"I don't belong anywhere. That's the problem."

(In)Between ethnicities, masculinities, and sexualities in Latino American coming-of-age novels.

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Masters thesis
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Abstract

The aim of this study has been to examine representations of Latino boys and young men in Latino American coming of age novels. Two concepts have been central to the study: positions of (in)betweenness and the ability to "fall in line" with norms and expectations. Three overarching themes are been explored in relation to masculinity. These are sexualities, ethnicities, and the representation of women. First, representations of queer sexualities are explored, focusing on the protagonists' "coming out" process and the varying reactions to this. The second part of this theme explores representations of disciplining strategies between boys and men as a means to regulating homosocial bonding and maintain the dominant masculinity ideal. The second theme, ethnicity, examines representations of "authentic" Latino identities in relation to language and bilingualism, and the link between location and identity. Disciplining measures aimed towards the protagonists, such as criminalization and dehumanization, are also explored. The final theme deals with the lacking representation of women in literature and research focused on men and masculinity. In the novels, women are depicted as confidants, present in the boys' lives mainly in order to provoke and facilitate their renegotiations of ideas regarding the previously discussed themes. The boys are represented as inhabiting positions of (in)betweenness throughout the novels, whether in relation to ethnicity, sexuality or gender. While (in)betweenness holds a potential to challenge and "worry" fixed categories, these positions are also characterized by unease, precariousness and the risk of being disciplined by other men.

Key words: masculinity, boyhood, sexuality, ethnicity, Latino American, (in)betweenness, discipline, homosociality, identity.
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Introduction

Latinos and Hispanics make up approximately a sixth of the population in the U.S., making them the biggest ethnic minority in the country. In spite of Latinos being such a large portion of the population, representation of Latinos in the media is disproportionately low in most areas: whether as news anchors, leading actors, subjects or reporters (Dominguez 2013). Mainstream media has a tendency to (re)produce ethnic and racial stereotypes in the few non-white roles featured in film and TV, often through "tokenism": the inclusion of a racial or ethnic minority character for the sake of claiming diversity in an otherwise very white-invoking cast. A 2010 study of ethnic and racial representation on prime time TV found that less than 5% of characters featured on the largest American TV networks during prime time were Latinos, when they actually make up for 17% of the U.S. population. The study also found that Latino characters were more likely than any other ethnic group to be portrayed with a heavy accent and to be less articulate and intelligent than other groups, as well as being less moral than white characters. Finally, the study found that while there were no significant ethnic or racial differences in depiction of aggressiveness or laziness, there had been a decrease in counter-stereotypical images since a similar study in 2000. This means that while racialized people are not depicted as aggressive or lazy, little is being done actively, within mainstream media, to counteract such stereotypes (Monk-Turner et. al. 2010, 105-109).

Another area of cultural representation is "Hispanic literature", which has become its own category on websites such as Amazon.com and in bookshops. While this categorization is arguably problematic, it also shows that there is an interest in Latino-specific narratives. However, the narratives that are included in this category by publishing companies and book sellers might also be problematic and heavily influenced by normative assumptions of what Hispanic and Latino literature should be like, and its difference from "regular" literature, which in turn affects what is published. By studying Hispanic and Latino literature published in the US, it is possible to study the strategies for Latinos to reclaim their voices and claiming space within an American literary narrative while also offering an alternative portrayal of US in

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1 Hispanics and Latinos - the terminology varies between different status and consensus surveys - make up for approximately a sixth of the US population at 17%, a total of 53 million people (US Census Bureau Public Information Office 2012).
2 For further explanation and discussion of the terminology used in this study, see the section Terminology: Latinidad in historical context.
contrast to the white dominated media. Whereas the media offers stereotypical portrayals of Latinos, it is possible for fictional literature to offer alternative representations. Fictional representations may be freer from clichés as the scope allows for more in-depth characterizations.

Literary scholar Laura P. Alonso Gallo argues that there is a current "Latino cultural boom" and that it is a form of ethnic commodification, a media-produced mirage to expand "consumer power and offer new exotica to the American middle class". Alonso Gallo argues that Latino writers are included in this boom, where their literary works are "marketable exoticism" and "the celebration of Latinidad from above seems to be accomplishing an advantageous social ease in today’s US multicultural landscape". The Latino boom can be understood a result of *hegemonic tropicalization* through which stereotypes are circulated and exploited, however, many latino/a writers engage with these stereotypes as a means to question and resist them, often through double-coded, metaphoric strategies where bilingualism can serve as a useful tool. While Latino/a writers are framed as "ideal minority commodities", the writers themselves create narrative spaces where ideas of Latino stereotypes are deconstructed or examined with different sets of social values and beliefs. They engage in a new form of tropicalization, through their use of language and their use of multiple discourses to challenge the oppositional binary of American/Latino (Alonso Gallo 2002, 241-244). American Latino literature, therefore, can engage both with existing mainstream stereotypes of Latinidad and political Latino/Chicano discourses, and challenge these.

A title that has gained wide critical recognition is Junot Díaz's *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), a novel that follows two young Latino boys in the U.S. and explores themes such as masculinity and ethnic identity. Like the literature Alonso Gallo describes, Diaz employs code switching, moving between Spanish and English, as well as containing an extensive use of footnotes, adding comments and a historical narrative to the story. Junot Díaz's novel forms a part of the narrative space of Latino writers that simultaneously engages with and challenges imagery of Latinos in the U.S. This study will focus on contemporary representations of young Latino men and masculinity in coming-of-age novels, as issues of race and ethnicity in relation to masculinity and marginalization are still side lined in discussions of feminism, and mainstream media continues to reproduce static and adverse stereotypes of Latino men. Simultaneously, the

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3 Latinidad means more or less "Latinoness" in Spanish.
popularity of authors such as Junot Díaz shows that there is a growing interest in the deconstruction of the stereotypical Latino man through the medium of literature. As I am interested in contemporary representations, I have chosen to focus on novels published during the 2010s and within the coming-of-age novels, as these often depict transitional and transformation phases focused on matters such as identity.

**Purpose of the study**

As discussed in the introductory section, fiction can serve as a means of writing representations that challenge and deconstruct ethnic stereotypes, as well as depicting intra-community issues facing young Latinos. The aim of this study has been to examine different representations of Latino boys and men in contemporary American literature. The study has focused on eight American Latino novels in the "coming of age" genre published during the 2010s.

The research questions for this study are:

- How does masculinity figure in the novels? How do these representations intersect with ideas of ethnic identity and sexuality?
- How are disciplining practices between men depicted?
- How do the narratives engage with stereotypical imagery of Latino masculinity?

**The research field**

My research project interlocks with a number of different research fields. On the one hand, it falls within the field of cultural studies or literary studies; on the other hand, it is also a part of Latino/Chicano studies. Furthermore, it is a project within masculinity or boyhood studies. These are not mutually exclusive research fields - quite the contrary - and I will briefly summarize the various fields, how they intersect, and then discuss previous research projects that inform my own, and how.

Although these fields are too vast to be summarized here, Latino/a and Chicano/a Studies is a research field which predominately exists in the US - Chicano/a being a US specific term - which encompasses multiple disciplines, including cultural studies and gender studies (Sosa Riddell, 1990, 71). In common for projects belonging to the field is that they focus on the experiences of Latinos and has close ties to other areas of ethnic studies. Latino/Chicano Studies is a vast
research field, with a multitude of research centres at universities in the U.S. and the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) based in California. Research areas include feminist and queer theory (see Anzaldúa 1987; Roth 2014; Hertlein 2015), history (see Acuña 2007; Thies & Raab 2009; Raussert & Habell-Pallán 2011), and social issues (see Butler, Gurr & Kaltmeier 2011; Kirschner 2012; Benavides, Midobuche & Carlson 2011).

Masculinity studies focuses on men and masculinities (Connell 1993, 601-602). The field also includes studies of female masculinity, perhaps most notably by English scholar Jack Halberstam (Halberstam 1998). Masculinity studies also include the field of boyhood studies, devoted to studying boys' lives (Janssen 2014). Both of these fields of study are interdisciplinary, and the following presentation of research is focused on research in which Cultural Studies, Latino/Chicano Studies and Masculinity Studies all intersect.

In *It doesn't have to be this way: Re/presentations of Chicano Masculinity in Chicano and Chicana Literature, Film and Performance* (2005), Philip Ruben Serrato dedicates part of his dissertation to children’s literature and its relationship with critical Chicano masculinity studies. Ruben Serrato argues that children’s literature - and much Chicano literature, in general - aspires to deconstruct the stereotypical depiction of Chicano masculinity as emotionally detached by offering alternative modes of being male. These deconstructions range from disavowing aggressive forms of masculinity to providing kinder, gentler examples. Young boys are depicted as working through various ways of being, and habitually disidentifying themselves with other boys around them in the process - it is a critical, self-conscious detachment that serves to, among other things, destabilize patriarchal primacy and demands patriarchal accountability (Ruben Serrato 2005, 214-218). However, Ruben Serrato also identifies one key issue in these narratives: when attempting to deconstruct masculinity in male-centred stories, there is a tendency to forget about women. Women are merely background characters, who may serve a purpose in the boys' lives, but rarely exhibit any character depth or agency themselves (Ruben Serrato 2005, 223-224).

A second dissertation that has been influential for my study is John Alba Cutler's *Pochos, Vatos, and Other Types of Assimilation: Masculinities in Chicano Literature 1940-2004* (2008). In his dissertation, Alba Cutler studies different waves within Chicano literature in the U.S., and how different generations relate to ideas of assimilation, self-assertion and masculinity. He argues that these various representations of assimilation, which have been produced over the past seventy years, shows the conflicting and contradictory negotiations of what constitutes Chicano
masculinity, but also that a clear shift has taken place: some assimilation has occurred. Today, boundaries between Chicano literature and American literature have been blurred, both in terms of Chicano literature being written predominantly in English and adopting formal codes of American literature, and in terms of Chicano Studies becoming a research field with its own centres and departments at higher education institutions (Alba Cutler 2008, 254-256). Alba Cutler also argues that a major shift between the Chicano generation of the 1970s and 1980s and that of the early 21st century is that, while postcolonial theories still apply, the colonial paradigm of claiming Chicanos' connection to indigenous America is insufficient and problematic (Alba Cutler 2008, 256-257).

My own research is highly influenced by both of these works, as the topics of study are related. However, there are some major differences between my study and those of Alba Cutler and Ruben Serrato. One characteristic that Ruben Serrato and Alba Cutler’s studies share is that they both focus on Chicanos specifically, whereas my study includes Latinos more generally. While studying Latinos as a group is problematic (and further discussed in the Terminology section below) I believe this is a research gap that needs to be filled. Because the two terms are often confused as interchangeable, it is important to diversify and broaden research to encompass more Latino identities than those identified as Chicano. Furthermore, my study is a rather time-intensive study in comparison with Alba Cutler's study - focusing on eight novels published during a much shorter period of time - and it engages with only one medium of art, whereas Ruben Serrato studies multiple mediums. I have chosen to do a genre-specific and time-intense study to examine specific representations produced during a short period of time and within the frames of a certain style of writing. It has been my aspiration to, in the footsteps of previous Chicano and Latino scholars, study representations of Latino presence and identity formation in the U.S.

Positionality and reflexivity
I am neither male nor living in the US, and though I identify as a Latina and Swedish-Chilean, I also acknowledge that I often pass as white. Passing as white means that other people read me as white, and by default, Swedish, but that there is always a possibility that I am "revealed" to be other because of aspects such as my mixed-language name. Passing as white means that I obtain
privileges that other people from the same ethnolinguistic group - for example, some of my family members - and I in part benefit from racist structures as light-skinned.

Furthermore, as a cisgender\(^4\) woman from an academic middle class living in Sweden, I am in a position of privilege. Even with a shared ethno-linguistic or, to a certain extent, socio-cultural background between me and the characters, there are many differences between us. Whereas most Latinos living in Sweden today are first or second generation immigrants, which affects intra-community issues and ideals, Latinos living in the U.S. need not have migrated at all.

Though my ambition is to study what it means, for the characters, to be Latino and male in the U.S. today, my interpretations are inseparable from my own experiences as a part of one Latino community which is historically, socially, culturally and economically situated in a specific context other than that portrayed in the novels. Though the experiences of the characters may differ greatly from my own experiences as Latina, this also affects how I read the novels and the characters. My understanding of Spanish increases my comprehension of the texts, when non-Spanish speakers might find the use of several languages frustrating and excluding. Growing up in a mixed family in a rather homogenous location affects how I interpret the characters' thoughts about belonging. How I identify, and my sense of belonging, affects how I react to the texts, how I identify with the characters and which parts I interpret as important for the analysis of the texts, which will be further explored in the method section.

In part because of the focus of this study on men and masculinities, I think it is important to acknowledge that my Latina ancestry comes from my father's side of the family, which affects how I relate to Latino masculinity. This difference is not only based on socially constructed gender differences, but on the emotional ties I have to Latino men specifically. Research is always political and deeply personal, regardless of the subject matter, but to me it is important to acknowledge and analyse the relationship that I do have to this project. My relationship with my father, as well as other Latino men - relatives, friends, past and potential partners, as well as strangers -, greatly impacts how I read the novels and interpret the representations of masculinities and ethnicities in them. My positive relationship to and with Latino men aligns with my choice of method (further discussed in the Method and material section), which is a

\(^4\) Cisgender describes the gender identity in which a person identifies as the same gender as was assigned to them at birth. Being a cis woman means I was assigned a female sex at birth and this is consistent with my own experiences of gender identity (Logie et al., 2012).
benevolent, emphatic reading. Rita Felski describes the empathic approach as a means of combining analysis with reading with attachment and love (Felski 2008, 20-22).

**Terminology: Latinidad in historical context**

Latino Americans, or Latinos for short, is the collective name for an ethno-linguistic group that is racially diverse, and the shared identity is based in language⁵. It is also based in the ancestral background from and via Latin America, which means that the group includes people with ancestry from any other continent, as well as people of indigenous descent. A variety of terms can be used to label people of Latin American descent living in the U.S. today. However, it is important to note that these words - Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano - are not interchangeable and are laden with meaning. The term Hispanic is often used in population consensus surveys, or to categorize literature, but it is problematic to use Hispanic in the context of this study as it implies a connection to Spain, which not all Latinos have.

Whenever I use the term Hispanic, it is because the source material uses this term, and it cannot simply be changed for another. Chicano, which will also be mentioned on occasion, is a term of identification for many people of Mexican heritage living in the U.S., but should not be used interchangeably with Mexican-American or Latino. Because of the limitations of the terms Chicano and Hispanic, I favour the term Latino. Latino is suitable for this thesis as the common denominator between the characters is the Latin American heritage, whereas not all of them are necessarily of Hispanic descent or identify as Chicano, and they have a shared ethnic identity even if there are large variances between different areas. The term Latino includes the variety of races, nationalities and indigenous populations found throughout Latin America in a way that the other terms do not⁶. In some cases, the characters speak of ethnic identity in terms of nationality, in which case these terms will be used instead. I also use the term men or people of colour, an alternative to non-white or minority with more positive connotations. Another term used in relation to Latino identity is racialization. This describes the process of ascribing certain people a

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⁵ Spanish and Portuguese are prominent official languages of the region, but also, to a certain extent, French.

⁶ Further examples of terms used within the Latino American ethnolinguistic group are denominators such as afrolatino/a or latinegro/a for Latinos of African descent, and Latinx, mainly used in the US, to include non-binary persons as the terms Latino and Latina are gendered.
racial identity based on norms and stereotypes, and it is an on-going process highly dependent on the context (Omi & Winant 1986, 66).

It is also worth noting that criticism has been aimed at the term Latino as well, for being homogenizing and neo-colonial, but for the purpose of this thesis it is the most inclusive term I have found. Using Latino and American as oppositional and exclusive categories may contribute to reinforcing these categories, and stereotypes derived from them, but these terms are often used in the novels. Furthermore, when speaking about blackness in relation to Latino identity, the term can refer to Afrolatinos, dark-skinned Hispanic Latinos and indigenous Latinos depending on the context. Because of the history of anti-blackness and erasure of Afrolatinos from Latino narratives and imagery, it is important to me to not reinforce such strategies in my reading of the novels. Because of this, discussions of blackness in the novels that do not include references to other racial categories are interpreted as referring to Afrolatinos. Furthermore, using a term such as Latinos immediately sets this group apart from "regular" Americans, which are understood as implicitly white people. Apart from being a problematic term in regards to ethnicity and race and the understanding of white as the default, normative ethnicity in the U.S., using American as a name for the population of the U.S. also affects other American countries' claims to American authenticity and identity. The American continents consist of over thirty independent countries, a majority of which are located in Central and South America and the Caribbean. By using Latino in opposition to American, the study might contribute to a reinforcing of this idea, but it also these terms that are used in the novels examined. The self-identification of the characters and the authors as Latinos can be seen as a political project, high-lighting the experiences of those who do not belong to the perceived white American norm.

Fictional representations of ethnic minorities are inseparable from the historical context of Latino presence in the country. In order to understand the portrayal of Latinos in the novels, and the use of certain labels, it is vital to understand the construction of "the Mexican" within American culture. Labels such as Mexican and Latino are often conflated and used interchangeably, meaning that the discourse formation of "the Mexican" affects how Latinos in general are seen as well. Natalia Molina argues that today's idea of Mexicans as seasonal workers and "birds of passage" as well as carriers of disease and bad behaviour relates back to the racial biologism of the 1920s and 30s. Biologist theory had a large impact of the Immigration Act of 1924 where the perception of Mexicans has mostly visibly shifted from the previous Immigration
Act (of 1882). In the Immigration Act of 1924, work force migration is valuable to the U.S. economy, but the willingness to allow migrants to stay once their work is done had radically decreased, fostering the seasonal "birds of passage" imagery to signify a transient status. Though Mexicans were already considered inferior in terms of intellect in the Immigration Act of 1882, they were still considered to be valuable workers and "uniquely able-bodied." Their racial distinctiveness from white Americans carried some positive connotations that made them more valued immigrants than people of other nationalities. In California, where current health care policies still disproportionately affect Mexican women and children, Mexicans were considered to be one of the main forces behind the spread of tuberculosis, and Mexican mothers were particularly targeted as needing state intervention (Molina 2006, 24-26). This scapegoating, mostly aimed at undocumented Latino immigrants, continues today (Alba Cutler 2008, 1).

