritage.
PJ21to Dad's worksite...the roofing company,

## Appendix B

### Coding Frame Subcategory Names, Descriptions, Decision Rules

Table B1 includes, the name and description for each subcategory in the coding frame, as well as decision rules where needed.

Table B1

#### *Coding Frame Subcategory Names, Descriptions, Decision Rules*

Subcategory name	Subcategory description and decision rules
Immigrant character	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the story indicates the immigrant character's name.
Age	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the story indicates the immigrant character's age.
Country of origin	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the story indicates the immigrant's country of origin.
Destination	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the story indicates the immigrant's destination in the United States.
To find wealth or adventure	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant or a member of his or her family moved to the United States to seek adventure or wealth, or to strike it rich.
To escape poverty	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character and his or her family experienced poverty before immigration to the United States, or if poverty in the home country was a reason for immigration to the United States.
To find jobs or opportunities	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant or a member of his or her family expressed aspirations of pursuing education or a particular career, or had a job offer, or was simply hoping for better opportunities than in the home country.
To escape oppression, war, or violence	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his or her family moved to the United States to escape persecution, oppression, or violence, or if persecution, oppression, or violence was the reason that the immigrant left his or her home country, or if the story indicates that there was oppression in the country.

Home life before immigration	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character and his or her family enjoyed economic or social status in the community before immigrating to the United States.
Skilled labor before immigration	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his or her family held a skilled (needing some formal training or higher education for this position) labor position before immigrating to the United States.
Unskilled labor before immigration	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his or her family held an unskilled labor position before immigrating to the United States.
Loss of a parent before immigration	A unit of coding belongs in this category if, before moving to the United States, the immigrant character experienced the loss by death or abandonment (including perceived abandonment) of a parent or other relative. Include emotional abandonment and purposeful leaving.
Immigration decision made by self	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the young immigrant independently made the decision to immigrate to the United States. Include even if the idea came from someone else.
Immigration decision made by parents/relatives	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the story indicates that the parents or relatives of the young immigrant made the decision to immigrate to the United States. Include even if the idea was the young immigrant's.
Leaving loved ones behind	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character had to leave significant family members or friends in the home country, or if members of the immigrant character's family immigrated at different times. Use this category for saying good-bye.
Traveled by airplane	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character traveled to the United States by airplane.
Traveled by ship or boat	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character traveled by ship or in a smaller water vessel, at least for part of the journey to get to the United States.
Traveled by car, train, bus, or on foot	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character traveled by car, train, bus, on foot, or by other means, at least for part of the journey, to get to the United States.

Disagreeable/distressing/dangerous traveling conditions	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character experienced disagreeable or distressing conditions during travel, such as being cramped aboard a vessel, lack of access to food, water, sanitary facilities, and so on, or if the immigrant character experienced or feared that he or she would experience physical danger from the elements, from means of transportation, from other people, and so on, during the immigration journey. Include experiences in refugee camps.
Escaping dangerous or distressing conditions	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character and his or her traveling group had to sneak out of their home country or if the immigrant character and his or her traveling group had to run away from their home country to immigrate.
Death of parent or relative during immigration journey	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the young immigrant character lost a parent or other relative during the immigration journey. End point is touching American soil.
Documentation issues	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or members of his or her family or traveling group arrived in the United States without documents, or with false documents.
Lived in refugee camp	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrating character or members of his or her family spent time in a refugee camp before coming to the United States.
Death after the immigration journey	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the young immigrant character living in the United States experienced the loss by death of a parent or relative who also immigrated, or if the young immigrant character living in the United States learns of the death of a significant relative or friend who was left behind in the home country.
Happiness about immigration	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the young immigrant character or his or her family members experience feelings of happiness or freedom as a result of immigration to the United States.
Reunification with family members	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character was reunited with extended family members or friends who were like family after immigration to the United States.
Skilled labor after immigration	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his/her family held

	a skilled (needs special training or higher education) labor position while living in the United States.
Unskilled labor after immigration	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his/her family held an unskilled labor job while living in the United States, or if the immigrant character or a member of his/her family was unemployed after seeking employment or after becoming disabled and unable to work while living in the United States.
Inadequate living conditions	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant/family did not have sufficient funds to pay for basic necessities, such as food, clothing, or medical care, or if the immigrant character's living quarters in the United States were inadequate, or if the character was living in a home with extended family for financial reasons.
Language struggles	A unit of coding belongs in this category if an immigrant character struggled to communicate in English or chose not to learn English.
Fluent English	A unit of coding belongs in this category if a young immigrant character spoke English fluently, or if the young immigrant handled adult family or community responsibilities because adults in the family or community did not speak English well enough to do so. Include if the young immigrant had enough English to handle most adult communication situations.
Education valued	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character was pursuing or wished to pursue education as a means to social or economic advancement, or if the immigrant character or a member of his/her family valued learning English or wanted to learn English to increase opportunities and have a better life. Include if the immigrant cared about education.
School struggles	A unit of coding belongs in this category if a young immigrant character had difficulty adjusting to the United States school environment or struggled academically, socially, or emotionally at school. Include also second and third generation.
Adjustment to climate	A unit of coding belongs in this category if an immigrant character had to adjust to weather conditions that were significantly different from those in the home country.



