It Starts by Asking the Right Questions-Meeting the Needs of the Hispanic Community in Public Libraries

By: LaTesha Velez, Patricia Lyons, and Anthony S. Chow

Abstract:

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina has seen exponential growth in its Hispanic population. Recognizing that this growth requires the public library to reinvent itself to meet the needs of Hispanic patrons, the research team surveyed Spanish-speaking Hispanics living in Mecklenburg County and interviewed Spanish-speaking outreach librarians to better understand the priorities of this patron group. Findings suggest that current library programming is in line with the priorities of Spanish-speaking Hispanic community members, but more effective outreach needs to be done to inform the Hispanic community about the services and programming offered by the public library.

Keywords: public library services | outreach | Latinx | Hispanic

Article:

Introduction

As Tyckoson (2020) reminds us, libraries must be considered valuable to their communities in order to continue to thrive and may be "marginalized" or even closed if they are not. He suggests "librarians must learn who comprises that community, what their information needs are, and how those needs are changing" (Tyckoson 2020, 4). The Hispanic population in the United States is a growing demographic and, as such, serving Hispanic and Latinx patrons is a challenge that public libraries must respond to. According to the Pew Research Center, the Hispanic community is the second largest ethnic group after Whites and is the fastest growing minority in the United States, reaching nearly 58 million in 2016 (Flores 2017). One can argue that, for most immigrants, one of the top reasons to come to the US is to look for a better way to provide for their families. For example, Ibarra and Carlos (2015) explain that Mexicans (more specifically,

Mexican men) are coming to the U.S. in the hope of finding work that enables them to send money back to family members. They situate this reason for migration within the context of the unequal economic arrangements between the U.S. and Mexico, explaining that large-scale migration "is the direct byproduct of political economic arrangements stemming from a hegemonic conquest of a country's economic and political structures through forced economic arrangements coupled with propaganda to justify these arrangements" (215). Another reason for migration to the U.S. is the increased violence in several Central American countries spurred by organized crime causing people of all genders and ages to come through the borders, "including many applying for political asylum to escape persecution from narco-trafficking networks, gangs, or extortion rings" (Orozco 2017, 2). These are, by no means, the only reasons for the growth of the Hispanic population in the U.S. but are indicative of the diverse needs this growing community may have. Therefore, it is essential that libraries consider Hispanic/Latinx patrons' differing reasons for immigration, backgrounds, and cultures in order to identify the appropriate programming, service, and outreach.

Based on information gathered from a study completed in 2007, the American Library Association (ALA) provides resources for serving for immigrant populations. This information includes a report, a toolkit for serving non-English speakers, and resolutions in support of immigrant rights (American Library Association 2019). However, these resources are not specifically targeted toward the Latinx population. While the Reference Services Section of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), in consultation with the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking (REFORMA), offers excellent resources including guidelines for providing library service to Spanish-speaking patrons (American Library Association 2008), and REFORMA offers its own helpful resource page (Information for Libraries, n.d.), the authors wanted to get a better understanding of the specific needs of their community, particularly how to reach those who do not frequent the library.

Although it is not a well-known growth area like California, the U.S Census Bureau (2019) estimates that North Carolina's Hispanic/Latinx population is growing at a faster rate than the national average: 24.6% versus 18.6% growth between 2010 and 2018. As of 2018, approximately 997,000 Hispanics live in North Carolina with the largest concentration of Hispanics, approximately 148,000, residing in Mecklenburg County (Tippett 2019). Most North Carolina Hispanic or Latinx citizens identify as Mexican (57%). Another 11% identify as Puerto Rican, and 14% are from locations in Central America. The ancestry of the remaining 18% is uncategorized. In order to get a better understanding of what the Hispanic community wants from the library, the authors surveyed the Hispanic community in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. We also interviewed Spanish-speaking librarians in that county regarding their expertise on how to best serve Latinx patrons.

Based on their prior experience working in North Carolina libraries, as well as partnering with libraries both across the state of North Carolina and nationally, the research team involved in this study questioned whether the Hispanic community is using the library to its fullest extent, if the library is providing the services and resources that this community needs, if libraries truly understand what those needs actually are, and if libraries are providing a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. The authors also recognize that shrinking library budgets mean that one of

the dilemmas in offering new services that resonate with the Hispanic community is justifying an increased allocation of resources in tight budgetary times for a population of the community that is not currently using existing resources and services to a high extent. With those issues in mind, the research team set out to explore several questions to help address the needs of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Hispanic/Latinx community.