Furthermore, the Chicano activist movement has also cultivated a specific image of Latino men. John Alba Cutler argues that masculine self-assertion has always been an important part of the Chicano movement, as a means of rejecting white, nationalist assimilation politics. This rejection of assimilation politics also criticizes "sell-outs", vendidos, the bilingual, educated and ambitious Latinos and Chicanos that take part in re-producing the American dream. In this context, assimilated Latinos are considered parasites, benefiting from the cultural, economic and social oppression of more "authentic" Latinos, reifying the conditions of marginalization that they themselves have escaped. Chicano empowerment becomes a movement for male empowerment, consolidating the heterosexual, nuclear family led by a virile male (Alba Cutler 2008, 5-10). These two historical narratives create the setting for the novels analysed here, and that the characters are constantly relating to.

**Method and material**

**Method and methodological approaches**

Rita Felski argues that the current canon of literary theory encourages us to adopt "poses of analytical detachment, critical vigilance, guarded suspicion" and that "problematizing, interrogating and subverting are the default options", with so-called critical reading being "the holy grail" of literary studies. She argues that the negative has become overbearingly normative and that we are all *resistant readers* (Felski 2008, 2-4). Instead of this critical approach, Felski
favours "the empathic experience" which honours "the differential nature of our responses to specific texts" and is a manner of "treating literary texts as formative in their own right, as representations that summon up new ways of seeing rather than as echoes or distortions of predetermined political truths" (Felski 2008, 20). However, she continues, there is no escape from the discourses of value. Even with a more empathic or benevolent approach to literature and reading, we still make choices, rank and privilege different works. Empathic reading does not entail abandoning all tools or literary theories, but is rather a way of combining analysis with "attachment, criticism and love" (Felski 2008, 22).

In Maria Margareta Österholm's doctoral dissertation, Österholm builds on Felski's emphatic reading and uses a technique she refers to as benevolent reading. Reading benevolently, she writes, entails posing questions about what the texts are telling the reader, rather than what they are hiding from the reader, the latter of which she refers to as suspicious reading. This approach, Österholm continues, requires a queer, restorative reading. Österholm views fictional characters as politically situated and embodied subject positions, as eccentric subjects with resistance and agency, fulfilling an idea about "something else/different" (Österholm 2012, 91-93). While my focus is on the characters, the context in which these novels are produced and read influences my interpretations of their stories. I bring Felski's loving approach and Österholm's benevolent reading into contact with Alonso Gallo's argument that Latino/a writers are able to engage with and deconstruct stereotypes about Latinos. However, it is important to note that empathy and benevolence does not mean I employ a wholly uncritical approach to reading. A benevolent approach means that I am not reading "suspiciously", between the lines or against the grain, while also remaining critical of what the text is telling me.

These methodological approaches to reading have affected how I have read and interpreted the novels, and how I have documented my reading process. During the first read-through, notes of quotations and interactions were taken for each of the novels based on my research questions and I continuously wrote down my own reflections and feelings about the novels and reading experience. Once a novel had been finished, I thematized it by identifying common and reoccurring broad themes. After the first read-through, I went over my notes and formulated more specific sub-themes: the 18 original sub-themes have been narrowed down and reworked into the three parts of the analytical section. The first two themes are those most prevalent in the

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7 The Swedish "välvilligt läsande"
novels, however this does not mean that the novels all treat the themes in the same ways, and both similarities and differences are discussed in each section. The themes that were excluded were those that did not answer my research questions; some smaller, similar themes were reorganized into the two main themes. The chosen themes are not mutually exclusive, and there are some quotes and incidents featured in more than one theme. The three themes are: Knowing your place - sexuality, homosociality and manhood; Ethnic authenticity in a certain time and place; and Becoming men, forgetting men. The final theme, which focuses on representations of women, has been included in an attempt to counteract tendencies to erasure of women that Ruben Serrato argues is a common side effect in studies of masculinities.

Material
The selection of material for this study has involved several different steps, as I have had to narrow down the range of approximately two hundred novels published in the 2010s to a list of nine for a first selection, and eight for my final selection. Previous research has to a large extent focused on literature published during the 20th century and extending into the early years of the 21st (such as Alba Cutler's 2008 study). I have chosen the condensed period of 2010-2014 to study the representations of contemporary masculinities published within a limited time span. This time span has also been chosen to study representations in fiction that are a part of the Latino cultural boom and have been produced after successes such as Junot Díaz's *The brief, wondrous life of Oscar Wao* (2007). The selection is based on Amazon.com's range of books included into the category "Hispanic", a subcategory in their department for American, fictional novels. In the discussion of limitations, found below, issues regarding this categorization are explored. An initial criterion, apart from the time range (2010-2014) of the publications, was that the book had to be originally published in the U.S. and in English (or Spanglish), which meant that a large amount of translated literature from Latin America and Spain were excluded from the first selection. Another criterion was that the protagonists, as well as the authors, had to self-define as Latinos or Hispanics within an American context. This was determined by the summary of the novels and, if available, the author profiles on the website. In the cases where no profiles were available, I looked to authors' websites and interviews. All novels belonging to the genres fantasy, science fiction and crime, as well as novels set before the 1980s were then
excluded to focus on a shorter time span. The final steps were to remove all novels with a protagonist living in the U.S. as an undocumented worker, as this study of ethnic identity also ties to ideas of citizenship and national identity. To include representations of undocumented migrants would have added a variety of new themes and could compose material for another study of its own. Some of these criteria were practical: limiting the time period both for publication and setting, as well as genre to narrow down the selection. Others were political: choosing Latino writers, rather than all American writers, as the idea for this study is in part based on the lack of representations of Latinos in media. Furthermore, novels with male-identifying protagonists were chosen to ensure a focus on Latino men specifically.

The publication dates were then double-checked to ensure that none of the novels had been published earlier than 2010, as Amazon.com organizes books after the publication dates of the specific edition. The nine novels included in the first selection all have male protagonists. The primary search was conducted in December 2013, and a second search was conducted in June 2014 in order to include novels published up until December 2014 according to the same criteria. One novel was excluded between the first and final selection simply because it had yet to be published and was therefore not available. This resulted in a list of eight novels: *Aristotle and Dante* (Alire Sáenz 2012), *We the Animals* (Torres 2011), *Barrio Bushido* (Bac Sierra 2011), *Mijito doesn't live here anymore* (Martinez 2012), *Chulito* (Rice-González 2011), *Dogfight* (Burgess 2010), *Thirty Minutes on Third Avenue* (Fernandez 2013), and *The Second Time We Met* (Cobo, 2010). The novels included in the final selection are all quite different in plot, characterization and exploration of the themes, but share some common ground.

*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (Alire Sáenz 2013) is set in the U.S. south and follows the two teenage characters as they befriend each other and eventually fall in love. The two boys struggle to understand what it means to be Mexican-American men, and find comfort in confiding in each other. In *Chulito* (Rice-González 2011), the title character is torn between his need to be accepted as a "tough guy" by the other men in his neighbourhood in South Bronx and his feelings for his childhood friend Carlos, who is openly gay and eager to distance himself from everything Chulito's friends represent. *We the Animals* (Torres 2011) follows an unnamed narrator and his two older brothers from childhood and into their teens, as biracial Latinos in a mostly white neighbourhood in upstate New York. In *The Second Time We Met* (Cobo 2012) main character and Colombian adoptee Asher goes on a self-exploratory trip to
find his birth mother and better understand himself as a non-Spanish speaking Latino raised in California by a Jewish Italian family. *Barrio Bushido* (Bac Sierra 2011) consists of first person accounts from the lives of friends Toro, Santo and Lobo, following them through their adolescence in an unnamed California city. *Dogfight* (Burgess 2010) follows Alfredo and Isabel's process of preparing for parenthood and how family dynamics change when Alfredo's older brother Tariq is released from prison and returns home. In *Thirty Minutes on Third Avenue* (Fernandez 2013), Chino's life changes after a robbery and he is forced to re-evaluate his views on manhood, family and love. Finally, the novel *Mijito doesn't live here anymore* (Martinez 2012) follows the lives of twin brothers Gustavo and Hector and their sister Angel as they try to create a life for themselves in California, after a traumatic childhood.

The selected novels can be broadly categorized as coming-of-age novels. Coming-of-age novels can be defined as, and are in this study understood as, stories which follow a youth in their transition from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, and often focus on the personal development of the protagonist (Millard 2007, 14-15). The study is focused on Spanish-speaking Latinos; novels representing Latinos with (explicitly stated) Brazilian ancestry are not included in the study. This is a selection criteria based mainly on my desire for full comprehension of the novels and the languages used in them. The novels are set over varying periods of time; from a few months to several years. The age of the protagonists also vary: some of the characters are legal adults throughout the novels, whereas others start out as teenagers or children. However, they all depict "life-changing" incidents and transitions for the characters. The coming-of-age genre is suitable for this study as the narratives focus on transformational phases such as the transition from boyhood to manhood. Because I am interested in studying ambivalence and (in)betweenness, the genre is particularly relevant for this study due to the common depictions of transformational phases.

**Research limitations**

There are several limitations of this study, such as the selection of protagonists. By including only the novels with male protagonists, portrayals of masculinity in the novels featuring female protagonists are also excluded from the study. From the range of books that were sorted through, a total of seven novels had female protagonists but fit in with all the other criteria I had set up
before my search. While this study includes a section of the representation of women in the selected novels, it is brief in relation to the other sections. A second limitation is the exclusion of protagonists living as undocumented workers. While definitely a group that would be interesting to study, I focus on protagonists who are U.S. citizens as national identity is one of the major focuses of the study.

A third limitation lies in the categorization of Hispanic and Latino literature. As Richard Rodriguez notes in his autobiographical work Brown (2002), the fact that "Hispanic" is used to define a literary genre of sorts poses an immediate problem. Rodriguez states that he remains "ambivalent about those Hispanic anthologies where I end up; about those anthologies where I end up the Hispanic; about shelves at the bookstore where I look for myself and find myself" (Rodriguez 20012, 26). He further argues that "how a society orders its bookshelves is as telling as the books a society writes and reads" (Rodriguez 2002, 11). In creating a specific "Hispanic" literature, a Hispanic (or Hispanic American) canon is created, defining what it means for something to be Hispanic literature. By choosing to only include the novels that Amazon.com believes fit into this category, other fictional works about Latinos in the U.S. might be excluded, and this might also contribute to a cementation of which books are categorized as Hispanic and Latino American "coming-of-age" novels.

A final limitation is that my perspective is that of a gender studies scholar. This means that it is gender perspectives, in connection to masculinity and ethnicity, rather than literary perspectives on these issues, that characterize the theories and research that are used in this study.

**Theoretical framework**

**Theoretical approaches: gender and masculinity**

My theoretical research background is in gender studies. While this study is mainly based in feminist cultural studies, perspectives on postcolonialism, especially focused on the Americas, are highly influential in my approach to the research material. At the core of this study lies the idea that gender is a social construct. Rather than gender being determined by biology, gender is culturally and socially constructed, meaning that we interpret gender and bodies based on our own perception and understanding of femininity and masculinity and how these coded bodies
should look and act (Butler 2005, 45-46). In this study, I continuously use the term gender rather than sex.

As this study focuses on young men and masculinity, theories on masculinity and homosociality are particularly relevant. The representations of men in this study are influenced by and engage with the internal hegemony of men and hierarchies based on race, ethnicity and sexuality. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that homosociality - the interaction between people of the same gender - exists on a spectrum with homosexuality, but the lines between the two are drawn more abruptly and sternly for men than women. Female homosociality and homosexuality is a continuum understood by "common sense", whereas male homosociality and homosexuality are seen as dichotomous. Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that because obligatory heterosexuality is built into male-dominated patriarchy, homophobia becomes a necessary consequence (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 2-3). Homophobia acts as a mechanism for regulating male homosocial behaviour, holding a disproportionate and unpredictable leverage over all men, to varying degrees. Homophobia, and fear of being labelled homosexual, dictates how men are expected to act and affects how men react to displays of homosexuality (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 88). In this study, I focus on Latino masculinity specifically, employing theories on masculinity and homosociality as an analytical tool in combination with theories on ethnicity and Latino identity.

The interaction between different identity aspects, such as ethnicity, sexuality, age, and gender, can be understood through an intersectional approach. Intersectionality describes how different identity aspects and power structures interact, or intersect, to produce specific positions of superiority and subordination, the simultaneous effect of inhabiting different categories at once. Intersectionality is not only a theoretical approach to describe the relationship between different power aspects, but a way of exploring how power structures are constructed and maintained through categories (de los Reyes & Mulinari 2005, 24). It is important to note that in this study, intersectionality is an approach to understanding identity and power, rather than a theory explicitly applied to the source material. In the conclusion section of this study, I return to intersectional perspectives and research.
Postcolonial perspectives on race, ethnicity and violence

A postcolonial perspective is applied in my readings of fictional texts. Before describing what approaching the material with a postcolonial perspective entails, it is vital to discuss the meaning of the word postcolonialism. Loomba argues that there is a dual meaning of the prefix post in postcolonialism. While the post may point to the temporal aspect, and the aftermath, of colonialism, it also fills an ideological function. A postcolonial nation is not free from colonialism, rather the ideological use of the word points to the critique of colonial and neo-colonial structures. Loomba argues that the term is inadequate in defining contemporary realities in previously colonised countries, as it is temporally removed and does not illuminate social and racial differences within societies. In the case of formerly Spanish colonies in Latin America, those who won the independence from Spain barely pass as colonial subjects, whereas the Native Americans in these countries are still living in colonised states (Loomba 2005, 7-9).

Applying a postcolonial perspective in this study involves keeping a critical approach to established "truths" and norms knowing that they are built on western, white ideals, which attain a hegemonic position in the paradigm of knowledges. Even though the U.S. is considered to be multicultural in many aspects, the nation-state is built upon white privilege, racist legislation, and the discrimination and marginalisation of other ethnic groups, among them Latinos. Furthermore, Rosa Linda Fregoso argues that Latino culture is framed as the negative manifestation of hegemonic masculinity through the use of the Spanish term machismo rather than the English sexism, a term so well known that it need not be translated or explained, and makes Latino men the "model-subject for the pathological transgressions of hegemonic masculine identities". Fregoso argues that these negative connotations date back four centuries, to "violent and unruly" conquistadors and "blood-thirsty" indigenous people (Fregoso 1993, 661-662). The word macho means man, and the term machismo in Spanish serves to describe sexism in a way that specifically focuses on certain ways of performing masculinity, unrelated to the ethnic or racial dimensions it takes on when the term is used in another language. This standpoint is important to take into account in the analysis, particularly in regards to the characters' discussions about gender and ethnicity, and their experiences of internalisation or dis-identification with this idea of Latino men.
However, violence and hypermasculinity in relation to Latinos and men of colour will also be explored. Victor Rios argues that hypermasculinity\(^8\) and violence is an ideal that is fostered amongst racialized working class and low-income men in part due to institutional inequalities and efforts to "reform" convicts. The criminal justice system and its related institutions are based on the idea of getting citizens to be law-abiding and complaint, through domination and control that forces them to accept subordinate societal positions. These domination techniques affect racialized men in particular because of their already socially vulnerable positions created by sexist, racist and colonial structures in society. Due to their racialization, they are framed as particularly "savage" and in need of constant surveillance by institutions that are embedded in masculinity - such as the police force - and therefore embrace violence. Rios further argues that these men are stuck in a double bind: when they succeed in complying with the demands of the criminal justice system, they are more like to fail "on the streets", but when they fail to comply, they are harassed and arrested (Rios 2009, 153-159).

This connection between racialized men and violence is (re)produced through cultural representations. According to Richard Mora, the "cholo\(^9\)" is depicted as something abject in cinema. The term "cholo" has always had negative connotations, though the definition of the word has changed over times. It now mainly serves as a stigmatizing term to refer to both actual gang members and Chicano and Latino youth in general, linking crime and violence, and through that abjection, to a specific ethnic group. Mora argues that the Latino "cholo" is depicted as a gang member with no individual agency, as he surrenders his individual identity to join the gang, and is abject in his depicted embrace of violence. The "cholo" threatens the social order with "ill intentions" and hypermasculinity, which aligns with the construction and policing of Latino youth in the U.S. "Cholos", and other Latinos, are marginalized and deemed "unworthy" of being members of society: the abject "cholo" belongs in equally abject zones of the cities, uninhabitable and unliveable to others. His existence is entrenched in violence and considered a natural pathway to manhood, with no escape from the gang life other than death. The cinematic

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\(^8\) In this study I define hypermasculinity as behaviour that is deemed to be an exaggeration of traditionally male-coded traits, such as aggression, violence and domination.

\(^9\) The word "cholo" originates from the Quenchuan "chulu" to refer to people of mixed descent. I have chosen to put the term "cholo" within quotes to avoid normalization of a term that often is often used in racist and stereotyping ways. This also applies to my use of the term "thug".
representation of "cholos" continues the creation of Latinos as abject, deviant and violent, a southern "threat" in America (Mora 2011).

Ethnicity, sexuality and (in)betweenness

As homosociality and masculinity are prevalent themes in this study, a number of theoretical perspectives are necessary to understand the various representations in the novels. In this section I present the central concepts of this study, (in)betweenness and lines. The characters' doing of gender intersects with ideas of ethnicity and authenticity, sexuality, abjection, and (in)betweenness. Sara Ahmed continues Butler's (and Connell's) theorizing about performativity and regulatory norms in Queer Phenomenology (2006) as she explores orientation and the linearity of gender, sexuality and lifelines. Ahmed uses the term orientation to describe how we are always facing in a particular direction, which determines what we can or cannot see, as there is always something that remains out of sight. Our orientation determines how we inhabit and embody spaces, and we acquire direction (in life) by taking a certain (visible) point as a given. We align ourselves with others to stay in line, and thereby reinforce these "given" lifelines. In order to stay in line, we have to stay straight and keeping facing the right direction. To "fall out of line" requires us to disorientate ourselves, remove ourselves from one familiarity, to find a new direction to face and a new position to "feel at home" in (Ahmed 2006, 11-17). Ahmed relates this theory to sexual orientation in particular, but it is also applicable to life-altering decisions. The act of deviating from what is socially and culturally expected of you as, in the case of this study, a Latino boy in the U.S., means that you fall out of line and change the way you inhabit a space and the way you are perceived.

In this study, (in)betweenness is a central concept throughout the various themes. The (in)betweenness explored in the novels is related strongly to perceived borders between American/Latino and home/exile, as well as relating to ideas of gender and sexuality. Claudia Egerer, who builds her theory on Homi Bhabha's (1994) theorization of (in)betweenness, otherness and cultural hybridity, argues that concept of home and exile is a binary related to ideas of unhomeliness and homeliness. Borders and dichotomies are maintained through these ideas, and a position of (in)betweenness makes "worrying the lines" of these borders possible (Egerer 1997, 20-21). Egerer emphasizes the significance of mobility as thinking across lines,
people (in)between categories are travellers that crosses - and because of this, worries - lines and therefore forces a de-coding and re-coding of seemingly fixed categories (Egerer 1997, 23-26). However, it is important to note that this travelling - also explored through Maria Lugones' theorizing of playful world travelling - is not necessarily easy travelling (Lugones 1987, 12-13). The (in)betweenness experienced by the characters showcases the various tensions that crossing perceived borders cause.