Fear of deportation	A unit of coding belongs in this category if an immigrant character or members of his or her immigrant community feared interaction with U.S authorities, such as police, social workers, or doctors, or if the immigrant character or his or her family members experienced fear of deportation as a result of their undocumented, illegal, or other status, or that another character caused the immigrant character to be afraid because of undocumented status.
Resentment toward parents or other family members	A unit of coding belongs in this category if a young immigrant felt resentment toward or engaged in conflict with a parent, stepparent, or other family member while living in the United States, or if a young immigrant character felt abandoned by a parent who also immigrated, or when a young character and a parent, stepparent or other family member resolved conflict while living in the United States.
Strong emotions and mental health issues	A unit of coding belongs in this category if an immigrant character is homesick or grieves the loss of the home country or family members who were left behind, experiences depression or other mental health issues after moving to the United States, feels lonely or has difficulty making friends, regrets moving to the United States, finds that the American Dream is not all that he or she had expected or hoped for, experiences stress, anxiety, shame, or guilt about issues such as being able to meet the needs of family members, feels pressure to succeed, or experiences other negative emotions. Include experiences of second and third generation people as well.
Home country traditions	A unit of coding belongs in this category if immigrant characters performed rituals specific to their religions or cultures, or avoided specific objects or animals in observance of their religions or cultures.
American traditions	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character observed an American tradition or celebrated an American holiday.
Traditional food	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his or her family ate traditional food from the home country as a way of maintaining the home culture or refrained from eating certain foods because of culture or religion.
American food	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his or her family

	ate or wished to eat American food as a way of blending into American culture.
Traditional clothing or hair or appearance	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his or her family wore traditional clothing or hairstyle as a way of maintaining the home culture.
American clothing or hair or appearance	A unit of coding belongs in this category if an immigrant character or a member of his or her family wore American styles of clothing or hair as a way of blending into American culture, or wished to look more American.
Welcomed or befriended	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the young immigrant or members of his or her family was befriended by someone who lived in the United States, was accepted/befriended by Americans or fellow immigrants at some place along the journey to the United States, was treated decently by employers, was reached out to by someone who helps or defends immigrants, was treated decently by people in authority in the United States, or representatives of the United States abroad, such as police, medical personnel, or social workers, or relief workers, or if the young immigrant acquired a romantic interest. Include any positive interaction
Concern or resentment about immigration	A unit of coding belongs in this category if a character or group of characters expressed concern or resentment about the impact of an influx of immigrants into the community, or if someone expressed concern or resentment about a particular immigrant, or if an immigrant character was suspected of violence, terrorism or joining a terrorist group, or if the immigrant character or his or her family experienced discrimination, such as denial of housing, medical care, job opportunities, and so on, while living in the United States, or if the immigrant character or his or her family were victims of racially-based or religiously-based physical violence after arriving in the United States or at some point along the journey. Include all negative talk about immigrants or immigration
Looked down upon by relatives or fellow immigrants	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the young immigrant character or his or her immediate family members were looked down upon, taken advantage of, ignored, or left out by relatives or other immigrants

	from the same country while living in the United States or at some point along the immigration journey.
Inter-immigrant conflict	A unit of coding belongs in this category when the story indicates that members of various immigrant groups engaged in conflict with each other or made discriminatory statements to or about members of other immigrant groups.
Abuse and bullying	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrant character or a member of his or her family was a victim of actual or threatened physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, including being screamed at or threatened, if the immigrant or his or her family were bullied, insulted, or called names because of their race, religion, or immigrant status, or if someone implied that they were not clean, or if the immigrant's reasonable freedoms were restricted, or if someone touched the immigrant without permission, or if an immigrant character felt threatened by another character or by the dominant society, or if an immigrant character experienced fear of physical or sexual abuse during the immigration journey, or if a person's actions or words made the immigrant feel uncomfortable or unsafe, or if immigrant character or members of his or her family experienced negative physical or verbal treatment or disrespect from authorities in the United States or representatives of the United States abroad, or if an immigrant character's safety or well-being was or boundaries were neglected at the workplace, or if unreasonable labor demands were placed upon the immigrant.
Slavery, prostitution, or child marriage	A unit of coding belongs in this category if an immigrant character was being bought or sold, or if another character attempted to buy or sell an immigrant character, or suggested that someone could be bought or sold, or if a character tried to give an immigrant money for a sexual encounter that the immigrant did not want, or if another character tried to force an immigrant into prostitution or another form of slavery, or if a child character was forced into marriage.