This research contributes to and extends our understanding of the needs of the Hispanic populations and can help libraries with similar populations by offering evidence-based outreach and programming suggestions. We hope that providing evidence-based service and programming suggestions may mitigate budget allocation concerns the Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library may have. It is also the hope of the researchers that libraries can use this work as a useful roadmap to begin their own assessment projects and understand some of the challenges and necessary decision points involved. Finally, we hope that research such as this encourages researchers and instructors to embed work about minoritized populations into LIS courses so new professionals are cognizant of the needs of diverse patrons and will seek to identify and address the needs of any underserved members of their own library communities.

Who we are

As researchers who are engaging in the social justice project of helping libraries identify and centralizing the needs of minoritized people, we feel that it is important to name our own racial and ethnic background to situate our research with our own individual cultural contexts and to help identify potential biases. All three members of the research team identify as ethnic minorities and two as Latinx. While only one member of the team speaks Spanish, all three have some experience around primarily non-English speaking households. Dr. LaTesha Velez is of mixed race/ethnicity, African American and Puerto Rican, and identifies as both. Dr. Anthony Chow is the son of Chinese immigrants, he was initially fluent in mandarin before kindergarten but is now a primarily English speaker. Patricia Lyons, a MLIS graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, was born and raised in Mexico. After moving to the US, she accepted a job in a bilingual preschool to teach English to Latinx students. She saw first-hand the struggles of the Hispanic Community. Ms. Lyons' is affiliated with Mecklenburg County public libraries and wanted to aid the libraries in better serving the Hispanic populations it serves. She is the sole Spanish-speaker on the team and, as such, administered and translated the surveys.

Literature review

Outreach

Crafting successful outreach strategies was a common theme addressed in the literature about public library services to Latinx patrons. Currently, many institutions other than libraries are meeting the information needs of the Hispanic community. These institutions include schools, churches, charities, the YWCA, and social service agencies (McClain 2007). However, when members of the Hispanic community do visit the library they are more likely than White library users to see public library services as important to themselves personally or to their families.

Hispanic patrons are also likely to recommend the library to family and friends (Brown and Lopez 2015).

Rosales (2016) reminds us that the very first step in a positive direction is to acknowledge that your patron population includes a Hispanic community, although it is important to remember that "Hispanics" is a broad term that encompasses many different cultures and ethnicities. Once you acknowledge those communities, the next step is to develop partnerships with Hispanic community organizations and leaders (Alire and Ayala 2007; Rosales 2016). Rosales (2016) explains, "The most important thing is to make the Hispanic community aware that you do understand their needs and acknowledge their presence" (32).

Ruhlmann (2014) spoke with several librarians to gather best practices for effective outreach. One librarian interviewed echoed the suggestions made by Rosales regarding developing community partnerships by also stressing the importance of creating a dialogue and asking questions before attempting to promote library resources. Such questions reveal the concerns and motivations of the people you are speaking with so that libraries have a better understanding of how they can help and what messaging will be best for marketing materials. Waukegan (Ill.) Public Library's (WPL) volunteer promotors perform needs assessments by speaking to groups of Hispanics at churches, school meetings, and other community gatherings (Ruhlmann 2014).

Circulating bilingual flyers and including Spanish language signage in the library was one suggestion for advertising programming and making your Latinx community feel more welcome. "This is a useful tactic that will let Spanish speakers know that the library indeed understands there is a Hispanic community and they are important as well. The signs do not have to be flashy or over the top. They should be as effective as possible while also being concise" (Rosales 2016, 32).

Bilingual staffing

Although the rate of growth is slowing, the overall number of Hispanics in the United States who speak Spanish in the home is rising. According to the Pew Research Center, "a record 37 million Hispanics [in the U.S.] ages 5 and older speak Spanish at home, up from 25 million in 2000" (Flores 2017, 10). Unsurprisingly, considering the number of Spanish speakers in the U.S., bilingual staffing is recommended (Alire and Ayala 2007; Rosales 2016).