These theories on lines, borders and transgression are particularly relevant in relation to the exploration of ethnic and sexual identities in the novels, as these two aspects are vital in the characters' (continuously shifting) understanding of how a Latino man should be. In terms of ethnic identity, there are several ideas at play of "authentic" Latinidad, relating to aspects such as appearance, bilingualism, and socioeconomic status. Although the theoretical perspectives presented above form the basis for this study, a variety of other theories will also be employed. This includes theories on location-based identity, the colonial aspects of gentrification, animal theory, and abjection.

Disposition

The analysis has been split into three sections, followed by a short conclusion. The first section, knowing your place - sexuality, homosociality and manhood, examines homosociality and (in)betweenness in relation to sexuality, specifically focusing on queer sexualities and homophobia. In the second section, Ethnic authenticity in a certain time and place, I continue to study the theme of (in)betweenness and masculinity, relating it to ethnic authenticity and identity, location and racialization. Finally, the brief third section, Becoming men, forgetting women, deals with representations of women in the novels in relation to the protagonists' navigation and negotiation of masculinity ideals.
Knowing your place - sexuality, homosociality and manhood

In this section, I explore how sexuality is represented in the novels, and how masculinity figures in these representations. Sexuality is depicted in a variety of ways in the novels, from being a central topic to merely being mentioned in passing. In the novels where the male protagonists have romantic and sexual relationships with women, the role of sexuality is the most downplayed; it is present and plays a role in the stories, but is not deeply explored. In four out of the eight novels, however, the main characters have sexual and romantic relationships with other boys, a result which I had not expected when setting out to do this study. Because this study is centred on positions of (in)betweenness, the main focus on this section is on queer sexualities, and the tension between queerness and performing masculinity for young men and boys. I have chosen to refer to their sexualities simple as queer\textsuperscript{10} as few characters explicitly name their own sexual orientations. In only one novel, *Mijito doesn't live here anymore* (Martinez 2012, henceforth *Mijito*), does main character Gustavo have a rather uncomplicated relationship to his sexual orientation. Throughout most of the novel, he identifies as gay and his transition from curious child to gay-identifying adult is not thoroughly explored. In the other three novels, however, sexuality and sexual orientation are major preoccupations for the main characters and one of the many aspects they struggle with in terms of self-determination and figuring out who they are and how that fits with their ethnic background. This section has been split into two parts: first, queer sexualities and coming out, which explores the protagonists' coming out process in the novels, and the varying reactions they meet. The second part further focuses on reactions to queerness, and how gender, ethnicity and sexuality interact in strategies to physically and verbally discipline boys who diverge from heterosexuality and the strict rules of homosocial bonding.

As mentioned in the introduction, Alonso Gallo argues to that the current "Latino cultural boom" has led to a *tropicalization* of Latino culture, where Latino literature becomes an "ideal minority commodity". However, this increased interest in Latino literature allows for the creation

\textsuperscript{10}While the term queer is not wholly unproblematic in terms of its history as a slur in an English-speaking context, the representations of sexuality varies to such a degree between, and within, the novels, that it is difficult to label characters as either homosexual or bisexual. I have chosen to use queer not as an identity or label which the characters fall under, but rather as a way of describing how their sexuality challenges heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality.
of a larger narrative space that makes it possible for Latino writers to both interact with these stereotypes and deconstruct them (Alonso Gallo 2002, 241-244). This idea of both playing with and challenging stereotypes in Latino literature is highly visible in the narratives of how sexuality and masculinity is represented in the selected novels.

Queer sexualities and coming out

One of the ways in which the representations of heterosexual versus queer sexualities differ between the novels is in the need for sexual orientation to be declared. When I argue that sexuality is downplayed in the novels which feature straight protagonists, I mean that it does not need to be "revealed" in the same manner as queer sexualities. Heterosexuality is tied to performing masculinity in such a way that it still needs to be enacted or performed, yet it is also expected as the default sexuality, and unlike heterosexual characters, the queer characters need to "come out". The concept of "coming out" is inescapably entangled with the presumption that all people are heterosexual until stated otherwise. This presumption, and the structural-level consequences of heteronormativity, facilitates the construction of non-heterosexual orientations as abnormal, deviant and something that needs to be declared. Sexuality and heteronormativity is entangled with ideas of gender. Performing masculinity and achieving "manhood" is heavily reliant on sexuality and sexual behaviour in relation to and with women. Men who perform masculinity in a way that is deemed as incorrect are labelled as gay or queer for failing to achieve a correct form of manhood that is strongly connected to gender roles and heterosexuality. Masculinity is, in part, performed through social interaction between men, here referred to as male homosociality. Critical theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that homosociality and homosexuality are considered to be dichotomous, but actually exist on a spectrum (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 2-3). Because obligatory heterosexuality is built into patriarchal institutions, homophobia becomes a necessary consequence to regulate homosocial interactions and what is deemed "manly", heterosexual behaviour. At the same time that men live in a state of "homosexual panic" they also live with a coercive double bind of homosocial organizations that promote homosocial bonding (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 88-89). In this section, representations of "coming out" are discussed, focusing on the protagonists' thoughts and reflections about sexuality and masculinity.
In *Mijito*, as mentioned in the introduction to this section, the main character Gustavo does not display a prolonged inner struggle with his sexual orientation, knowing he likes boys from a very early age. He is, however, highly aware of the fact that liking boys is not accepted by everyone. He comes out to his close friends as a child, but censors himself around adults. At one point early on in the novel, Gustavo is upset from thinking he could get AIDS, having grown up with stories about and stereotypes related to the virus. When he is asked by a teacher why he is crying he "suddenly realized [he] was about to tell an adult that [he] loved a boy" and averts the story, coming up with another excuse (Martinez 2012, 15). Because his father uses homophobic slurs aimed at Gustavo, he also learns what it means to look or act "gay" and consciously avoids those behaviours in situations that he perceives as unsafe. *Mijito* differs from the other novels in how the main character reflects on his sexuality during his adolescence. As a teenager he no longer fears reactions from others in the same way as when he was a child, but representations of masculinity, in relation to queerness, continue to be present in the novel.

A novel in which the protagonist's "coming out" is depicted as a negative experience is *We the Animals* (Torres, 2011). The novel follows the protagonist (and narrator) and his two older brothers during their childhood and adolescence in a predominately white area in upstate New York. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist is set apart from his brothers because of his "bookishness", encouraged by his parents to fulfil his "potential" (Torres 2011, 109). As the story progresses, the protagonist becomes more preoccupied with sexuality. Similarly to *Mijito*, queerness is established as something negative through the use of homophobic slurs during the protagonist's childhood. He keeps his sexuality a secret, documenting it in a journal that the family eventually finds. As a result, he is institutionalized by his parents to be "fixed", his sexuality representing something shameful, but ultimately amendable (Torres 2011, 122).

*Aristotle and Dante discover the secrets of the Universe* (Alire Sáenz, 2012) follows Aristotle (henceforth referred to as Ari) and Dante as the two Mexican-American teenage boys become friends, fall in love and trying to figure out what it means to be Mexican-American. In the novel (henceforth *Aristotle and Dante*) sexuality is represented as one of the main obstacles for the two title characters in achieving the Latino masculinity they both believe they should be striving for. While Dante is quicker to accept his sexual orientation than Ari, he is more anxious about the effects it will have on his parents. However, this might be connected to Dante's experiences of failing at being a "real" Mexican in other ways. He is unable to speak Spanish, light-skinned and
belongs to the "wrong" socioeconomic class. When his mother's pregnancy is announced, Dante views this as a new opportunity for his parents; Dante believes the pregnancy is a new chance for them to have a "real" Mexican child, who will succeed in being the right kind of boy. Towards the end of the novel, Ari has a conversation with Sam, Dante's father:

He was so happy you were going to have another baby. And not just because he was going to be a big brother. He said 'he has to be a boy and he has to like girls.' That's what he said. So that you could have grandchildren. So that you can be happy (Alire Sáenz 2012, 303).

To me, Ari and Sam's conversation shows that Dante has a clear idea of what is needed to be happy, and that he fails to fulfil the conventions of familial happiness. Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed argues that we orientate ourselves in particular directions - meaning that we are always facing something specific while being turned away from something else - and are expected to align ourselves with others, follow the expected lifelines in order to stay in line. Falling out of line requires a "turn" away from the perceived "right" and expected direction, and an initial disorientation before finding a new direction to face and familiarize with. By following lines, we also reproduce them. This reproduction takes on a concrete, literal nature: part of the normative, straight, reproductive lifestyle is creating new life that will also continue along the same lines (Ahmed 2006, 11-17). Following Ahmed's theory, I interpret Dante's "queerness" as deviating from the lines in multiple ways: he not only deviates from the expected, normative sexual orientation, but this deviation also ensures that he will not produce the new life needed to further reproduce the lines. His attraction to, in this case, cis men is a "dead end" in terms of biological reproduction in a traditional, nuclear family sense. By failing to stay in line, Dante believes himself to be a failure as a son and sees his new sibling as a new chance for his parents to have a child that can stay in line and also reproduce. Sexuality is one of the major ways in which Dante fails to achieve the Mexicanness he idealizes, and reproduction constitutes a concrete way through which he conceptualizes his failure: he sees happiness as so intrinsically tied to staying in line and reproducing the lines that he not only fails himself but his family.

For Ari and Dante, issues of sexuality often revolve around, and are solved with aid from, their families. Dante is inadvertently outed to his parents in connection to a violent attack: a group of neighbourhood boys catch Dante kissing another boy, and he ends up in the hospital after they attack him. Their parents' positive reactions to Dante's sexuality surprises both Ari and Dante; more than anything, Dante's parents are sad that he did not feel he could tell them sooner.
Even after Sam's open acceptance of his son's sexuality in his discussion with Ari, Ari turns defensive when talking to Dante's mother, Mrs Quintana, and is quick to tell her that "there are worse things in the world than boys who like to kiss other boys" (Alire Sáenz 2012, 307). Following Dante's stay in the hospital, Ari's parents approach their son about the boys' - at that stage, platonic - relationship in an attempt to convince him that they are also accepting of Ari's sexuality. After Dante is attacked, Ari is still in denial about his own sexuality, but his parents' openness leads him to realise that he is in love with his friend. Ari's father tells him:

> If you keep running, it will kill you. [...] Ari, the problem isn't just that Dante's in love with you. The real problem - for you, anyway - is that you're in love with him. [...] Why would you risk you're own life to save Dante if you didn't love him (Alire Sáenz 2012, 348)?

During the conversation that the above quote is from, Ari's parents make it clear that they love him unconditionally. Having already lost Ari's older brother (to prison) they are determined to prove to him that being in love with Dante is not enough for them to reject him, and that it is nothing to be ashamed of. In the above quote, Ari's father is attempting to convince Ari that "the problem" is not an actual problem, but an easily solved one; it is not Ari's orientation that is the problem, but rather his failure to recognize this desire. The novel not only shows positive representations of queer characters - without sugar coating the real dangers LGBTQ people face - but also includes positive parental support. Different stereotypes or assumed positions are simultaneously questioned: the straight, ladies-man Latino, and the conservative, narrow-minded parents. Compulsory heterosexuality is challenged both by the queer desire of the boys and by the easy parental acceptance of Ari and Dante's relationship and sexualities.

In *Chulito* (Rice-González 2011), the title character is a 16-year-old Puerto Rican living in South Bronx with his mother Carmen, having dropped out of high school to work full-time with drug dealing alongside his friends. The novel is centred on Chulito's coming out process, from a stage of living in full denial to coming out to his family and friends. The first person Chulito more or less comes out to - by admitting his feelings for the other boy, rather than explicitly saying he is queer - is Carlos, Chulito's childhood friend and eventual boyfriend, whose reciprocated feelings are fundamental for Chulito's self-acceptance. Chulito's coming out process is gradual. Before coming to terms with his feelings for Carlos, Chulito has a narrow-minded, stereotypical view of gay men as feminine. He also thinks of gay men as predominately white, which also carries negative connotations, and as people who are stigmatized and punished by his
community. Through conversations with Carlos and Julio, one of the few openly gay men in the neighbourhood, as well as Julio's colleague and friend Brick, Chulito's perception of gay men and what it means to be gay begins to shift. Having the emotional support from other men, and the possibility to speak openly about his thoughts and feelings, allows Chulito to reflect on and re-evaluate his own position in relation to queerness.

When Chulito comes out to his mother Carmen, her reaction is neither the instantly positive one of the parents in Aristotle and Dante, nor the supportive one Julio, Carlos and Brick, but it is not the wholly negative reaction Chulito had feared:

When he'd played this scene over and over in his mind, there had been tears, but also rage and it usually got to a point where Carmen would throw him out. But here it was happening and the smell of coffee and the touch of her hand gave him hope that his mother would come around. - Maybe we could help each other because I ain't got this all figured out either (Rice-González 2011, 308).

While Carmen is apprehensive and tells her son she needs some time to process his confession, she does not react the way Chulito had imagined. Furthermore, she also reacts lovingly by touching him, and remarking that "on the bright side," Chulito is in love with Carlos, a boy who she knows and loves, and can accept a healthy and good partner for her child. Because Carlos' mother Maria and Carmen are friends, Maria is able to provide the comfort and support Carmen needs to accept her son. While Carmen does not fully understand her son's sexuality, his choice of a, to her, known and loved partner that represents a healthier and more respectable lifestyle in contrast to the life Chulito otherwise leads, makes the revelation easier to accept. For Carmen, and Maria, Carlos' sexuality is compensated for by his choice to attend college and that he never got involved with the otherwise expected lifestyle of young Latinos in the neighbourhood. While Carlos fails to achieve the ideal of the local men, it is this failure that makes him more acceptable to their mothers.

Although his choice of partner is a "bright side" to his mother, Chulito's sexual orientation is at odds with his already established persona as a "tough guy". He is frequently privy to homophobic comments aimed at other people, while simultaneously developing romantic feelings for Carlos, who is openly gay. He is coerced into having sex with a woman, in a threesome with his friend and boss Kaz and Kaz's friend Yolanda, because if he remains a virgin for too long, he is not considered man enough and will be labelled gay. Sexual prowess acts as a "manhood insurance" for both Kaz and Chulito: by having sex with Yolanda, Chulito proves he
is not gay. Similarly, Kaz is allowed to do things that normally would not be sanctioned straight man behaviour and dress in a way that is perceived as flamboyant: "Nobody said shit about his flamboyance when it came to dressing because he had the women and the babies to steer them away from taggin' him a 'mo" (Rice-González 2011, 128).

Masculinity theorist Michael Kimmel argues that masculinity, in many ways, is a largely homosocial enactment. Masculinity, while defined through homosocial interaction, is also signified by homophobia. Kimmel describes homophobia as more than just the fear of homosexual men or being label as such, also including the fear of other men and their "emasculating" powers in general (Kimmel 2006, 5). While the threesome between Kaz, Chulito and Yolanda is meant to function as a display of heterosexuality for both Kaz and Chulito, it also functions in an oppositional manner due to the focus on the two men. In her theorization of erotic triangles, Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that the bond that links the two "rivals", in this case Chulito and Kaz, is as strong as that between either of the rivals and the "beloved" (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 21). In the threesome in Chulito, Yolanda is the intended object of desire. Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that patriarchal heterosexuality uses women as instruments for cementing bonds between men and that the true partners in the male-male-female erotic triangle are the two men (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 25-26). This point is made explicit by the fact that Chulito does have feelings for Kaz: Kaz is the actual object of desire and Yolanda merely a means for covering up Chulito's attraction to men in general and to Kaz in particular. As this example illuminates, heterosexual prowess becomes a means of proving masculinity to other boys, by distancing oneself from homosexuality and related effeminacy. The "tough guy" narrative that Chulito feels a need to fit into (lest he be exiled like Carlos or bullied like Julio) dictates that "real men" are straight and perform a particular kind of masculinity, void of anything soft or effeminate. In her study of black masculinity, sociologist Kristie A. Ford argues that the idea of the "thug" is intrinsically tied to heterosexuality, meaning that the closer you are to performing the "thug persona", less is needed to further prove heterosexuality (Ford 2011, 47).

Chulito and Kaz's manifestation of manhood through the threesome with Yolanda also allows for displays of brotherly affection, such as Kaz kissing Chulito's cheek, without it being interpreted as gay. However, because Chulito has feelings for Kaz (and Carlos), he begins to feel uncomfortable with Kaz's expressions of affection:
Chulito struggled to not cross the pato line. Now [Kaz]'s brotherly kiss felt weird even though at times they'd sit in their underwear and smoke weed or sit side by side near the Bronx River sipping Hennessey and watching the sun rise. They were just two niggas hanging'. They didn't cross the pato line and Chulito could keep his feelings in check. [...] - Just don't kiss me on the block in front of everyone, O.K.? (Rice-González 2011, 63-64)

The quote above signals Chulito relating to, and attempting to navigate, the thin line between their actions being seen simply as homosocial bonding or the more stigmatized and feared homosexuality. Because Chulito is attracted to men, he becomes hyperaware of his actions in a way that differs from Kaz. Kaz is more comfortable and lenient in his behaviour towards other men because his sexual behaviour already rewards him a kind of "manhood insurance". By being deemed as fulfilling most ideals, some "deviating" behaviour is permitted by other men, but the narrative makes it clear that Chulito could ultimately be revealed as queer and therefore shows him avoiding any potentially suspicious behaviour.

As previously mentioned, other men - namely Julio and Brick - provide emotional support and alternative representations of queer men to Chulito that causes his perception of queerness to shift. Meeting other queer boys, seeing "different kinds of gay" as it is described in the novel, further shakes Chulito's ideas of masculinity (Rice-González 2011, 274). Once Chulito has begun to open up to Carlos about his feelings, he accompanies Carlos to the Village where he meets other queer youth. In the Village, Chulito feels at once like "an outsider and part of a tribe" (Rice-González 2011, 274). Seeing other boys, especially boys similar to Chulito, challenges his stereotypical views of sexuality and makes his (in)between position less intimidating and threatening, making it a possible and (mostly) harmless one instead. At the beginning of the novel, Chulito is reluctant to cross any boundaries: as long as he does not act on his attraction to men, he can still claim straightness (Rice-González 2011, 72). When Chulito and Carlos finally go on a date, that boundary-crossing is depicted as a revolt against what they know: "And kiss they did, defying their neighbourhood, defying their macho Latino culture, and embracing each other" (Rice-González 2011, 173). Their relationship constitutes a defiance of the masculinity ideals and homophobia that they grew up with and that exists on a societal and cultural level - and not only as a part of Latino culture, but Anglo American culture - as well as locally.

