

ABSTRACT

This dissertation reassumes the research and literary analysis conducted in my Master's thesis "Family Ideal and Real: The Change of the Image of the Family in Selected Works of Mexican American Authors" and extends its scope. As an interdisciplinary work, it examines the connections between history, sociology, and literature. Family as one of the central values in the Mexican American community, started to be officially celebrated as such during the Chicano Movement, in the 1960s and 70s. However, the family was viewed as warm and nurturing by some people, and as strict and rigid by others, and this dichotomy is represented also in literature.

After opening the dissertation with a discussion of Charles Taylor's and Will Kymlicka's view of multiculturalism, I move on to the analysis of the Mexican American family and address several statistics, which describe and analyze the position of Mexican American minority in society and also the Mexican American family, focusing especially on the common stereotypes and supporting them or refuting them with research studies on the specific topics.

The literary section of the dissertation analyzes three segments of Mexican American literature: literature by Chicana authors, autobiographical narratives, and children's literature; and assesses the representation of the Mexican American family in selected literary works. The chapter on Chicana authors evaluates the position of the family in story collections by Sandra Cisneros and novels by Ana Castillo. While the first one blames the family for limiting women in their choices and exposing them to abuse, the latter puts emphasis on the power women have in creating a family that is loving and caring. The chapter on autobiographical narratives by Mexican American authors discusses two books by Norma Elia Cantú and Francisco Jiménez, which address growing up in Mexican American families. Both authors view them positively, though their works demonstrate the difference in their social status and also their gender. The chapter on children's literature evaluates a larger body of books and assesses the change in the representation of the Mexican American family in literature for children between 1960s and 2000s. This dissertation thus addresses the different ways of perceiving the Mexican American family in literature and analyzes the reasons for these differences from historical and sociological perspectives.