While it is true that librarians of any ethnicity may speak Spanish, it is still important for patrons to see librarians who reflect their own identities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's (2019) QuickFacts tool, 18.3% of the U.S. population was estimated to be Hispanic or Latinx in 2019. The percentage of Hispanic librarians in the United States has only incrementally increased from 3.9% to 4.7% (Rosa and Henke 2017). Clearly this figure does not reflect the rates found in the U.S. population overall. Alire and Ayala (2007) explain that successful outreach efforts designed to bring more Latinx community members into the library necessitates fluency in Spanish. They elaborate that more than just knowing how to speak Spanish, librarians should also understand the Latinx culture, so they call for both bilingual and bicultural Latinx library staff.

In a survey conducted between May 5 and August 5, 2011 that included all library types but mostly consisted of public librarians (78 public librarians out of a total of 97 participants), 69% of respondents indicated that they speak Spanish. However, there is no indication of their level of comfort with the Spanish language and the results may be skewed because many respondents come from areas that traditionally have large Hispanic populations (RUSA's RSS Committee on Library Services for Spanish Speakers 2011).

Adkins and Sean Burns (2013) published a study comparing the library services offered to Spanish-speaking patrons in Arizona in 1999 to those offered ten years later in 2009. They found that important metrics such as the number of Spanish-speaking librarians and the quantity of programming being offered are increasing but these increases are incremental.

Alvarez and Alvarez (2016) offer a case study of a bilingual public library located in Kentucky. Pulling from García and Wei's 2013 book entitled, *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*, Alvarez and Alvarez explain, "Translanguaging is the moving back and forth between and across languages, a dynamic literacy activity among bilingual communities" (48). The authors found that the library was a counter-space that challenged deficit notions associated with being bilingual and was a safe space to practice translanguaging.

Programming

Guerrero et al. (2013) tells us that there is a literacy gap between Hispanic and White children and explains this may be exacerbated by "lower maternal education, weaker early reading practices, larger family size, and less exposure to quality preschool" (1701). This may be one reason that some researchers cited resources to aid in research for work or school as a service that Hispanic community members desire (Bala and Adkins 2004; Brown and Lopez 2015). Other authors suggest offering bilingual story time (Driver and Wall 2007; Paz 2016; VanDyne 2018) and appealing to the whole family – not just the children – with a bilingual book club (Saldaña 2009).

Offering services that address literacy concerns is useful, but it is important not to assume a deficit-based stance to programming. Rather, librarians should use programming to honor Hispanic culture. Kuglin (2009) and Wallace (2015) both describe how participation with the *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* (Children's Day/Book Day) initiative, which was created by author Pat Mora and REFORMA and is currently housed in the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), can help libraries celebrate Latinx culture and literacy. Wallace provides several suggestions to successfully engage the community in *Día* including similar best practices to those discussed above such as creating partnerships with Latinx community leaders. She also suggests being creative and finding ways to make children active participants in performances and programming. Kuglin (2009) provides insight into how one library chose to use *Día* to both celebrate the thriving Latinx community in the area who already frequented the library and as a marketing tool for outreach efforts to bring new Spanish-speaking patrons into the library. As we have seen repeatedly echoed in other articles, this library partnered with a local church that served the Spanish-speaking community and MIRA (*Modulo De Informacion Recursos y Apoyo*) Latino Resource Center.

Barriers to access

The issue of citizenship status, however, complicates both outreach efforts and efforts to provide the best service for Hispanic patrons once they are in the library. Hispanics may face an added level of library anxiety due to a fear that they will be asked their citizenship status which may ultimately lead to deportation (Rosales 2016; Ruhlmann 2014). Card (2019) reminds us that there may be extenuating circumstances impeding Hispanics' library usage unrelated to the library itself. Moving around their own community may be actively dangerous for Black and Brown youth so it is not enough to simply offer worthwhile programming, services, and resources. She cautions, "While it is important to highlight the academic support that libraries provide, we must also emphasize that libraries are safe spaces for many who face physical danger when they socialize in groups in public, including black and Latinx teens, often subjected to over policing in their communities" (37). Therefore, it is imperative that library outreach efforts make it clear that libraries are a safe space, regardless of skin tone or immigration status, and that seeking assistance from librarians and library staff will not cause harm.

Librarians interviewed by Ruhlmann (2014) report that many of their Mexican community members that live in more rural areas are unfamiliar with the library. So, when librarians conduct outreach, they do not specifically talk about the library at all instead they "try to learn what barriers are keeping them [the rural Mexican community in Waukegan] from succeeding" (40). Some common responses that librarians from the Waukegan Public Library heard were, "I don't have a GED," "I'm scared to drive because of the laws," "I can't speak English," or "I can't help my children with their homework" (40).