When Chulito comes out to his friend Kaz, the other man is relieved, having thought Chulito wanted out of drug dealing, and even criticizes the church, its judgement and other men: "The
problem is that fuckheads like Damian like to start trouble. I got your back, bro, no matter what" (Rice-González 2011, 279-280). Several of his other friends react somewhat positively as well, with Davey saying that "Chulito's still our boy" and Chin-Chin accepting gay people as long as "they don't try no shit". Papo is the only one in Chulito's immediate circle to react negatively, and Kaz is quick to defend Chulito, by saying "why do you care unless you're interested" (Rice-González 2011, 284-286). The others ridicule Papo’s reaction by implying queerness in Papo himself and Chin-chin's reaction shows why. Papo's anger is seen as irrational in the context - suspect in that it is too fearful - but Chin-Chin's comment shows that they still draw clear lines between homosocial and homosexual. Some transgression is allowed, as long as key cornerstones to masculinity are maintained: one being that Chulito is still "their boy" and on their side, and the other being that his queerness, and Carlos' queerness, is kept at a distance. Queerness is permitted as long as it is contained, which is further discussed in the next part of this section, exploring disciplining measures. Ways in which language, feminization and fetishization is used to mark difference and discipline other men that called fixed categories are norms are also further explored in the next part of this section, (In)betweenness and discipline.

(In)betweenness and discipline

Queerness, as discussed above, causes inner turmoil for the main characters' of the novels. While some of them receive positive reactions from friends and family, it is also made clear that anyone or anything diverting from the norm, whether challenging the norm willingly or not, is object to disciplining measures. The word "queer" in itself describes something different and deviant, worrying the lines of and between categories that are assumed to be static. Egerer's (in)betweenness is signified by this "worrying" element, and Ahmed's lifelines are queered by diversion from the norm, failing to reproduce old lines and instead finding new paths. In the novels, this queerness does not go unchallenged or unpunished. Hierarchies between men, produced and negotiated through homosocial interactions, are disturbed by a perceived nonconformity, a failure to stay in line and act as expected. This section focuses on how the novels describe the (less positive) verbal and physical reactions from other characters' to the boys' coming out, reaction that are often of a confrontatory and disciplining nature.
In *Chulito*, one of Papo's main concerns is that "faggots never know their place" (Rice-González 2011, 284). Earlier in the book, Chulito describes how Julio, another openly gay man in the neighbourhood, is tolerated for two reasons: "The fellas didn't bother Julio because they grew up with him and he kept to his place" (Rice-González 2011, 35). Julio's sexuality is tolerated, though not accepted, in part because of his familiarity to the other men, their past relationship to each other. It is further tolerated because he does not show his sexuality in overly flamboyant ways, and when he does, he is still considered relatively harmless. Carlos is also, to a certain extent, tolerated for knowing his place. Chulito remarks that Carlos used to be well liked before going to college, but that he has since become less popular: the neighbourhood's rejection of Carlos is both due to his sexuality, and the fact that he is "leaving". He is "placed in pato" exile - no one looked at him or talked to him" (Rice-González 2011, 3). Julio and Carlos are tolerated and escape being subjected to physical violence by keeping in their place or being simply ignorable, but they are not fully accepted. They are, however, constantly called homophobic slurs, and subjected to the threat of violence if they act out of line and their sexuality becomes too apparent.

Both the verbal abuse and the constantly present threat of violence functions as a disciplining method, making sure that the hierarchies between the men of the neighbourhood are kept intact. Through domination and intimidation, the men at the top of the hierarchal ladder maintain their positions - verbally reminding everyone of the hierarchies and, with the threat of violence, discouraging any attempts from the subordinate men to challenge the status quo. As previously mentioned, Chulito's friend Chin-Chin argues that it is okay to be gay as long as "they don't try no shit" (Rice-González 2011, 284). Knowing one's place, and keeping in place, is vital to the conditionality of tolerance of Julio and others.

Carlos "falls out of line" in multiple ways, both by being gay and by choosing an unexpected career path by the neighbourhood's standards. He is turned away from most of the lifelines expected of young Latinos in South Bronx, a turn that fails to reproduce heteronormativity as well as the criminalized and short life they lead. Carlos' difference, however, makes him an uneasy presence in several rooms: in his home neighbourhood, his sexuality and his intellect makes him an uncomfortable reminder of difference. At college, he is a man of colour, inevitably

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11 Pato means "gay" in Spanish.
marked by his ethnicity in a predominantly white space, inescapably (in)between positions in both situations.

(In)betweenness, in this study, is a term that English scholar Claudia Egerer uses to describe positions (in)between perceived, binary categories, specifically focusing on ethnicity, positions which cause a "worrying" of lines, or the borders of these categories. Without these (in)between positions, borders and dichotomies are maintained, ideas of home and exile, and homeliness and unhomeliness, remain unchallenged (Egerer 1997, 20-21). Literary scholar Wang Hai further explores the discomfort experienced in and by (in)between positions, arguing that (in)betweenness is not so much a middle-ground between categories, but rather the middle of a line and an act of becoming (Hai 2014, 184). This act of becoming is interpreted as (in)betweenness and a kind of nomadism because of its lack of discipline: nomads are too fluid, too heterogeneous for a time in which people are expected to neatly fit into place and fall in line (Hai 2014, 180). The discomfort of (in)betweenness comes from seeing it as nonconforming behaviour, by defying boundaries, rather than seeing it as a way of becoming in itself. This "worrying", or discomfort, challenges seemingly fixed categories. In Carlos' case, he worries the borders of class and ethnicity by, in the opinion of the other men in the neighbourhood, aspiring to achieve "whiteness". He is (in)between in his position as a college student as well, by worrying the borders of what bodies are expected in a university setting.

Although Carlos "worries" the lines of perceived categories, his sexuality is kept in place as long as he is single, or believed to be with someone who is not from that neighbourhood and who is a man identified as a rich white college kid and therefore inherently different. Furthermore, Carlos only visits his mother from time to time. His sexuality, associated with another time and place, is ignorable when he only comes home for brief periods of time and minds his own business. In Ford's study, the link between "thugs" and heterosexuality also reveals a link between whiteness, femininity and homosexuality, where whiteness functions as a negative opposite to blackness (Ford 2011, 50). English scholar John Alba Cutler also links ethnicity and sexuality, in his presentation of Chicano rhetoric during the 1960s and 1970s. The focus on male self-assertion and heterosexual masculinity constructs diverting behaviour and beliefs as part of an assimilation process, where the diverting party is considered a vendido for following ideals linked to "the American dream" (Alba Cutler 2008, 6). In Ford's study behaviours associated with whiteness are also considered as "selling out" (Ford 2011, 50). Because Carlos is already
following a life path that is considered wrong in the context of *Chulito* by attending college, as well as deviating from the "thug" or "cholo" persona in terms of behaviour and clothes, his sexuality can be attributed to his general "wrongness."

However, when Carlos and Chulito become a couple, their sexuality becomes *excessive* in its obviousness and unavoidability, as it not only ties Carlos' sexuality to the neighbourhood but also includes another "known face". Similarly, Julio is targeted more than usual after featuring Brick, another man from the neighbourhood, in an ad campaign for his travelling agency that is quickly dubbed to be "gay" and "homo thug". It becomes doubly excessive when the queerness is enacted by a couple and by men who, like Chulito and Brick, otherwise enact idealized masculinity, further associating queerness with the identified "us" rather than "them". Excessive displays of non-normative sexual expressions serve as something abject for the other men of the neighbourhood, and forces them to act against the abject. Cultural geographer Robyn Longhurst describes abjection as the feeling of disgust and anxiety at the face of an object, image or fantasy to which one can only react with aversion and nausea. The abject threatens the border of the self and the other: bodily fluids that are expelled are never fully distinguishable from one's self, they are something other, but clearly come from the subject, and become abject as they provoke feelings of disgust (Longhurst 2001, 28-29). To prevent these feelings of abjection, bodies must be controlled, kept as impenetrable shields, and the valorisation of certain body fluids also genders the controlled body. In her study on Asian American masculinity in literature, literary and film theorist Eleanor Ty argues that the abject includes people who are a part of the identified group "but have to be expelled". Ty specifically focuses on the abject elements of ethnicity and sexuality, arguing that racialized queer men are doubly abject. These people are abject others who have to be excluded for disturbing identity and order by forming an (in)between position (Ty 2004, 128). In the context of *Chulito*, Latino ethnicity is not abject in itself. However, the already established link between whiteness and queerness makes queer Latinos particularly abject because it associates queerness - the abject - with an ethnicity otherwise strongly associated with straightness.

Just how abject queer sexuality is perceived varies. In *We the Animals* the abject is repelled: the protagonist is removed from the family and institutionalized after they discover his diary. The family is contaminated by the abject, and the boy must be removed for a time to be "fixed" in order for the whole family to be redeemed (Torres 2011, 123). In *Chulito*, it is possible to
contain the abject feelings towards homosexuality when Carlos and Julio make up isolated incidents of queerness. Carlos is already exiled and Julio is deemed to be relatively harmless because he knows and abides to the set rules. However, when Carlos and Chulito become a couple, the abject is formed: by situating it in that specific time and place, their queerness becomes part of the location, and in its inextricability from the neighbourhood it becomes something abject - undesired, but inevitability there and necessary to relate to. It can no longer be contained and ignored, but rather spills over in its perceived excess, forcing a reaction from the others. It is doubly abject, as queerness can no longer be attributed to Carlos' general aspirations for "whiteness" as it is also a part of Chulito. This abjection causes the lines to be, as Egerer calls it, worried, as it disturbs the boundaries between the concepts of home and exile. Carlos' "pato exile" is revoked through Chulito's status, but this also forces what has previously been seen as something found in others to become a part of the idea of "home" (Egerer 1997, 26).

In the universe of the novels, the threat of being forced into "pato exile" is one posed to all men. Kosofsky Sedgwick describes homophobia as a mechanism for regulating the behaviour of the many (all men) by the specific oppression of the few (gay men). Because the boundaries between homosociality and homosexuality are difficult to discern - as Chulito's thoughts about the "pato line" showcases - homophobia posits a disproportionate leverage over all bonding between men (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 88). Both for Ari and Chulito, there is a threat of being labelled as "gay" by association because they both have best friends that are open about their sexual orientation. In Aristotle and Dante, when it is only Dante who has come out, he fears that this threat means that Ari will someday end their friendship and leave him. Dante argues that "someday, someone will walk up to you and say: 'Why are you hanging out with that queer?';" and that it will scare Ari away, which he promises it will not (Alire Sáenz 2012, 248). The idea of being "gay by association" both pathologizes homosexuality and displays how easy it is to fall down in a social hierarchy based solely on assumptions about sexual orientation. In Chulito, any attempt to defend Carlos is immediately turned against Chulito and other boys refer to Carlos as his boyfriend (Rice-González 2011, 3). The comment is teasing, but also contains a clear threat: defending gayness is as bad as being gay, and Chulito can just as easily be forced into the "pato exile" Carlos is in.

The most extreme, negative reaction is depicted in We the Animals. In the novel, the protagonist keeps his sexuality secret in a diary, a "catalog of imagined perversions" that his
family eventually finds (Torres 2011, 116). He is sent away and institutionalized in an attempt to "fix" him (Torres 2011, 123). When he objects to the family's decision, claiming that he has rights, his father simply responds with "you got rights. What you don't got is power (Torres 2011, 120)." In this quote, homophobia as a regulating mechanism of homosocial bonding takes on a very literal nature. Paps, the protagonist's father, makes use of his superior position to the boy and sends him away to control his behaviour.

Other negative reactions represented in the novels include queer bashing. Incidents of queer bashing - the verbal or physical abuse of people perceived as LGBTQ by the aggressor - take place both in Aristotle and Dante and Chulito. In Aristotle and Dante, Dante is attacked after he is seen kissing another boy. In Chulito, a larger fight happens after Chulito and Carlos come out together to the neighbourhood, caused by the reactions of some of the other men. In both of these situations there is retaliatory incidents of violence, which are enacted and reacted to in rather differing ways in the two novels. Building on Kosofsky Sedgwick's argument that homophobia is a regulating mechanism of unpredictable and unstable power in relation to the regulated "crime"; queer bashing can be interpreted as a reactionary and defensive response to displays of crossing the "pato line" (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 88). In psychologist Hans Toch's discussion of hypermasculine violence, he argues that two objectives are believed to be achievable through assault: first, it displays the assaulter's contempt for the other man's "demeaning femininity" and, two, it reassures the assaulter that he is different from the "fearful" target of the attack. Fear, being considered an unmanly emotion, is replaced by violence and a manly anger. "The rule becomes, 'big boys don't cry'; they have temper tantrums" (Toch 1998, p. 173). In the case of homophobic violence, Dante and the boy he is kissing are fearful subjects that the other boys react to. As fear or any other "feminine" emotions are prohibited, they lash out violently. Both attacks lead to retaliatory violence, but these retaliations are described differently in the novels. In the case of Aristotle and Dante, Ari's retaliation after the attack on Dante is largely condemned, and Ari himself sees it as a loss of control:

Sometimes, you do things and you do them not because you're thinking but because you're feeling. Because you're feeling too much. And you can't always control the things you do when you're feeling too much. Maybe the difference between being a boy and being a man is that boys couldn't control the awful things they sometimes feel. And men could. That afternoon, I was just a boy. Not even close to being a man. I was a boy. A boy who went crazy. Crazy, crazy (Alire Sáenz 2014, 310).
Though Ari's violence could have been understood as legitimate, due to its retaliatory purposes, and in line with masculine aggression, it is instead represented as a loss of control that negates his status as a man. A "real man" has control over his feelings, and by extension, himself. This bodily control is something Ari has been working on for the entirety of the novel - he works out, lifting weights, to the extent that his mother notices, and points out, that he does it whenever he is angry or upset, "lifting weights and moping" (Alire Sáenz 2014, 248). This physical strength plays a role not only in exercising violence, but also as a means of controlling and preventing emotional leakage. The idealized male body is not only a strong and fit body, it is also a tough body in control of emotions associated with femininity.

Several aspects influence Ari’s views of masculinity. On the one hand, he relies on the common and stereotypical imagery of Mexican and Chicano men, as well as other men, in the U.S. On the other hand, he also relies on influences from homosocial interaction with other boys his age and older men. Three older men are key in Ari's doing of gender: his father, his brother, and Dante's father Sam. For the duration of the novel, Ari's older brother Bernardo is incarcerated for murder and rarely spoken of. Bernardo's fate represents a bad kind of masculinity that functions to maintain a certain aversion to the idea of hypermasculinity. Bernardo's excessive hypermasculinity regulates Ari's idea of masculinity by setting boundaries between good and bad behaviour (Alire Sáenz 2012, 96). Sam and Ari's father represent two quite different kinds of men and fathers, and Ari is surprised when he discovers they have befriended each other. Sam and Dante's way of interacting with each other is a catalyst for Ari, making him more preoccupied with his relationship to his own father. Ari's doing of gender and idea of masculinity is heavily influenced by his father. Ari's father, a war veteran, is frequently described as silent. His silence is a contrast to how Sam is represented, being a more easy-going, extroverted parent who is actively involved in his son's life. Ari's father does not speak of his war experiences, or much at all in general. Though Ari despises his father's silence, it is also something he emulates through exercising away his feelings rather than talking about them. Ari is simultaneously able to acknowledge that his father's behaviour is not healthy for anyone in the family while also aspiring to keep his own feelings silent and under control. He is disturbed by Dante's ability to cry in front of another guy (Ari himself), and by how Dante's tears affects him emotionally as well. Sociologist Tracy Xavia Karner's study of oral histories of military masculinity shows that the interviewed men pattern their doing of masculinity after their fathers,
in a way which complies with their peers, even when they are able to identify their father's way of doing masculinity as destructive. This admission, however, affects not only the men's idealized view of their fathers, but of themselves as well, showing a continued struggle to balance the ideal view of manhood and their own lived experience (Xavia Karner 1998, 202-205). Sam and Dante's entrance into Ari's life further disturbs the balance between his idea of manhood, influenced by his father's behaviour, and his preoccupation with his father's way of being.

It is not until Ari breaks Julian's nose that something changes between Ari and his father. When Ari comes home, Julian’s parents have already contacted his parents. After he tells them about why he did it - that Julian and the other boys had beat up Dante - his parents comfort him and his father tells him that he is "fighting this war in the worst possible way" (Alire Sáenz 2014, 319). Following Dante's beating, their relationship shifts and Ari's father begins to open up both about Ari's older, imprisoned brother, and his war experience. Ari begins to understand his father's silence differently - not as unfeeling, but rather careful. "And I loved my father too, for the careful way he spoke. I came to understand that my father was a careful man. To be careful with people and with words was a rare and beautiful thing" (Alire Sáenz 2014, 324). When Ari begins to read his father's silence as careful rather than distant, as well meeting Dante - who, on several occasions, cries in front of Ari - and Sam, he begins to re-evaluate what it means to be a man. Changing his views on masculinity constitutes what Ahmed refers to as a reorientation for Ari, meeting different men that all perform masculinity differently from himself and from each other enforces a turn away from the line of familiar masculinity (Ahmed 2001, 55).

In Chulito, the bashing happens after Chulito comes out to the neighbourhood and his friend Papo becomes violent - both as a reaction to Chulito and Carlos kissing and holding hands, and to the disinterest and acceptance of Chulito and Papo's mutual friends. This fight is larger than that in Aristotle and Dante, as several bystanders - from the nearby car wash and travel agency, as well as Chulito's friend Brick and the neighbourhood drag queen Puti - become involved, and the police end up having to break them up. Just as with the example with the boys that attacked Dante, Papo's violence is both a manifestation of contempt or disgust towards homosexuality, and a means of distancing himself from it. By violently broadcasting how he feels about homosexuality, Papo attempts to lift what Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to as a leverage of homophobia over all men and clear himself of any potential accusations (Kosofsky Sedgwick
1985, 88). However, Papo also reproduces this leverage by displaying the unpredictability and disproportionality of homophobic violence through his acts.