## Appendix C

### Main Coding Frame Example

Table C1 shows an example of the main coding frame. In the main coding frame, units of coding are assigned to an appropriate subcategory. This example is from *Lost girl found* (Bassoff & DeLuca, 2014).

Table C1

#### *Main Coding Frame Example*

Lived in Refugee Camp
A unit of coding belongs in this category if the immigrating character or members of his or her family spends time in a refugee camp before coming to the United States.
LBLD67When we get...another like refrains.
LBLD72Then one day...have reached Lokichoggio.
LBLD74Inside the camp...it may mend.
LBLD74-75The first security...water for you.
LBLD75-76I look at...do not last.
LBLD76So you will...your foster daughter.
LBLD77Though I have...this new woman.
LBLD77Here in Kakuma...a dry place.
LBLD82-83That night, as...is still alive.
LBLD83Before sending me...done it before.
LBLD88A thorn in...gone too long.
LBDB94The unaccompanied boys...so long now.
LBDB110Every day is...our hands out.
LBDB122She calls me...with a man.
LBDB132I walk out...without looking back.
LBDB141Little does she...a refugee camp.
LBDB182Poni? It is...your cousin Keiji.
LBDB182-183But then I...me right away.

## Appendix D

### Side-by-Side Comparative Coding Frame and Final Decisions Example

Table D1 shows an example of the comparative coding frame, where the first and second codings are compared side-by-side. The purpose of this coding frame is to identify units of coding that were coded the same way in both the first and second codings, and to identify the units of coding that were coded differently. This example was taken from *Flowers in the sky* (Joseph, 2013).

Table D1

#### *Side-by-Side Comparative Coding Frame Example*

immigration decision made by parents/relatives	immigration decision made by parents/relatives
A unit of coding belongs in this category if the parents or relatives of the young immigrant made the decision to immigrate to the United States. Include even if the idea was the young immigrant's.	A unit of coding belongs in this category if the parents or relatives of the young immigrant made the decision to immigrate to the United States. Include even if the idea was the young immigrant's.
LJ1I did not...my seaside home	LJ1I did not...my seaside home
LJ1But Mami kept...better for you,	
LJ3She was thinking...want to go	LJ3She was thinking...want to go
LJ13So that was...feet in Samana.	LJ13So that was...feet in Samana.
LJ13And although she...that everything changed.	
LJ20I did not...in New York	

Table D2 deals with units of coding that were coded differently in the first and second codings. The two subcategories that the unit of coding was coded under are placed side-by-side, and a final decision is made. In this example, the final decision was to assign all three double-coded units of coding to the subcategory *immigration decision made by parents*.

Table D2

*Coding Final Decisions Example*

Text segment	Where coded in first coding	Where coded in second coding	Final decision
LJ1But Mami kept...better for you,	Opportunities/Jobs	Immigration decision made by parents	Immigration decision made by parents
LJ13And although she...that everything changed.	Resentment Toward Family Member	Immigration decision made by parents	Immigration decision made by parents
LJ20I did not...in New York	Opportunities/Jobs	Immigration decision made by parents	Immigration decision made by parents

## Appendix E

### Comparative Coding Matrix Example

Table E1 shows an example of the comparative coding matrix. This matrix is used to look at units of coding across texts. The number of times a unit of coding was assigned to each subcategory for each book is recorded, and the numbers are added to show how many total times a unit of coding was assigned to each subcategory.

Table E1

*Comparative Coding Matrix for Category: Why Do They Come?*

	Escape Poverty	Escape Oppression	Opportunities	Wealth
<i>American street</i>	0	0	6	0
<i>Angel de la Luna</i>	14	0	2	0
<i>The big fix</i>	4	2	8	4
<i>Bridge</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>Either Beginning or End</i>	0	20	0	0
<i>Flowers in the sky</i>	2	0	14	0
<i>The gamble</i>	0	0	0	2
<i>Game seven</i>	0	46	0	0
<i>Go-Between</i>	0	0	4	0
<i>Home in America</i>	0	12	0	0
<i>Joyride</i>	2	0	0	0
<i>Forgotten Girls</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>Lost girl found</i>	2	46	0	0
<i>Dragon's Mouth</i>	0	14	0	0
<i>Radius of Us</i>	2	42	0	0
<i>Out of nowhere</i>	0	12	0	0
<i>Something in between</i>	0	0	12	0
<i>Secret Side of Empty</i>	0	2	6	0
<i>Through my eyes</i>	0	12	0	0
<i>Trafficked</i>	16	0	10	0
<i>Tyrant's Daughter</i>	0	52	0	0
<i>Watched</i>	0	10	0	0
Total	42	270	62	6