When taken together, the research discussed above makes it clear that librarians must actively seek out members of their Hispanic and Latinx populations and listen to their communities' needs before offering programming (Rosales 2016; Ruhlmann 2014). Such outreach efforts may be more effective if performed by Hispanic and Latinx librarians who have a greater understanding of each community's cultural context (Alire and Ayala 2007). It is particularly important to remember that some of these patrons have barriers to accessing the library that other patron groups do not experience such as language barriers, fear of being profiled by law enforcement, and fear of deportation (Card 2019; Rosales 2016; Ruhlmann 2014). While researchers did provide programming options, with one suggesting programming informed by the literacy gap between Whites and Hispanics (Rosales 2016), it is important for librarians not to approach Hispanic and Latinx communities with deficit-based notions of who they are and what they need. Ensuring that your library is a counter-space that celebrates Hispanic cultures and where deficit notions about the literacy and criminalization of Hispanic community members are challenged, can be a powerful way to show that your library is safe and welcoming (Alvarez and Alvarez 2016; Kuglin 2009; Wallace 2015). With these findings in mind, our research team undertook a project designed to listen to the needs of the Hispanic population in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

Materials and methods

This study was conducted in 2019 using a mixed methods approach. Mecklenburg County keeps library usage data, but this data is not divided by racial or ethnic group. Researchers interviewed

local Spanish-speaking public librarians responsible for outreach and services to Hispanic patrons to gather information about usage patterns and to gather a frontline perspective from librarians who work directly with this community. We also surveyed Spanish-speaking members of the Latinx community in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina to ascertain who our community was, what was important to them in their daily lives, and what library services may be of interest to them.

The purpose of our study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the daily priorities of the Hispanic community?
2. What are the library services/resources and programs that are most relevant to the Hispanic community?
3. How can public libraries provide more services/resources and programs for the Hispanic community?

After defining our research questions, we operationalized how each research question would be measured by creating sub-questions. We created a table to crosswalk each sub-question with a corresponding research question to cross-reference that the sub-questions aligned with our original research questions. Four sub-questions mapped back to R1 and three each for R2 and R3. We then used these sub-questions as the basis for our survey. This ensured alignment between the research questions and the data collection instrument. It also helped ensure that data collected would answer the research questions thereby increasing the internal validity of the study. The resultant research questions with their sub-questions are as follows:

R1. What are the daily priorities of the Hispanic community?

SQ1. Activities that are important to my family and me
SQ2. In my free time I …
SQ3. I know where the closest library is
SQ4. I, or somebody in my family, has a library card

R2. What are the library services/resources and programs that are most relevant to the Hispanic community?

SQ1. I use the Library's services
SQ2. I attend programs at the Library
SQ3. These are some of the services/programs that I use

R3. How can public libraries provide more services/resources and programs for the Hispanic community?

SQ1. Reasons that I don't use the library
SQ2. I, or somebody in my family would benefit from a library service/program
SQ3. I would like the library to offer this service/program …

Data sources

Telephone interviews with four Spanish-speaking library staff who serve the Latinx community of Mecklenburg County were conducted (see Appendix A for interview instrument). This was a purposeful sample that included the only librarians in the system known to provide services in Spanish to the Hispanic community. The telephone interviews included ten questions and each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. Three interviewees worked in different branches throughout the county, and the fourth was part of the outreach team providing services and programs across the county. These interviews were intended to provide more information on the current services being offered, outreach efforts being made, and library usage trends for Spanish-speaking patrons.