Apart from the difference in scope of the fights in *Aristotle and Dante* and in *Chulito*, there is also a difference in reaction to the fights. In *Aristotle and Dante*, Ari feels bad about the retaliatory violence, and his father acts a moral compass for how to "correctly" fight for Dante. In *Chulito*, Julio motivates his participation in the fight with that "they need to know they cannot fuck with us" and Chulito says that he "will fight this every day if I have to" (Rice-González 2011, 296-297). In the context of Chulito, the homophobia and the violent fight that it leads to is a battle for power and dominance. The previous compromise - where peace is only upheld when the subordinate knows their place - is insufficient. In the case of *Aristotle and Dante*, there are other structures and capital in place that allows for different forms of mediation. Their context is in general less violently oppressive: the attack on Dante is a rare occurrence, rather than a common reaction to difference, even when weighed down by difficulty navigated masculinity ideals. Ford links the likelihood of homophobia and related violence to a heightened importance of masculinity, which is both linked to race and socioeconomic context (Ford 2011, 58). Because of the socioeconomic vulnerability of the boys in *Chulito*, they are more in line with imagery of hypermasculinity, and its related violence, for self-assertion and sense of self. Sociologist Victor Rios argues that "real man" status is achieve by passing constant masculinity tests, through which young boys are taught male-coded behaviours that begin a cycle of deviance and punishment (Rios 2006, 152). In the context of *Chulito*, both the deviant behaviour and the consequential punishment are expected, sanctioning Chulito and the others' attempt to fight back.

While Chulito and Ari are both willing to fight for themselves, and for Carlos and Dante respectively, they are both torn between fearing difference (or being marked as different) and their reluctance to be like other men. When Ari sees other teenage boys around him, and older men, he sees what he does not want to become: "I just didn't belong. I think it embarrassed the hell out of me that I was a guy. And it really depressed me that there was the distinct possibility that I was going to grow up and be like one of those assholes" (Alire Sáenz 2012, 16). At first, Ari reacts negatively to what he considers to be feminine behaviour from Dante, such as crying. He acknowledges, to a certain extent, that there is something about masculinity ideals that he feels uncomfortable with, but struggles to accept Dante's non-conforming behaviour. Similarly, in *Chulito*, there is a clear wish for escape from violent masculinity. In his process of coming to
terms with his sexuality, Chulito spends a lot of time thinking about what is means to be a man. In a dream, he imagines a world where "the macho\textsuperscript{12} has been outlawed. Police will take any man that achieves a certain score on the Macho Meter away to be "made better", and a news cast has the inventor of the Meter explaining that "all men have macho in them. Even gay ones, but there are varying degrees, and while most forms of macho are lethal to the progression of the world and society, there are some acceptable levels, very low levels, that can sometimes be useful" (Rice-Gonzalez 2011, 236).

As previously discussed, meeting Dante means Ari can turn away from the line he is expected, or expects himself, to reproduce, and this warrants a reorientation. The initial line that Ari attempts to reproduce has simultaneously positive connotations of being "normal" and familiar, but is also associated with a discomfort and aversion. Ari knows that he is expected to reproduce it, and aspires to fit into the mold of how he believes men should be, while also being aware of his dislike of other boys. After meeting Dante and his father Sam, as well as developing a new relationship with his own father, Ari also changes his view on whose opinion matters. Early on in the novel, he is more concerned with what other boys think of him, while fearing to become like them. As he develops new, unconditional friendships he becomes less concerned with other people and feels less of a need to "perform" a certain kind of masculinity.

Apart from (threats of) violence, feminizing language serves as a disciplining measure. In Chulito, Kevin describes Carlos and Kevin’s relationship as sibling-like, and he tells Chulito that "I love him like a sister" (Rice-González 2011, 202). Furthermore, Julio is on multiple occasions referred to as "La Julio", a feminine pronoun commonly attached to women's names. In Mijito, Gustavo is repeatedly feminized - both explicitly maliciously by other men, and more benevolently by his sister Angel. While neither Angel nor Kevin exhibit malicious intentions, the tendency to feminize gay men is a kind of domination technique through which hierarchies are established. In We the Animals, feminizing language is also used as a disciplining measure during the narrator's childhood. The narrator believes that his brothers are simultaneously proud, jealous and afraid of him because of his "bookishness" and "potential" to go somewhere else, and he is punished for his difference. He is referred to in feminizing terms as such as "girlie", and told that he is "twisting up [his] panties" when he shows concern at their behaviour (Torres 2011, 12

\textsuperscript{12} Though the word "macho" has come to take on another, very context-bound meaning in English, it is worth noting that macho originally means \textit{man}, rather than a specific expression of masculinity, in Spanish.
Masculine men are rewarded a higher status for their gender expression, whereas feminine men are too much like women to attain the same status. Devaluing femininity, and associating it with undervalued characteristics such as fragility and vulnerability, affects both men and women, regardless of sexual orientation. Emasculation reminds men that masculinity and status is something that you can lose, and the polar opposite of being a man is being a woman. In both these novels, feminization functions as a prelude to the stronger negative reactions to come, establishing a disciplining and homophobic environment in them.

From the threat of violence to feminizing language, there are a variety of disciplining methods between men displayed in the novels. Each of these methods functions both as a way of reminding everyone involved of the desirable mold for masculinity and that some transgressions or breaches are may be punished. These disciplining measure are however not fully accepted: in the novels, they are both disputed and challenged. The boys are constantly relating to masculinity ideals, both aspire to achieve them and questioning them, and the retaliatory violence in *Chulito* and *Aristotle and Dante* are concrete protests to disciplining attempts exercised by other men.

To conclude this section I would like to return to Alonso Gallo's theory on narrative spaces. By interacting with common stereotypes that are both internalized by Latinos and adopted by non-Latinos, such as the womanizing, virile and utterly masculine "cholo","thug", the text is made accessible and relatable. This relatability and accessibility allows the text to be included in the "marketable exoticism" of the Latino cultural boom. However, simultaneously they carve out the narrative space where writers can challenge these stereotypes. Both in the representation of queer sexualities and the overall positive reactions to queerness, ideas of compulsory heterosexuality and widespread homophobia are challenged. The homophobic, disciplinary measures that are depicted also serve as a critique of masculinity ideals: the people exhibiting homophobic tendencies are rarely represented as the "good guys" in the novels. The "good guys" are the people who unlearn homophobic behaviour and reformulate their understanding of masculinity and sexuality.
**Ethnic authenticity in a certain time and place**

As discussed in the previous section, representations of sexuality play an important part in identity formation and figures as a site of contention in the novels. For literature that is in fact marketed as "ethnic", the centrality of ethnicity and identity is evident. Belonging is a reoccurring theme, both in relation to ethnicity, masculinity and geography. The following section studies how, more precisely, ethnic identities are reproduced, explored and negotiated in relation to masculinity.

In the previous section, Alonso Gallo's ideas of engaging with and deconstructing stereotypes was a point of departure in the analysis of the texts, and her theorization of narrative spaces within Latino literature continues to influence this part of the study. Stereotypes and ideas regarding authenticity are continuously examined in the texts, along with (in)betweenness and hierarchies between men. Topics that are explored in this section are what is represented as "authentic" Latinidad, representations of whiteness, and the role of location and geography in the novels. Finally, depictions of racialization, hypermasculinity and ideas of animal likeness is explored. Similarly to the previous section, this section first focuses on the inner turmoil and experienced pressure of the protagonists, and then goes on to focus more on outer pressure, stereotyping and the consequences.

Gloria Anzaldúa writes about reclaiming one's tongue - in this case, the bilingual or multilingual tongue - as a way of unapologetically acknowledging and legitimizing one's own existence (Anzaldúa 1987, 81). Several of the authors in this study use their own blend of English and Spanish in their novels. Language, bilingualism in particular, plays an interesting and vital role in determining identity, whether in regards to gender or ethnicity. The different languages are used to reinforce each other, while also cementing an ethno-linguistic belonging. The novels discuss ethnicity in relation to nationality, and there are processes of dis-identification with "Americans" both implicitly and explicitly present in the texts, and this dis-identification reinforces the notion of the American as white by default. These processes also entail repudiations of "the American way of life" for several of the characters, while others strive towards achieving certain levels of respectability according to white/American middle-class values, an endeavour often conditioned by their ability to pass as white. There is a clear ambivalence regarding ethnicity and the framing of being Latino or being American as two polar opposites.
**Ethnic identity and language**

While there are other issues that also cause conflict in the characters' identifications, such as sexuality or physical appearances, language is key. Language plays an important part throughout the novels. For the characters that are fluent or proficient in Spanish, language serves as a means of expressing oneself fully, a way of asserting one's identity and describing one's sense of self where English is insufficient. The languages are switched between with ease, as though they are one. However, for some of the characters, asserting their identities through language is an area of conflict. For the *agringados*\(^{13}\), their lacking knowledge in Spanish becomes a symbol that they are not Latino enough, not authentic enough. The linguistic link to ethnic identity, and the state of (in)betweenness of being a Latino in a non-Latin-American country, makes linguistic failure particularly shameful. As Gloria Anzaldúa describes it:

> Often with *mexicanas y latinas* we'll speak English as a neutral language. Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or conferences. Yet, at the same time, we're afraid that the other will think we're *agringados* because we don't speak Chicano Spanish. We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the 'real' Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos (Anzaldúa 1987, 80).

There is a fear of having to showcase one's Spanish-speaking abilities to other Latinos and to fail in front of them, but deciding to not showcase it at all is a definite failure. Ethnic authenticity and its link to language is something that I myself have thought a lot about during my life, especially as an adolescent. While being a part of a Latino diaspora differs from being a part of the Latino population in the U.S. (especially in how the populations came to be), language preservation serves an important part in maintaining one's ethnic identity when removed from one's ancestral geographical and cultural dwelling. Language is an on-going process created through interactions, and is always a part of a specific context. Speaking patterns, dialects and languages are part of signalling our experiences and backgrounds to others: because dialects and language are so intrinsically tied to geographical and cultural identity, language also becomes a vital part in which identities you feel comfortable or capable of claiming. In *Aristotle and Dante*, as well as *The Second Time We Met*, language and bilingualism are particularly prevalent themes.

In *Aristotle and Dante*, Dante speaks English *too well* to be a "real" Mexican-American, his father Sam is a contradiction in his occupation as an English professor, and in *The Second Time We Met* Asher speaks barely any Spanish despite being a Latino in California. In a conversation

\(^{13}\) *Agringados* means "Gringo-nized" Latinos.
between Dante and Ari, that starts out being about shoes: Dante dislikes wearing them, and points out that the Japanese remove their shoes outside while Ari notes that they are not Japanese, but Mexican. Both Dante and Ari's own, as well as other people's perception, of what it means to be Mexican is revealed. Ari argues that they are Mexicans, because that is where their grandparents come from and they speak Spanish. Dante objects that they neither live in or know much about Mexico, and do not speak Spanish particularly well, to which Ari responds "speak for yourself, Dante. You are such a pocho" (Alire Sández 2011, 44).

- Okay, so maybe I'm a pocho. [...] [Mom] says there are laws. And then she talks about the disease I could get [If I don't wear shoes]. And then she says that people will think I'm just another poor Mexican. [...] She hates that people might mistake me for another poor Mexican. And then she says 'Being Mexican doesn't have to mean you're poor.' And I just want to tell her: 'Mom, this isn't about poor. And it isn't about being Mexican. I just don't like shoes' (Alire Sández 2012, 45).

In the above quote, several views on Mexicanness are discernable. First, a Mexican that does not speak Spanish well (or at all), is represented as not-quite Mexican. For Ari, Mexicanness is strongly connected to language. Second, Mexican stereotypes still affects the pochos of the world, because they still "look" Mexican. Mrs Quintana, Dante's mother, is aware of other people's perceptions of Mexicans, the stereotype of Mexicans as poor, sick and filthy, and how this limits Dante's ability to express himself. A white child walking barefoot during summer time does not invoke the same ideas of disease as seeing a Mexican child does. Mrs Quintana's concern shows that there is a need for the family, as Mexican Americans, to constantly compensate for and prove stereotypes wrong even in everyday actions, in something as simple as wearing shoes, in a way white people do not have to. The idea of the poor, disease-carrying Mexican is an idea with roots in early 20th century racial science and, Natalia Molina argues, efforts to raise support for limited migration in reforms of the Immigration Act. Constructing "the Mexican" as disease-carrying is a part of constructing Mexicans, and by extension other Latinos, as a group of "undesirables". Mexicans constitute a necessary workforce, but is an undesirable population in terms of citizenship, and the strict policing of the Mexico-U.S. border is a part of the U.S. nation state project (Molina 2006, 27-28). Mrs Quintana's fear is that Dante's actions reinforce stereotypes that they are otherwise trying to dispel (or, at the very least, avoid) and that this will have negative effects not only on him, but other people labelled as Latinos.

14 Pocho, as explained by Ari in the novel, means "half-assed Mexican". It can also mean Americanized Mexican or Mexicans that have lost their culture.
Out of all the novels, *Aristotle and Dante* is the one most explicitly focused on ethnic belonging. Both Ari and Dante have an ambivalent relationship to being Mexican-American, as they both feel they "fail" in different ways. They share a position of (in)betweenness - too Mexican to be white, and by extension Americans, but too Americanized to consider themselves "proper" Mexicans. Apart from their ambivalence towards their own Mexicanness in relation to their ability to speak Spanish, there is a disconnect between Ari and Dante ideas of themselves and their ideas of "real" Mexicans. Dante's appearance is an area of yet another failure to him, reinforcing the idea that he is not a "real" Mexican. When Dante remarks that Ari looks a little pale, Ari responds that he still looks more Mexican than Dante (Alire Sáenz 2012, 72).

Rodriguez argues that "brown is the colour most people in the United States associate with Latin America. [...] In Latin America, what makes me brown is that I am made of the conquistador and the Indian. My brown is a reminder of conflict" (Rodriguez 2002, xii). The colour brown has become a major signifier for Latinoness and those falling outside of this category are read as something else. In the U.S., Afrolatinos are often read as African American, their Latino ancestry ignored, and while white Latinos enjoy white privilege their Latino identities (outside of Latin America) are less likely to be acknowledged. While Dante is able to recognize the privilege of being a well-spoken and in part white passing Latino in the U.S., the same privilege makes it difficult for him to feel comfortable claiming the Latino identity that he feels a need to perform. Being a pocho puts Dante in an (in)between position of being neither Mexican nor American enough. To make up for failure in one area, compensating in another is necessary. However, as Dante lacks the right looks and language - at least, in comparison to Ari - he struggles to find a position that is comfortable or achieve what he believes to be the right kind of Latino identity.

Ari does not exhibit the same insecurities regarding language and appearance. However, he is aware that he does not live up to the stereotypical idea of the Mexican man, his lifestyle too white, too middle class, and too "nice". When his mother asks him about his plans during the summer holidays, he responds that "I'm going to join a gang [...] I'm Mexican. Isn't that what we do?" (Alire Sáenz 2012, 8). As previously discussed in relation to sexuality, Ari initially aspires to achieve a more traditional, tough kind of masculinity, while simultaneously being reluctant to become like other guys. In his conversation with his mother, Ari sarcastically evokes the imagery

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15 Afrolatinos are also especially hidden in the history of many Latin America nations, along with Asian Latinos.
of the "thug" or "cholo" as a hypermasculine, stereotypical figuration of Latino men. Here, the stereotype is toyed with: on the one hand, it is an attainable path that is also expected by others. On the other, the joking way in which Ari brings it up to his mother instantly rejects the idea. To Ari, joining a gang is a laughable concept because he is "too nice" and being part of a gang is not an integral part of being Mexican. At the same time, he is ambivalent about gangs, as the toughness associated with being a "cholo", and the "real man" status it would achieve is also desirable to Ari.

Hence, Ari and Dante are not able to live up to their own expectations of how Mexicans should be, but neither are they able nor desire to achieve the white Americanness that disrupts their Mexicanness in the first place. Dante compares Ari to Spider-Man, because he has such a tragic vision of life. "I'm just more Mexican [...] Mexicans are a tragic people" Ari responds, and goes on to tell Dante that he is "the optimistic American" (Alire Sáenz 2012, 20). While the concept of "the American dream" dictates that being American is something desirable - and that the optimistic American can achieve his goals and desires if he just tries hard enough - Ari and Dante reject the notion that they are included in the American community. Whiteness, as previously discussed, is associated with femininity, an unwelcome characteristic when attempting to achieve manhood. It is therefore not desirable for Dante and Ari in their attempts to perform any kind of Latino masculinity. It is better to be a half-assed Mexican, than a full-on American. Even though their disconnect to (white) American culture and identity is greater than their disconnect to Mexican identity, it is their Mexican side that causes the most problems for them - perhaps because whiteness is seen as something unattainable in the first place. This disconnect from their Mexican backgrounds is traced back to their parents:

- They had their studies. My mom was turning herself into a psychologist. My dad was turning himself into an English professor. I mean, my dad's parents were born in Mexico. They live in a small little house in East LA and they speak no English and own a little restaurant. It's like my mom and dad created a whole new world for themselves. I live in their new world. But they understand the old world they came from - and I don't. I don't belong anywhere. That's the problem. [...] Do you think it will always be this way?

- What?

- I mean, when do we start feeling like the world belongs to us?
I wanted to tell him that the world would never belong to us. - I don't know, I said. Maybe tomorrow (Alire Sáenz 2012, 87-88).

Their parents' social mobility, a socioeconomic journey from poor, racialized working class to a more financially stable middle class with university degrees, further disconnects Ari and Dante from what they believe Mexicans should be. There is a language barrier between Dante and his grandparents, so that he not only does fails to be Mexican in general as a monolingual English-speaker, but he also fails to be Mexican by not being able to connect with the living, personified evidence of his Mexican heritage. His parents are able to travel between two worlds, the world of their past and of their own parents, and the new world they have made, while Dante is stuck in one, unable to travel between them with the same ease. Travelling into his grandparents’ world is a situation filled with tension, as he does not have an obvious position there. His failure to achieve Mexicanness becomes too evident.

Philosopher María Lugones argues that there are a variety of ways of being "at ease" in a world. "Fluent speakers" know all the norms in the world, are confident and familiar with a world. Being normatively happy means being aware of the norms and agreeing with them. To be bonded to other dwellers of the world, and have reciprocated loving feelings, as well as having a shared history, is another way of to feel at ease. Travelling between worlds means shifting from being one version of a person to another, a slightly different person (Lugones 1987, 11-12). In Dante's case, he is mostly at ease and comfortable in his parents' new world, raised in a context of white, academic middle class. His parent's old world, his grandparents' world, however, is not a world of ease to him. Although familiar with many of the norms, he is at odds with the norms, unable to fulfil them, in spite of sharing bonds, history and love with the dwellers of that particular world. The world that Ari and Dante inhabit with their parents is a more white-coded world than that of their grandparents, the old world. The old world is characterized by struggling - a word that Ari claims is his parents' favourite - the way Dante and Ari seem to think Mexicans are supposed to. They believe Latinos in the U.S. always struggle, and this is yet another way in which they believe themselves to be failing in achieving authenticity. His sexuality, as previously discussed, is yet another way that Dante's fails to successfully perform Mexican

16 As we can see in Ari and Dante's positions of ethnic and sexual (in)betweenness, they too struggle, but with different issues than their parents and grandparents.
masculinity as he perceives it, further preventing his ability to be at ease in both his parents' old and new world.

Dante's lack of self-worth from being a "failed" Mexican man is constantly reinforced and emphasized by his tendency to compare himself to others. Dante frequently compares himself to Ari, who is browner, knows more Spanish and who is, because of this, represented as more "authentic". Ari's higher claim to authenticity is also due to belonging to a lower socioeconomic class, even though Ari also struggles with issues of authenticity. Dante's musings on his "failure" can be read as an attempt to position himself in relation to others - other men in general, and Latino men specifically - while his ideas of manhood leads him to only consider an inferior position for himself. His inability to achieve "authentic" Latinidad or white Americanness and his sexual orientation all add up to character flaws that he has internalized as subordinate.

Towards the end of the novel, however, the boys begin to accept themselves for who they are. With the help of each other and their parents, their ideas of how Mexican men should be lessen in importance, and they become more at ease with their specific ways of being. As previously mentioned, Hai argues that (in)betweenness is not so much a position between fixed categories as much as one point on a spectrum, or a line, and an act of becoming. This position is however perceived as a disruptive (in)between state because of its heterogeneity in a society where we strive for simpler, homogenous categories (Hai 2014, 184). In the case of Ari and Dante, the two boys start out being caught in (in)between positions, conflicted by their ideas of what it means to be Mexican and American and failing to achieve either of these ideals. Towards the end of the novel, as they become more at ease with themselves, I would argue that their positions are represented as ways of becoming, rather than disrupting and "worrying".

In The Second Time We Met Asher, similar to Dante, is insecure about his inability to speak Spanish. In spite of being adopted from Colombia by a Jewish-Italian family that doesn't speak Spanish, his geographical location dictates that he should be able to. "My Spanish sucks. It's ridiculous. I'm a Latino raised in Los Angeles, and I speak no Spanish (Cobo 2012, 154)." California and Hispanic-named cities like Los Angeles have, as a previous Spanish colony (Alta California) and later a part of Mexico, strong Latin American connotations. Moving in a space that is, in some ways, Latino-coded, Asher becomes hyperaware of his failure to perform "real" Latinidad. Asher is, in Sara Ahmed's words, out of line as a (often) Latino-identified body in the geographical, cultural and demographical context of California. He looks "thoroughly
Colombian" but does not align with the expectations of how a California-dwelling Latino should be (Ahmed 2006, 10-15). Asher, like Dante, travels uneasily in a world that he has labelled as Latino-California because he does not know the social norms and does not have emotional bonds to other Latinos dwelling in that world, as an adoptee and as an Italian-Jewish boy.

At the same time that Asher struggles with the Latino-part of his identity, he is also able to reconcile the three categories - Italian, Jewish, Latino - with each other, which is a prime example of the flexibility and ambiguity of identity. None of these categories are mutually exclusive and Asher is not represented as seeing any real conflict between them. The conflict lies rather in his (in)ability to achieve what he believes to be appropriate levels of Latinidad in his specific fictional setting, but simultaneously identifying as multiple ethnicities does is not a conflict in itself. A clear difference between Aristotle and Dante and The Second Time We Met is thus whether or not different categories are envisioned as conflicting with each other. Meanwhile both of the novels share a focus on language. All three boys move in a setting where bilingualism and knowledge of Latino culture is expected, and they share an inability to reach their static idea of a "real" Latino.

In We the Animals (Torres 2011), the unnamed narrator contemplates the specific mix that he and his two older brothers are. His father is a "purebred" black Puerto Rican, and his mother what I read as a light-skinned American, making the boys biracial in an overall very white neighbourhood in upstate New York. The narrator refers to himself and his brothers as "half-breeds", in contrast to "the white-trash boys" living in the same area (Torres 2011, 90). While the area the family lives in appears to be rather underprivileged in general, the narrator distinguishes between the brothers' and the other boys' ability to feel at home, at ease, and with a claim to the land:

Who knows this mutt life, this race mixing? Who knows Paps? All these other boys, the white trash out here, they have legacies, decades upon decades of poverty and violence and bloodlines they can trace like a scar; and these are their creeks, their hills, their goodness. Their grandfathers poured the cement of this loading dock. [...] They felt proud to be the kind of boys they were [...] They weren't scared, or dispossessed, or fragile. They were possible. [...] Look at me. See me there with them, in the snow - both inside and outside their understanding. See how I made them uneasy. The smelled my difference - my sharp, sad, pansy scent (Torres 2011, 104-105).
The above quote points to racial structures among the poor, where the so-called white trash boys, even in their "poverty and violence", are represented as "possible" to the protagonist - their right to exist, as they are, is undeniable and undisputed. Even if poor, their whiteness assures them a legacy of the privilege of colonizers. Sara Ahmed argues that all bodies inhabit spaces, over or less comfortably. Bodies comfortably inhabit spaces that "extend their shape", and that "whiteness may function as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape". These bodies have already shaped social spaces, and this makes it easier for certain bodies to pass through them. While white spaces are not solely inhabited by white bodies, the hegemony of whiteness functions in two ways: first, it make other bodies invisible when the space is read as white, and second, these bodies become hypervisible in their strangeness, "standing out" (Ahmed 2007, 158-159).

While the U.S. is not literally, demographically a white space, the construction of the U.S. as a white country makes some bodies, in the words of the narrator in We the Animals, more "possible" than others. The narrator also shows how the national narrative constructs the U.S. as a white nation: the white trash boys belong because they, or rather their ancestors, built the country. It is theirs because they made it. Even without actual power over the nation, white boys are the nation, the original colonizers, whereas the narrator and his brothers are "mutts" are something else entirely, something unknown.

The narrator's strangeness - even though neither Hispanic, indigenous nor Afro Latinos are actual strangers to the U.S. population-wise - is a strangeness produced by the other boys' familiarity and obviousness. In the above quote, the narrator's family is marked as different from most of the other residents, and his existence in particular causes the others feelings of unease. Ty theorization of abject others, in which the other is simultaneously a part of the group and something that needs to be repelled, is applicable in the narrator's description of his own strangeness. The narrator is ethnically "wrong" for the neighbourhood, and yet he is also "wrong" in relation to Latinidad, his good grades "too "white" for a boy of colour, and he is set apart from the white boys as well as his brothers. The narrator is perceived as strange because of his "pansy scent" too, setting him further apart from the other boys. He becomes the abject other because he disturbs the order in multiple ways; he is ambiguous in his racial identity, sexuality and in how his markers of whiteness are out of place in his specific socioeconomic context. His
"white ways" are not behaviours associated with the white trash boys, but rather that of a hegemonic, white middle-class.

*We the Animals* is one of the few novels where white people are explicitly present. In several of the others, the white population exist mainly as an external reference point of how (not) to be. White people are represented as more of an abstract concept than individual characters and spoken of as something undesirable. In *Barrio Bushido*, Lobo (narrator alongside his friends Toro and Santo) distances himself from "the American dream", white people and ideas of respectability and "goodness" while simultaneously challenging this idea of America:

Yeah, I'll show America what's America about. I'll be more American than an albino white boy, and I'll slave so hard that the Africanos will laugh. After this lick, I'm gonna study days and nights and the Chinese'll be left with their mouths open. I'm gonna make shit happen with all odds against me, and I'll persevere with all them bullets aimed right at my head. But in doin this shit, it'll also be for them [...] and I'll show em that just cause a vato's got three strikes against him don't mean he's out. Cause I'm America whether motherfuckers like it or not, and I'm America when it gets down to rot (Bac Sierra 2011, 236-237).

By arguing that he is America, Lobo challenges the idea of America as something wholesome and respectable. America "when it gets down to rot" is as much America as any other image of it, the vatos\(^{17}\) and "cholos" an integral part of that. This claim worries the lines of the idealized image of what it means to be American, disrupting the meaning of the word. However, while white America is present in the novels - mostly as a reference point, and a polar opposite of Latino identity - the overall focus is on the Latino aspect of the characters' identity. The characters' ideas of authenticity revolve around language, with the bilingual U.S. Latino being the idealized image, and appearance, where whiteness and Latinidad are clearly separated. Furthermore, class is an important aspect, with poverty and "struggle" as a major signifier, especially for Aristotle and Dante who come from families that, to a varying degree, have experienced upward moving social mobility. Class is also an aspect in that many of the characters do struggle financially, having little access to education or potential for social mobility, and in the challenging in of the ideal of social mobility. Not all of the characters desire to achieve "the American dream", they do not desire more education or higher social status (in

\(^{17}\) Vato (originally "chivato", meaning informer or telltale) is a slang term referring to men of mainly Mexican ancestry and can be used as a Spanish equivalent to "dude" or "guy".

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relation to society at large), but rather reject this ideal. Their focus is instead more locally based, which is discussed further in the following section.

**Location-based identities**

In addition to the boys' specific ideas of how "authentic" Latino men look, act and speak, their identities are tied to and understood through the specific neighbourhood they live in. In a majority of the novels, the neighbourhood is vital to the boys' understanding of their identities, and their location is what they relate to when thinking about (not) belonging. Catrin Lundström argues, in her study of Swedish Latinas, that "neighbourhood nationalism" is fostered in segregated areas to compensate for the overall negative connotations (by society at large) and create a positive valuation of one's home district (Lundström 2007, 131). The idea of segregation is intrinsically tied to racialization: non-white neighbourhoods are typically spoken of as segregated, whereas predominately white areas are not. This connection contributes to the construction of people of colour as segregated others and further stigmatize (perceived) non-white areas. This stigmatization or marginalization is geographical and social, separating people on multiple levels: in the city, in school, and in social circles (Lundström 2007, 117-122).

In his study of masculinity and sexuality among young men in the "multi-cultural" suburbs of Gothenburg, Nils Hammarén also emphasizes the importance of location, of perceived boundaries between different locations, and the role that territory plays in identity formation and in performing masculinity. The dual imagery of the multi-cultural suburb is present in Hammarén's study as an identity-forming element, as well as in some of my novels. It is, on the one hand, "problematic and troublesome", and on the other, "fetishized and desirable". Imagery of the socially depraved "other," a place that represents fear for the "majority," and the exotic element to the "internal colony" of Lundström's study affect both how people outside and inside the suburb understand themselves and their counterparts (Hammarén 2008, 114-116). Because of the socio-geographical status, defending one's own location, i.e. "neighbourhood nationalism", both by high-lighting the positive aspects of living there and criticizing other locations, is part of building a location-based identity. People outside of the location are framed as immature, spoiled, and cowards that have not experienced the harsh "reality of the street". This is a way of adding value to one's own location and displaying the influential role location plays in the
lifestyle of young men, in terms of possibilities, expectations and values (Hammarén 2008, 118-119).

In the novels there is both a desire to leave and feelings of spite towards those who have left. Those who leave are deserters, having run away and abandoned their own, and think they are "too good" for the neighbourhood. Simultaneously, many characters express a wish to leave, to search for "something better", to change something about their lives, to have a chance to start over or live anonymously. This relates both to the idea of unity based on location and societal promotion of "the American dream" and social mobility.

In Barrio Bushido, with main characters Lobo ("wolf"), Toro ("bull") and Santo ("saint"), "neighbourhood nationalism" is framed as kinship formed out of necessity:

[We] accepted the relationship because without us we were nothing. We, with no money and no honey; we, with brown faces and rude manners; We, the miserable, were kings because we had each other, and each other was all we needed (Bac Sierra 2011, 148).

The social marginalization caused by racial stereotypes as well as geographical and cultural segregation helps create a collective identity and sense of "interior exile". While this collective identity serves to create more positive ideas of one's own neighbourhood, Santo shows that it is also a kinship formed out of necessity (Lundström 2007, 127). This segregated area that constitutes the interior exile, it is both an abject location because of its residents and a container of abject others. This abjection is mutually constitutive: it is abject because of the people who live there, but its abject status also affects how the residents are regarded. At the same time, because it constitutes an interior exile, the abject neighbourhood serves as a means of storage of abject others in order to keep them away from the "good" neighbourhoods. The location itself holds an (in)between position, at once a part of the city (home) and undesired, being pushed towards the margins.

In Chulito, Carlos and the title character also discuss spatial belonging as queer Latinos in relation to different neighbourhoods. Most "gay neighbourhoods" are represented too white, too racist, for them to fit in as the boys would be abject because of their ethnicity. In other Latino neighbourhoods, they are instead too gay to fit in. In their own neighbourhood, "at least [Carlos knows] the "thugs" on the corner (Rice-González 2011, 159)." In Mora's study of the cinematic representation of the "cholo" - an image that Chulito fits with his choice of clothing and involvement with drug dealing - the "cholo" is depicted as living in an unfriendly, uninhabitable
zone for most people. The "cholo" lifestyle is destined to end in one of two possible ways: complete distancing from the zone, the people and the life, or death (Mora 2011).

Drawing together Egerer's ideas of home, exile and border policing with the depiction of "cholo" lifelines, Chulito's decision to remain in the neighbourhood refutes the expectation that he would be killed or exiled for "betraying" his friends. Chulito is able to quit the business and still remain friends with his former colleagues and childhood friends. This particular neighbourhood, South Bronx, is still the safest for them, because they "know the thugs on the corner". The Bronx is a familiar zone for them as insiders, where they fit in socially and ethnically and their sexuality is to some extent accepted, but in gay-dominated neighbourhoods they will be reduced to their ethnicity that labels them as "thugs" and "cholos". They are already living in an interior exile, where they are abject to outsiders but less so to other residents of that same neighbourhood.

For Asher (The Second Time We Met), who juggles different identity markers such as Italian, Jewish, Latino and adopted, his location California, as an American state with a large Latino population, makes his Latino background even more complicated. While his mother's Italian background makes it possible for Asher to pass as his parents’ biological child to strangers, he also identifies as Latino. His status as an adoptee causes confusion: he's considered to be the "wrong kind" of adopted, as part of a familiar ethnic group of the area rather than something unfamiliar enough to be adopted:

It suddenly occurred to him that his being adopted was probably news to many people. [...] All the other adopted kids he knew were Chinese or African, or Russian kids who had Russian names that immediately revealed their provenance. But Asher Stone looked like... well, Asher Stone (Cobo 2012, 157).

Being part of a "native" ethnic group, nobody expects Asher to be adopted - adoptees are wholly foreign, a border which Latinos in California constantly balance on. Asher's (in)betweenness is thus, in part, related to his identity as an adoptee. He contradicts the expectations on adoptees in the context of the novel, where all the other adoptees are "Chinese or African, or Russian" (Cobo 2012, 157). Because he looks Latino, he is ascribed an identity that is "native" to the geographical location. His actual identity as an adoptee "worries" the lines between home and exile as he represents both at the same time. This representation of home and exile is further
explored in the novel, specifically in relation to location. Latino California is a dwelling that maintains a bond to a larger world, from which California extends:

[He] tried to imagine what it had been like to be a baby, to be born in the place one is conceived and nurtured and meant for, and then to be transplanted to another reality [...] He at least was connected to his home country by the mountain range that ran from California all the way down to the tip of South America. If his arms were only wide enough, he could open them and touch both places with the tips of his fingers and still remain in the middle of the two (Cobo 2012, 156).

To Asher, the geographical location also serves as a comfort because the connection to Latin America and Colombia through California further connects Asher to his Latino heritage. California serves as an extension of the southern half of the Americas, the mountains providing a very literal, physical connection between Asher's birthplace and home. In Asher's story, as in many of the others, the dichotomy of home and exile are once again brought into question. He has been physically removed from his birthplace, but is geographically connected to it, and he is simultaneously "at home" and exiled in California. California is his home, but he feels like an outsider in relation to other people who look like him. He is able to navigate the social norms and customs of some contexts, while failing to do some in others, where he believes he should feel at home. The lines between home and exile are blurred, as Asher experiences both while in the same location.

The comfort, unity and ease that locations provide for the characters is, as shown above, not constant. In several novels looms the threat of gentrification, through which neighbourhood populations shift in terms of class, race and ethnicity. Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith define gentrification as "the process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste" (Schaffer & Smith 1986, 347). Gentrification, and the people moving in along with it, in the place where the characters already live, is one of the few ways in which white non-Latino people are represented. They are spoken of as a distant "they", an occasional contrast to the characters' lives, these middle-class people representing carriers of the American dream and something to relate to, but ultimately quite uninteresting and rarely of any importance to the characters' lives and stories.

In Barrio Bushido, one of the main characters', Lobo's, view on gentrification is clear:

I've been making paper for the last few months, and I realise, even with gold and platinum, I ain't got shit. We ain't got shit. We're fucking laughingstocks. These motherfuckers moving in see gente as
jokes. We're maids and housekeepers, and ain't nothing wrong with bustin your ass, but there is something wrong with gettin no respect. There's somethin wrong when putos treat you like a boy. Cause the establishment thinks they've got us all figured out. They think we're a bunch of dummies who can't even put up a fight in their world, and their world is where the big lechuga\textsuperscript{18} is at. They want to pacify us with talk of peaceful, non-aggressive bullshit and have us happy with crumbs (Bac Sierra 2011, 259-260).

Gentrification is, in Lobo's point of view, a local, urban form of new colonialism, where white people move in as settlers, physically occupying an area that the characters consider their own, somewhat detached from the world around them. Jonathan Wharton argues that gentrification is an invasive process characterized by "exclusivity, marginalization and supposed revitalization", through which previous city planning that has created districts divided by race, ethnicity and class change (Wharton 2009, 1-2). While land ownership and transgressing the city divides is not per definition something negative, it is the way in which it is done that causes problems. Gentrification, as with colonialism, signals the way in which land is redistributed: through deals between city officials and buyers, with little consideration for or consultation with the pre-existing population that are at the receiving end of all the negative effects. As Wharton says: "gentrification is the modern man's obsession with land acquisition" (Wharton 2009, 6-8). In \textit{Thirty Minutes on Third Avenue} (henceforth \textit{Thirty Minutes}), Chino's neighbourhood is also experiencing gentrification:

His building was the only one of its kind left on the block. Real estate was quickly being grabbed by developers who built condominiums on one side, complete with small strip malls underneath. Gym and yoga studios were built into the converted tenement next to his, one that the neighbourhood people fought to keep when they obtained a landmark status for the building. [...] He remembered when living in New York wasn't a luxury and his tenement was full of immigrants, a veritable United Nations at dinnertime. [...] A bodega that sold Italian ices and loose cigarettes now boasted a salad bar and tofu. Yoga studios, acupuncture, spa and massage places abound (Fernandez 2014, 3-7).