In order to find out what is important to Spanish-speaking prospective library users, we also conducted a survey including only responses from individuals who indicated that they speak Spanish. While a survey design holds certain limitations, including the fact that surveys, as opposed to interviews and focus groups, remove the social interaction and idea creation that occurs naturally in a more conversational setting, researchers selected a survey design for a number of reasons. First, a survey design allowed us to ask a more detailed set of questions that were directly derived from and aligned to our research questions. Second, it gave us the ability to reach a larger sample size in comparison to interviews and focus groups. Third, it allowed for asynchronous data collection which was necessary given that the primary data collector is also a full-time librarian. The researchers initially intended to disseminate the survey online. Although internet usage amongst Hispanics is trending upward, particularly amongst younger Hispanics, there are still concerns around internet connectivity in more rural areas and we wanted to reach multiple age ranges (Brown, Lopéz, and Lopez 2016). We decided the best way to collect information was to administer paper surveys in strategic locations across the county. This included visiting a neighborhood care center, several churches, and two Mexican restaurants, all places where members of the research team had developed outreach relationships. The final location was outside of a local Walmart because it was in a part of the county that was not covered by the other locations and we wanted to survey as many areas in Mecklenburg County as possible. The surveys were administered by one of the researchers who visited the community center, preschools, churches, and local Walmart in person and handed out surveys. She then collected the completed surveys once respondents were finished. Surveys were also left with restaurant and store owners who were personally known by one of the researchers and completed surveys were collected at a later date. A total of 128 completed surveys were collected.

All the survey responses were written in Spanish and were translated into English by the same researcher who administered the surveys. The frequency of each response was then recorded. The surveys contained a mix of open-ended and multiple-choice questions (see Appendix B for the English translation of the questionnaire and Appendix C for the Spanish language questionnaire that was provided to participants). The second author, who shared a common ethnicity with many of the respondents and lives and works in the same region targeted for the study, identified recurrent themes across the surveys and used a frequency analysis to record the results. Although we must acknowledge that Hispanics encompass many different ethnicities and cultural contexts, we felt her embeddedness within the community best equipped her to properly situate the responses.

Results

Spanish-speaking librarians' interviews (n = 4)

Perceived respondent priorities

When asked to describe the priorities of Hispanic families, all four staff members responded that Hispanic families typically work long hours and one of their priorities is to provide their children with a "buena educacion" (good education). To that end, parents wanted to help and support students with their school homework. The librarians interviewed stated that the activities that Hispanic families engage in during their free time include spending time with their family, such as playing a sport or doing an activity together and attending church services.

Perceived library usage patterns

Library staff encountered Hispanic families through outreach, frequenting bilingual churches, and at preschools. The most popular services librarians provided outside of the library included children's services programming and workshops designed to assist parents help their children with reading and comprehension. One interviewee responded, "It is very important for our families to help and support their children with their school homework." The results were divided when asked if the families that they normally see when they provide outreach come to the branch to use the services or to attend programs; two librarians said that outreach resulted in visits to the branch, while the other two said that it did not. When discussing whether outreach lead to increased library usage one interviewee noted, "it is also very important if the branch provides programs that are intended for the Hispanic Community." When speaking about having Spanish-speaking staff available at the library, one of the respondents said, "If there is at least one staff member that speaks Spanish, the families will feel more welcome and encouraged to visit a branch." Each of the other three interviewees echoed the sentiment that having at least one staff member who spoke Spanish, regardless of whether that person also shared a Hispanic or Latinx identity, would help Hispanic patrons feel more welcome in library spaces. This notion that Spanish-speaking staff does not necessarily have to be Hispanic or Latinx themselves differs somewhat from Alire and Ayala (2007) assertion that is important for staff to both speak Spanish and also to have a deeper knowledge of Hispanic culture when one considers that this knowledge frequently comes from the lived-experience of being a member of that culture.

Librarian recommended programming

The staff members suggested six programs that would benefit the Hispanic community: 1) Spanish/Bilingual story time; 2) Reading Buddies; 3) Homework help; 4) ESL classes; 5) English Conversation Club; and 6) Workshops in Spanish for parents, like Active Reading or Reading Comprehension. Each of these programs are currently offered by Mecklenburg County branch libraries but are often not well-attended.

Hispanic library patron survey (n = 128)

Demographics

Demographic information was collected from survey respondents regarding their age, race/ethnicity, and language background. The specific cultural backgrounds of the Hispanic respondents who took the survey in relation to broader North Carolina demographics was an important data point in recognition of the distinct ethnicities that comprise the Hispanic population. Although respondents all spoke some Spanish, understanding their comfort level with English helped inform the question if bilingual services would be a useful inclusion in Mecklenburg Public Libraries. Like the demographics of North Carolina as a whole, most of our respondents, 34%, identified themselves as Mexicans. However, although 11% of the Hispanics in North Carolina identify as Puerto Rican, no survey respondents identified themselves as such. Because 24% of our respondents declined to answer that question, it is unknown if there were any responses from the Puerto Rican community. Of the remaining respondents, 13% identified as Honduran, 9% as Guatemalan, 6% as Colombian, 6% as Salvadorian, 3% as Venezuelan, 3% as Ecuadorian, and 2% as Dominican. When asked about their English proficiency, most respondents reported not speaking English at all, 54%, while 23% said they spoke some English, 7% said they spoke English, and 16% said that they are fluent in English. Four respondents were 18 to 24 years old, 52 were 25 to 34 years old, 58 were 35 to 44 years old, 10 were 45 to 54 years old, and four were over 65 years old.