To Chino, gentrification is a threat to the way their neighbourhood has previously existed: the ethnically diverse population of immigrants, sharing the same financial and social struggles as Chino's family, is being replaced the white middle class' version of diversity. Before being gentrified, Chino describes the neighbourhood as heterogeneous with cultural differences, but with a sense of community, solidarity in a segregated area. Chino tells the story of growing up in

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Lechuga} (literally "lettuce") refers to money.
a setting where the family gets by on his mother's disability check and Chino's drug dealing, an occupation that bothers both Chino's mother and sister but that is seen as an expected life path for boys in the area. Gabi, Chino's sister, goes to college, marries a white man, and leaves the area, and is at first represented as ashamed of her origins, as a traitor for "running away". Though the siblings later reconcile over their differences, Gabi's "new lifestyle" is initially seen as a betrayal to the unity of their community. However, it is gentrification and newcomers to the neighbourhood that pose the ultimate threat against the community.

What Lobo and Chino's reflections show is that gentrification both happens without any approval from the locals and serves to cement colonially coded roles of dominance and subordination. Lundström argues that societal and scholarly fascination with segregated areas and suburbs have a fetishizing function, connecting with colonial ideas of imagining the different worlds of others. The segregated, multi-ethnic suburb becomes an internal, (in Lundström's case) "non-Swedish" space that is central in the formation of a white national identity, similarly to the function of previous colonies (Lundström 2007, 123-124). Richard Mora argues that cinematic depictions of "cholos", like Lobo and Chino, tend to be set in gritty, uninhabitable zones of cities, the district and its inhabitants equally abject and unworthy on inclusion on over-all society (Mora 2011). In several of the novels, the ideas of segregated zones that Mora mentions are engaged with, while simultaneously challenged. The neighbourhoods represented in Thirty Minutes, Dogfight, Barrio Bushido and Chulito are "gritty", filled with drug dealing and violence. However, the neighbourhoods are also represented in a more positive light before gentrification. In Thirty Minutes, the neighbourhood is represented as a more pleasant and unified community in its difference from other neighbourhoods and cities (Fernandez 2014, 3-5). Gentrification, in the context of the novels, is a process of making these zones "liveable" for other people, a cleansing process where the abject is eradicated - thus making it uninhabitable to its abject population. The construction of suburbs as something exotic, and the tropicalization of Latino culture, as Alonso Gallo calls it, is also attached to gentrification of these areas. The "marketable exoticism" of Latino culture spills over into the marketability of Latino quarters, to be consumed, occupied and adapted by whites (Alonso Gallo 2002, 241). At the same time that this exoticism is deemed desirable and marketable, the actual residents are not: people like Chino and Lobo are abject others who, as a "positive" side effect of gentrification, are driven out of the
area, allowing gentrifiers to bask in the glow of multiculturalism without having to interact with the people behind that diversity.

The location-based identities discussed here all challenge ideas of home and exile in different ways. The different examples represent ambivalence to location and identity by exploring what it means to be "at home" in a specific place and what factors can cause unease. "Home" is not a constant concept, but rather something that is subject to change. This change can be caused by gentrification, but also by the policing of bodies inhabiting certain spaces that they regard as home.

Racialization and animal likeness

In the two previous parts of this section, I focused more on the boys' own experiences of ethnic and location-based identity. In what follows, I focus on outer pressures and stereotypes, starting with how criminalization and dehumanization of the racialized male body operate in the novels. I further explore positions of (in)betweenness and ambivalence in relation to ideas of race and masculinity. While striving to achieve authenticity and manhood in their various ways of performing Latino masculinity, the boys simultaneously struggle with racial stereotypes and prejudice that also relate to the imagery they in part attempt to emulate. As will become evident, disciplining measures operate on multiple levels in the narratives, influenced by the intersections of race, ethnicity and gender. Violence is featured as a prevalent disciplining measure, as well as dehumanization through analogies of animal likeness.

Alfredo (Dogfight) and Lobo19 (Barrio Bushido) both experience situations where they are very aware of how stereotypes of Latino men, and racialized men with a specific "look", project a violent image of them to their surroundings. Alfredo is visibly bothered when two little girls playing in a park are scared and view him as "a menace" when he talks to them (commenting on their ice cream), and resist the urge to chase them down to tell them he is a good guy. "I'm not some scary chester. I am Puerto Rican, an American citizen, a father-to-be," he argues for himself, but he also "understands that chasing two little girls in a city park is not the best way to prove one's own innocent intentions" (Burgess 2010, 9). His thoughts reflect different levels of trustworthiness: pointing out his nationality makes him, if not relatable, more familiar than the

19 Lobo means "wolf" in Spanish.
common "thug", his citizenship makes him less suspect, and his impending fatherhood "safe". While Lobo (Barrio Bushido) challenges the link between respectability and American identity by rejecting the American dream and claiming that "[he is] America", Alfredo appeals to this link instead (Bac Sierra 2011, 237). What the two characters share is the use of the label American to claim a level of righteousness to their way of being. In Barrio Bushido, Lobo is aware of his projected image when approaching a woman to talk to her - in order to make himself look less conspicuous to his surroundings and speaks to her with caution. "Gentle as a lamb, he did not want to alarm her, did not want her to show any displeasure or hint of unknowingness (Bac Sierra 2010, 232)." He tones down his "wolf" to appear as a lamb instead, gentle and unthreatening. In these situations, sexism and racism interlock with each other: an unfamiliar man approaching a woman is dangerous to her because of the threat of men's violence against women, but he is also deemed as particular dangerous due to racist stereotypes of men of colour. The racialized male body exists in a precarious state, as it is constantly framed as dangerous, volatile and deeply entrenched in a criminal lifestyle.

Dogfight and Barrio Bushido both depict the potential risks posed to racialized men if they are perceived as dangerous. Several of the novels in this study also depict characters that have been to prison. The novel Dogfight builds around the imminent release of Alfredo's brother Tariq, and the dogfight that will be held in his honour as he returns to the neighbourhood. Tariq is the character whose experiences of prison are discussed most explicitly in the text. On his way to the dogfight, Tariq wishes "to inhabit a body that never went to prison" (Burgess 2010, 257). As sociologist Victor Ríos argues in his study of the criminal justice pipeline, the criminal justice system demands passivity and compliance, while a previous prison conviction further contributes to poor, racialized men's lack of viable work (Ríos 2009, 153-155). Tariq's conviction limits his possibility of changing his life around after prison, even though the system itself is meant to bring about that "reform". The exclusion of former convicts from the labour market leads to a sense of hopelessness, and the system itself prevents the reform it claims to generate (Ríos 2009, 159). A body that never went to prison is also a body less embedded in violence. Violence is

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20 These novels are mainly Dogfight, Aristotle and Dante and Thirty Minutes. In Aristotle and Dante, Ari's brother Bernardo is imprisoned and barely spoken of. Ari describes it in his diary as "it's like being dead. It's worse than being dead. At least the dead get talked about and you get to hear stories about them" (Alire Sáenz 2012, 96). In Thirty Minutes, it is the protagonist Chino who has been convicted on multiple occasions and the novel focuses on Chino beginning to change his life.
what leads Tariq to prison; it follows him there as he is subjugated both to the controlling discipline of the criminal justice system as well as the violence between inmates. It continues to define him outside, as an ex-convict, and in the practice of dogfighting to determine his place in the social order. Prison also changes Tariq's relationship with Isabel. Before prison, Isabel is his girlfriend and he is one of the few people she trusts. When he is released, she is pregnant and together with Alfredo, and fears Tariq and his reaction to her relationship with his brother. Attempting to sexually assault Isabel solidifies his positions as dangerous and irredeemable. Rios argues that the criminal justice system and its related institutions attempt to "reform" convicts with masculine techniques of domination, but inevitably fail (Rios 2009, 153). The "reform" of Tariq fails, but he is not the only one who is targeted by police in the novel. The racialized male body, regardless of whether a man has been convicted of a felony or not, is labelled as suspect and volatile, deemed likely to commit a crime and therefore needing preventive surveillance (Rios 2009, 155-156). Alfredo and his friends are pre-emptively targeted and kept under surveillance by police, and are caught between the expectations of their community and the law. Failing either results in being subjected to disciplining measures. In Alfredo's case, declining to participate in the dogfight would mean losing his status within his community or even rejection from it, but by choosing to participate he instead puts himself at risk of being disciplined by the criminal justice system. The "reforms" that do occur in the novels, perhaps most notably in the case of Chino in Thirty Minutes, are not brought about through institution-driven reform. Rather, the changes that take place are through, as previously discussed, renegotiating what it means to "be a man" with the help of family members and friends.

Hence, while the consequences of institutionally based techniques of domination in relation to prison are explored mainly in Dogfight and Thirty Minutes, interactions with police occurs in several of the other novels. Throughout the novels, there is a general awareness of the vulnerable positions the protagonists are in as men of colour in relation to police. Rios argues that racialized boys are particularly targeted because of their already subjugated social status, where expectations on compliance and conformity is unaccompanied by any actual change to social conditions. When boys and young men fail - as they are set up to do - they are arrested and harassed, and if they comply they can instead risk being stigmatized by their community. The police force is embedded in an environment that embraces masculinity, employing similar but more large-scale and severe feminizing strategies as those mentioned in the section discussing
sexuality (Rios 2009, 156-158). Rios argues that the emasculating measures of the criminal justice system along with pervasive contact with it enforces the creation of hypermasculinity, by forcing racialized young men to choose between hopelessness and hypermasculinity. Hopelessness is produced by following the rules, and, as a result, losing your place in the community while simultaneously being unable to obtain employment. Hypermasculinity becomes a way of becoming "real men" which further entitles the system to keep them under surveillance and punish their behaviour (Rios 2009, 161).

In Rios' study, the police consider themselves to be "law enforcers of savages" (Rios 2009, 156). The use of the term "savages" serves to dehumanize racialized men in particularly, depicting them as less than human. This dehumanization is furthered through analogies of animal likeness, both by the characters themselves and by others in order to discipline and label them. In *We the Animals*, the connection between masculinity, race and animals is particularly prominent. The boys grow up being referred to as animals of different kinds, and the narrator begins to use the words himself and seeing himself as an animal. The narrator and his brothers are referred to as "mutts" by their father, for being mixed, when he refers to himself as "a [Puerto Rican] purebred"; as "locusts" and "marauders" by their neighbour (but also babies, innocents); and his father's boss also tells the boys that they are "half as ugly, dark, wild as your dad" while the protagonist himself refers to them as "three dogs on a log".

These animal analogies carry on throughout *We the Animals* and when the protagonist's family finds his diary, he "behaved like an animal [...] did and said animal" (Torres 2011, 118). He is institutionalized to be "fixed up" and once there, he claims he sleeps "with other animals in cages and in dens" as their prince (Torres 2011, 125). In the context of institutionalization, identifying himself as one of the animals and becoming their prince provides a means of escapism from the reality of the institution. However, the protagonist's (in)between position between human and animal also functions as a dehumanizing mechanism. The language used by others to refer to the boys is undeniably racial, building on racist structures and cultural imagery. Feminist and cultural scholar bell hooks argues that in these structures and images of the 19th century, the darker a person is, the more akin to animals they are. The black body in American culture is depicted as less civilized, more animalistic and sexually deviant (hooks 1992, 62). The protagonist is constantly reminded of his less-than-human-ness by predominantly adults, and
internalizes these ideas about himself. The boys move (in)between the categories of human and animal, claiming both at once and blurring the lines between them.

The internalized racism and sexualization of racialized people spills over into the narrator's description of his parents and their relationship. He describes his father as a dark animal, while his mother is light and fragile (Torres 2011, 45). "My mother fucked a beast," he argues, including his parents into the sexual deviance that hooks describes and attributing his own deviance to their relationship. It is their relationship that creates their "mutt" children, bringing them into (in)between positions through their birth. The narrator's own "catalog of perversions" is, in a way, inherited from his parents, and he presents it as inevitable. When his family finds his journal, he turns it back on them: "I bet you liked reading it, I bet it excited you" (Torres 2011, 116-118). The narrator places both himself and his family members into this animalistic, sexually deviant position, claiming they are the same as him.

While the protagonist's reduction to animal culminates in his institutionalization through a confrontation with his family, it is mainly outsiders who refer to him as an animal before that event. Early on in the novel, during the boys' childhood, it is their neighbour, Old Man, who makes these animal analogies:

- Animals, he hissed. He looked as if he could spit. - Locusts. [...] - What the locust swarm left, the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left, the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have eaten - Old Man paused to narrow his eyes at each one of us - other locusts have eaten.

Then he called us invaders, marauders, scavengers, the devil's army on earth. [...] He had all kinds of names for us, castaways, stowaways, hideaways, fugitives, punks, city slickers, bastards. [...] He also called us sweets, babies, innocents, poor pitiful creatures, God's own (Torres 2011, 33-37).

The use of the animal *locust*, specifically, is noteworthy. Biologists Simpson and Sword describe locusts as a type of grasshopper distinguished by its tendency to "form huge groups and embark on spectacular mass migrations, traveling as marching bands of flightless juveniles and vast flying swarms of winged adults". Further, Simpson and Sword argue that "locusts have been feared agricultural pests since the dawn of civilisation with plagues documented in ancient texts including the Qur'an, Bible and Torah" (Simpson & Sword 2008, R364-R365). Locusts, then, are a particularly invasive kind of animal, characterized by its freeloading, overwhelming tendency to show up and literally reap the seed of other (people's) work. Latinos are, in many
ways, portrayed similarly: exaggerated descriptions of migration patterns; the belief that Latinos, along with other people of colour, are overrepresented in the welfare system (without understanding what structures could make that the case) and therefore "freeload"; and that undocumented workers do not pay taxes.

Historian Natalia Molina argues that this imagery of Latinos can, in part, be attributed to the changes in the U.S.' Immigration Act during the 20th century, along with the growth of the eugenics movement, through which Mexicans (and by extension, other Latinos as well) were deemed an undesirable migrant group (Molina 2006, 29). While they were deemed to be able-bodied workers, they were also framed as less intelligent due to their "Indian stock" and carriers of disease (Molina 2006, 32). Suitable for seasonal work as "birds of passage", they were however not desirable citizens and expected to return to Mexico once the season ended (Molina 2006, 27). Birds of passage, like locusts, can also be agricultural pests, and carries the similar rhetoric of arriving in great swarms with devastating effects. Similarly, the boys in *Barrio Bushido* continuously speak of themselves as mice - or rather, that people believe that they are mice, and stupid enough to take the poison offered to them. Mice, like locusts, are pests or vermin, and yet another animal seen as causing devastation in uncontrollable masses, spreading disease as they invade what is not theirs. In *We the Animals*, it is others who project animal likeness onto the boys. In *Barrio Bushido*, it is the boys themselves who refer to themselves as mice, but it is represented as the opinions of others, an unnamed they who "want to kill [the protagonists] with poison cheese" (Rice-González 2011, 46).

In *We the Animals*, as the narrator contemplates after Old Man has referred to them as locusts - "And the other locusts, what's wrong with them, why do they come last, and what's left for them to eat?" - it is shown that the brothers are not the only locusts, but out of all the locusts in society, the "mutts" come last (Torres 2011, 38). Other locusts, such as the "white trash" boys that the narrator encounters, reap the seed first, and for some locusts, the leftovers are little to none. They, the underprivileged and poor working-class, are all locusts, but some locusts are more equal than others. However, Old Man is not entirely dehumanizing towards the boys - in the same breath that he calls them locusts, invaders, marauders, he also refers to them as babies and innocents. Boys, as a collective, are locusts, but Old Man is aware of the circumstances that make them so. They are innocent children in the grand scheme of things, locusts in their rowdy boyishness but ultimately harmless, even vulnerable - for now. Here, it is clear that the boys
move between the categories human and animal not only to themselves, but also to others. As children, they are still able to inhabit a position of innocence and humanity, but Old Man's comments are foreshadowing: as they grow, they will become wilder and less human, losing the traits that make Old Man pity them.

There are, however, instances where characters claim animal likeness for themselves in a way that differs from the protagonist of *We the Animals*. In *Barrio Bushido*, Toro\(^21\) has had his name ever since he challenged Lobo to a fight to join their group when they were children; they "saw me, saw a beast of a man charging down" (Bac Sierra 2011, 86). When Toro breaks his leg, he is no longer a bull - he's transformed into a cow. Before, he fought like a bull, charging forward, because "charging forward meant life" (Bac Sierra 2011, 74). After his injury, he's incapacitated (albeit only temporarily) and reduced to the passive, female version of a bovine.

Funny thing is, I was no longer a bull, but a cow staring out into green pastures and stupidly grazing in the grass, not knowing, not caring that the butcher was plotting what part of me he would have on his dinner table that night (Bac Sierra 2011, 145).

The transformation from bull to cow is not simply a matter of gendered differences with aggressiveness as typically male and passivity as typically female. The bull and cow are polar opposites: the bull, through its connection to bullfighting, represents brute strength and hypermasculinity, with its excessive violence and goriness, while the cow is as passive as it gets, unable to fully function on her own. Toro's transformation from bull to cow is therefore not only a matter of emasculation by loss of physical ability, but also a representation of a complete loss of agency and power. Toro gets what he wants, the status and acceptance he seeks, by being known a bull: aggressive, assertive and confronting. When injured, Toro is still an animal, but an animal that loses his power, and he no longer feels that he can assert himself.

While there are similarities between *We the Animals* and *Barrio Bushido*, with the boys being referred to either locusts or mice, the animal analogy used by Toro is rather a way to make sense the situation. Evoking the imagery of the strong bull versus the passive cow, Toro's sense of powerlessness is represented in a way that both worries the lines between human/animal and male/female. Ford argues that race and socioeconomic status makes certain groups of men especially reliant on imagery of hypermasculinity. A physically fit, able body becomes a means

\(^{21}\) Toro means "bull" in Spanish.
for performing manhood (Ford 2011, 58). The controlled body not only asserts masculinity through its solidity, but also through its balance between two modes of domination: disciplined control and excessive violence. A fit, disciplined body is also a strong body, which conveys an implicit threat of violence and physical prowess and a potential for physical domination over others. Toro's temporary disability has an emasculating function that threatens his social standing and risks forcing him into a new position of (in)betweenness.

Positions of (in)betweenness are created by both by the constant balancing between two systems and the dehumanizing strategies that regulate the boys' ability to move and act freely. While these representations have the potential to worry the lines of perceived categories, these hybrid positions are often characterized by unease by those who inhabit them.

**Worrying borders and hybridity**

To return to Lugones' idea of world travelling and Egerer's idea of worrying the lines, it is clear that world travelling can be perceived differently, both related to ethnicity, racialization and location-based identities. The white middle class, the gentrifiers, moving in can travel with ease, not so much adapting themselves as adapting the "new" world to become more familiar for themselves. Lobo (*Barrio Bushido*) and Chino (*Thirty Minutes*), who are labelled as other and suspect when they leave their neighbourhood, cannot engage in world travelling with the same ease as the white colonizers, and the invasive force of gentrification also changes their own, ease-filled world. Similarly, Dante (*Aristotle and Dante*) struggles to travel between different worlds he believes he should belong too - his parents' current world, and their "old" world, the world of his grandparents. Asher (*The Second Time We Met*) is both familiar and a stranger in the context of California: appearance-wise, he is familiar, his "thoroughly Colombian" looks fitting in with all the other Latinos, but he also feels uneasy in his inability to perform the expected Latinidad. For Lobo and Chino - and for Asher-, their appearance serves as an important aspect in their ability to fit into different context, and for Asher and Dante, language - specifically, their inability to speak Spanish fluently - serves as a barrier to their mobility.

While striving to perform Latino masculinity, the boys must relate to the obstacles preventing them from achieve their own idealized image of what that performance entails, as well as negotiate with outer pressure to conform. The boys exist in a double bind, where failing to
perform the "right kind" of masculinity can lead to stigmatization within their community, and successful performances results in other disciplining measures, such as penalization through the criminal justice system or dehumanizing strategies. They are continuously stuck in (in)between positions, whether in regards to sexuality, ethnicity, location, criminalization or animal likeness. In some cases, the boys are able to renegotiate the meaning of ethnic and male identity for themselves, but this does not mean that the world and society around them participates in this process. Hybridity, (in)betweenness and ambiguity can serve as a means of easy world travelling, such as code-switching between languages and speaking patterns. However, (in)betweenness can also harm this potential for playfulness, as shown in the boys' stories.

(In)betweenness is signified by unease, precariousness and "worry" because it questions preconceived notions of borders and identities, but not always to the benefit of the person embodying the (in)between. Instead, they are represented as something abject, something that either needs to be repelled or made comprehensible. The boys are subject to disciplining measures in order to regulate their non-conforming behaviours, both on local and societal levels.

There is a theoretical potential for (in)betweeners to be "worrying", challenging and changing definitions, categories and lines, but it not playful. Hai argues that rather than (in)betweenness being a position between fixed categories, it is a "way of becoming" and part of a spectrum (Hai 2014, 184). However, this insight is difficult to attain. While some of the representations in these novels do shift the boys' understandings of themselves from a conflicted (in)between to an acceptable way of doing masculinity, playfulness is never quite achieved. They may be able to renegotiate the meaning of Latino manhood for themselves, but remain in a position of (in)betweenness to others, constantly at risk of being disciplined.
Becoming men, forgetting women

Although the focus of this study has been on fictional representations of boys and masculinity, I believe it is important to say a few words about the depictions of women and femininity in the novels. Some points have already been brought up - for example, feminization of men as a disciplining tool - but there are other issues that should be discussed. As briefly mentioned in The research field section of this study, Ruben Serrato argues that in the attempt to deconstruct masculinity ideals and offer other alternatives, there is a tendency to forget, and further marginalize, female subjectivity (Ruben Serrato 2005, 214-215). This tendency is prevalent both in the majority of the novels included in this study, and in the study itself, as it is thoroughly man-centric in its focus on men in novels about men. Both in the novels and in this text, women are mentioned briefly and incidentally, with their presence in the novels seeping through, but never explored in depth. As a feminist researcher, it is important to me that women are not erased in studies of masculinity. However, this section is also significantly shorter than the previous two as women are, ultimately, not the focus of the study. In this section, I present examples where women are forgotten and marginalized; only providing fodder for the progression of the plot. I also highlight examples where women are represented as subjective, independent agents that do not exist solely for the benefit of the male protagonists.

Michael Kimmel argues that homosociality is something largely produced and defined through the interaction between men and that women, or rather the idea of women, constitute a form of currency and a polarized point to identify in contrast to (Kimmel 2006, 5). The idea of women, and femininity, also affects the construction of masculinity. All of the novels feature women, more or less prominently. The female characters mainly inhabit roles such as mothers and friends, and they all constitute anchoring, comforting presence that aid and support the male protagonists in their journeys. They also serve a purpose of being the characters to most explicitly voice critiques towards ideas of masculinity. While vital to the stories, they are rarely developed to the same extent as many of the male supporting characters.

A clear difference in the depiction of men and women can be found in the cases where they represent objects of desire. In Chulito and Aristotle and Dante, the desired parties - Carlos and Dante - both hold highly subjective and present positions in the novels. While the focus is on Chulito and Aristotle for the most part, Dante and Carlos are highly active agents in the stories. In contrast, Alessandra (The Second Time We Met) and Gizelle (Thirty Minutes) are present, but
not active. Alessandra exists as a supportive girlfriend to Asher - their power imbalance as
oblivious jock and clingy bookworm briefly highlighted but never resolved - but as little else, her
own background and personality obscured by Asher's own quest. Gizelle is very much a trophy,
an endgame, for Chino, symbolizing a better life and a reason to change the way he lives. The
end of his journey is marked by him succeeding in making their relationship happen. Kimmel's
reference to women being considered currency is valuable here. While it oversimplifies their
relationships, it is clear that Alessandra and Gizelle do serve a function of improving or
cementing Asher and Chino's respective positions in their distinct socioeconomic contexts.

In Dogfight, Alfredo's pregnant girlfriend Isabel does get a more deeply explored backstory,
and sections of the novel are entirely focused on her. In contrast to the journey of Chino and
Asher, Alfredo's journey and change in lifestyle is depicted as both for Isabel and Alfredo, rather
than a means of getting Isabel. Isabel is not so much an object of desire that will also ensure
Alfredo a higher status or a better life, as one of Alfredo's few allies. While Isabel is one of the
catalysts for Alfredo's changed life path, this change does not occur in order for him to attain or
deserve her. Isabel is afforded a subjectivity that is rarely allowed any other girlfriends in the
novels. While she is caught up in and suffers from the drama between Alfredo and his brother
Tariq, she is also the girlfriend character whose existence is less of an instrument for the
progression of the plot and represented as more of an active agent in the novel.

In Barrio Bushido, women are few and barely there, in terms of presence and impact on the
story. While the three main characters' mothers are referenced, only Santo's mother is given any
thorough attention, and only in a letter when Santo believes he is about to die (Bac Sierra 2011,
218). Similarly, Santo's girlfriend Maricela is mainly explored at the end of their relationship,
when she tricks him during a planned theft and he quickly forgives her, stating that "she did what
she needed to do to make her dreams come true" (Bac Sierra 2011, 173). The same goes for
Lobo's girlfriend Sheila, who is sacrificed as Lobo chooses his career over her life (Bac Sierra
2011, 68-69). Women's presence is rare, brief, and quickly discarded for the sake of the plot, a
phenomenon known as fridging. Fridging describes the instances in which women are injured,
killed or otherwise discarded in order to further the plot of mostly male protagonists. In Barrio

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22 The term fridging is derived from the original term "women in refrigerators", which was coined in 1999 by
feminist writer Gail Simone, during a discussion about the death of comic book hero Green Lantern's girlfriend Alex
Dewitt who was placed in a refrigerator after her death. (Simone 1999) The coining of the term was followed by the
creation of a website listing female characters lost to "fridging" on the website Women in Refrigerators.
Bushido, girlfriends are repeatedly fridged in differing ways. Sheila in particular dies an overtly violent, painful death, which in part fuels Lobo's actions for the remainder of the novel.

Women, and mothers in particular, often hold a role as confidants for the boys. Mothers are more or less present in all eight of the novels. Mijito is the only novel where the main character's relationship with his mother is a wholly negative one, with the character distancing himself from his mother and her inability to care for her children. In Aristotle and Dante, the boys have close relationships with their mothers, as discussed in the section on sexuality and coming out. In We the Animals, the mother is idealized in a way the father is not. However, in several novels, there is also a clear tendency for the boys to consciously distance themselves from their mothers as a strategy in doing masculinity. In Chulito, the title character exhibits a desire to speak to his mother about feelings and his life on multiple occasions, but his "tough guy" persona prevents him from voicing his thoughts. In Aristotle and Dante, the boys express a slight disdain towards their mothers for raising them to be "nice boys". While their open relationships with their parents allow them speak about their problems, Ari and Dante both consider the trust between them and their parents to be an obstacle for them to achieve true manhood. "Bad boys don't need their mother's approval" Ari argues, simultaneously voicing a masculinity ideal and his failure to be that man (Alire Sáenz 2012, 235). In We the Animals, it is the protagonist's mother who points to a split between mother and child: "When you boys turned seven, you left me. Shut yourself off from me. That's what big boys do, what seven-year-olds do (Torres 2011, 14)."

In Thirty Minutes, Chino's sister Gabi gets to step into the role as the seemingly overbearing, female family member that constitutes an obstacle between how Chino wants to live and what his family expects of him. Being a nice boy is linked to being a small boy, rather than being a big, bad boy or, even better, a man; keeping an emotional distance from one's mother is represented as an integral part in the process of becoming an adult man.

The Second Time We Met includes an interesting case of female subjectivity in terms of motherhood. There are two maternal figures present in Asher's story - Linda, the mother who raised him, and Rita, the woman who gave birth to him. While Linda holds the position of primary motherhood, as the nurturing and supportive mother that appears in many of the other novels, Rita takes up much of Asher's thoughts and fantasies in her absence. Linda is Asher's mother - something he most clearly realises upon returning from Colombia - but is in many ways obscured by the mystery of Rita. Rita is inevitably present in her complete strangeness and a
puzzle that needs solving. Although the first few chapters of the novel are told from Rita's point of view, they focus on her youth, her love story of Asher's biological father (Lucas), and the reader only follows her until she finds out about her pregnancy. She returns later on in the novel, after Asher has begun his search, but modern day Rita remains very much a mystery to the reader. In the case of The Second Time We Met, the mother who receives the most attention is the mother who, similarly to romantic interests in other novels, serves a more explicit purpose in the male protagonist's self-identification process. Linda, as well as his father Joseph and Asher's girlfriend Alessandra, is very much a bystander to the mother-son story between Asher and Rita, which in turn is mainly focused on Asher's wish to find out more about himself.

In several of the novels, violence against other men is fairly sanctioned, especially in Chulito, Barrio Bushido, Dogfight and Thirty Minutes. Violence against women, or domestic violence, is however particularly stigmatized and seen as excessive, illegitimate violence. Violence against subjects that are construed as innocent is seen as a loss of control, excessive anger against a group deemed unable to protect themselves. The illegitimacy of domestic violence simultaneously creates a supposedly positive masculinity ideal to follow - "real men" are good husbands who do not beat their wives - and a negative feminine ideal, where the women are construed as needing protection. Men can take each other's violence, whereas women cannot. While the result is partially positive for women, it also constructs them as weak and in need of male protection, as well as measuring their worth through their relation to men. Rios argues that the rhetoric of "real men" is self-defeating, as its emasculating function serves to create the tension and frustration in which hypermasculinity is formed. The idea of "real men" creates a pressure to manifest masculinity to prove one's manhood, in opposition to being emasculated and feminized. Therefore, "real men" as a concept implies that there is a correct way of doing masculinity and that anything associated with femininity or women is bad, thus reinforces gender differences (Rios 2009, 159).

To refer back to the overarching themes of this study - representations and (in)betweenness - it is clear that men and women are awarded different roles, and various degrees of subjectivity depending on gender. In regards to the concept (in)betweenness, female characters in the novels move in a grey area between subjects and merely being objects that are a part of the men's story. What is perhaps more interesting to discuss is (in)betweenness in relation to the aspects that have been examined in this study: ethnicity, sexuality and gender. However, because women are so
rarely explored in depth, existing only as comforting confidants or objects of desire, they do not inhabit positions of (in)betweenness. Because they are not deeply explored, they do not represent conflicted identities, nor do they challenge the labels projected upon them by the male protagonists. The female characters are not represented as feeling ambivalent about their ethnic identities, there is no apparent conflict in the novels in being a Latina in the U.S. Apart from the example of Isabel, the theme of sexuality is barely explored in relation to the women themselves, and neither is femininity. What it means to be a woman, and what some transgressions and potential disciplining measures might look like, is not questioned.

The gendered patterns discussed here as well as the doing of masculinity explored throughout the study, are partly in line with the representation of masculinity in *The brief, wondrous life of Oscar Wao*. Díaz's novel focuses on two boys, Yunior and Oscar, who have quite different relationships to women. Yunior is the hypermasculine ladies-man and Oscar is the nerd, desperate to get a girlfriend. While the novels are full of female characters, the stories about them are ultimately about the impact they have on the life of the male protagonists regardless of which particular relation they have to the men.
Conclusion

In this study, I explore various representations of Latino boys in Latino American coming-of-age novels, focusing on themes of masculinity, sexuality, ethnicity and positions of (in)betweenness. Fiction allows Latinos to reclaim their voices and carve out a space within American literature in which they can engage with and challenge stereotypical imagery of Latinos. These narrative spaces stand out in contrast to often stereotypical reproductions of Latino characters within TV and film. Due to a Latino cultural boom that frames Latino literature as "marketable exoticism" these novels are receiving more critical attention and recognition than before, and thus reaching a wider audience while simultaneously challenging the ideas that the boom is built on.

At the beginning of the study I aspired to diverge from a traditional division of categories, such as masculinity, sexuality and ethnicity, of which the latter two now make up for the main sections of this study, and the first is an overarching aspect throughout. This aspiration came both from a desire to challenge this typical categorization and a fear of reproducing the idea these categories as separable from each other. However, because of the limited scope of this study and the reoccurring patterns in the novels, the presentation of my results would have been more scattered and incoherent. Instead I have aspired to show how much masculinity, sexuality and ethnicity, along with other identity markers, do intersect and entangle with each other, producing identities where these aspects are not easily distinguishable from each other. Rather they build on each other and intersect in ways that create specific positions.

Two main concepts are central in this study. One is (in)betweenness, which describes positions between seemingly fixed categories and "worries" the boundaries between them, resulting in a form of hybridity. The second is orientation and linearity, "keeping in line" with norms and expectations on life paths and ways of being. (In)betweenness and being in line is explored through two major themes relating to representations of masculinities: sexualities and ethnicities.

The first theme is sexuality, especially in the novels with representations of queer sexualities. In these novels, the boys are portrayed as feeling particularly conflicted about their abilities to achieve their idealized images of Latino masculinity because of the strong link between manhood, straightness and homophobia. These representations of (in)betweenness are, in several cases, resolved or reinforced through the boys' "coming out" process. How successful the "coming out" process is varies from novel to novel. In some novels, it is represented as
something that is met by largely positive reactions from family and immediate friends. The positive reactions from parents and friends strongly influence the boys' own acceptance of themselves and, in turn, produces positive representations of being a queer Latino. In others, the reactions are violently negative. The negative reactions range from hesitance and confusion to homophobic violence and institutionalization to "fix" the protagonist. These negative reactions are, in several cases, a reaction to the perceived transgression of the boundaries between homosocial bonding and homosexuality. Even when the sexual orientation of the protagonist or other characters is unknown, disciplining measures such as feminizing language are used to question boys' ability to perform heterosexual masculinities.

The second theme is ethnic identity and belonging. Ethnicities are explored in a variety of ways. One is representations of ethnic authenticity as linked to language and bilingualism. In several of novels the boys struggle with their ethnic identities. This is due to their inability to speak Spanish, while simultaneously being represented as reluctant and unable to fill the mold of white American identity. Representations of location also influence the boys' ideas of how to properly perform authentic Latino masculinity. In some of the novels where the boys are represented as feeling "at home" in their respective locations, the process of gentrification challenges this sense of home. As with sexuality, there are also disciplining measures seen in relation to ethnicity and gender. The boys are represented as constantly being subject to racial profiling and surveillance from law enforcers, criminalized both on the basis of their racial and ethnic identities and their location. A second disciplining measure employed is dehumanization through animal analogies. Several boys are compared to various animals, which evoke images of savagery and looting, as well as racist discourse on Latino and black bodies in American culture.

The final theme in this study is the representation of women in the novels. While the protagonist are all male, there are clear gendered patterns in the characterization of supporting characters in these stories. Male supporting characters are portrayed in nuanced ways to a larger extent than their female counterparts, with the exception of Isabel in Dogfight. The representations of masculinity, sexuality and ethnicity are largely established through homosocial bonding between men. Women mainly inhabit the roles of confidants, instruments to progress the plot of the male protagonist, and they are mentioned briefly and incidentally. The novels attempt to deconstruct masculine and ethnic ideals, often renegotiating the meaning of
being a Latino man, but these attempts also function as a way of further marginalizing Latina women.

In this study, positions of (in)between ethnicities, masculinities and sexualities serve to depict diverse and multi-faceted representations of Latino boys. These (in)betweenness positions "worry" the lines of preconceived categories by challenging dichotomous and seemingly static ideas of doing masculinity. It is through the changeability of ethnicity and sexuality, explored as the stories progress, that the static imagery of performing masculinity is shifted. The variety of hybrid identities in the novels shows that identities are negotiable and transformable. In some of the novels, this leads to new understandings of the boys' identities.

However, the representations of (in)betweenness in these novels are always characterized by unease and precariousness. This means that while positions of (in)betweenness can provoke a renegotiation of masculinity ideals at one level, the boys in these stories simultaneously risk being disciplined by others. Additionally, the queer potential of hybridity that is present in the stories is represented as neither accessible to nor wanted by all the characters, thus showing that this potential also partially exists to the detriment of the boys' ability to "fall in line" with their own notions of "ordinary" boyhood.

In this study I have examined diverse representations of Latino identities while also exploring how stereotypes are related to and challenged in the novels. The boys in these novels have differing national, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, but they all relate to the same ideas of Latinos, "thugs" and "cholos". Building on previous research, I have attempted to contribute to new knowledge of contemporary representations of young Latino men and boys when explored through the specific narrative of coming-of-age novels.

Looking to future research, there are several potential directions to move in. Coming-of-age novels with female protagonists are a possible research material both for a similar study of representations of Latina women, femininities, sexualities and ethnicities, which the material in this study lacks representations of. Novels with female protagonists could also function as a continuation of studies of Latino masculinities and representations from a different perspective. Finally, another possibility for future research is to conduct studies similar to this from perspectives of literary scholarship on (in)betweenness and masculinities.
Literature

Primary sources


Secondary sources


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