Respondent priorities

The first question asked in the survey was an open-ended question regarding their daily priorities. Helping children with school or homework was mentioned most often with 74 respondents citing it as a daily priority. Next was spending time with family (50 mentions) and work (36 mentions).

Library usage patterns

Most of the respondents knew where their closest public library was located, with 91% answering "yes" and only 9% saying "no." However, that knowledge did not necessarily translate into library usage, as only a little over half of the respondents, 58%, said that someone in the household had a library card, and only 40% of respondents said they had attended library programs. Unfortunately, we do not have any current information that we can use to compare these results to other ethnicities. This is a possible avenue for future studies.

Requested programming

Respondents were asked to suggest three services or programs that they would like the library to offer. Of the 70 respondents who answered the questions, the most often requested programming was: 1) English as a second language class; 2) Homework help; 3) Help with reading; 4) More programming for school-aged children; 5) Workshops for parents (although no specific type of workshop was suggested); 6) Spanish language story time; and 7) Help with job skills.

Discussion

Librarians engaged in outreach to Spanish-speaking communities felt that daily priorities of the Hispanic community in Mecklenburg County revolved around family. Although they believed Hispanic residents likely worked long hours, they felt that free time was spent helping with homework, playing a sport or engaging in some other family activity, or attending church as a family. Survey responses indicate that these librarians were correct as respondents said their daily priorities did indeed include work, helping children with school or homework, and spending time with family. This is a positive sign that librarians have indeed communicated enough to be familiar with the Hispanic community and understand their daily priorities, which should allow them to build outreach and services that fit into the life of the library user.

It also appears that librarians' thoughts on what programming should be offered for Hispanic patrons is in line with what the community itself wants with both librarians and survey respondents saying that important programming would include ESL classes, homework assistance, help with reading, workshops for parents, and Spanish story time. However, Hispanic community members also asked for help with job skills. These findings echo many of the programming suggestions found in the literature.

Unfortunately, there seems to be some disconnect between providing services and making community members aware of the services being provided. Two librarians said that outreach led to visits to the branch library, while the other two did not see that occurring. Another finding of note is that, while most of the respondents knew where the library was (91%), only a little over half of the respondents had a library card and less than half had attended a library program. This finding, along with the fact that some of the services that survey respondents asked for are already being provided – like ESL class, homework help, and programs for families – indicates that the Hispanic community may not be aware of everything the library has to offer or might not be motivated enough to fit a library visit into their busy lives.

This has implications on outreach efforts, suggesting more work needs to be done to understand how best to reach members of this community and work closely with them to understand current barriers to their use of libraries. It may point too a need to expand outreach efforts to other locations in the community or to issues with the days and times that programming is offered. Suggestions from our study's results and the extant literature include three potential tactics: 1) developing strong partnerships with leaders in the community; 2) creating more of a dialogue in spaces like churches and school meetings; and 3) ensuring that marketing materials are bilingual. There may be other issues, however, related to ensuring patrons know that the library is a safe and welcoming space, regardless of immigration status, that bear further scrutiny.

Both the literature and interviews with librarians suggest that having more Spanish-speaking staff may be a way to increase library usage, make libraries feel more welcoming, and ultimately help libraries provide more resources and programming for the Hispanic community. The fact that over 77% of our respondents either spoke only Spanish or only some English supports the idea that Spanish-speaking staffing is important to aid in communication and providing services with the Hispanic community in Mecklenburg County.

Our study adds to the growing body of knowledge and literature on this underrepresented population. While our sample is too small to claim any statistical power, the repetition and

recurrence of responses suggests some validity to our findings. Furthermore, our study serves as a glimpse into the unique challenges of collecting data from this minority population. There are additional research avenues to be explored regarding providing the best possible service to our Hispanic and Latinx community members. One interesting and concerning question that emerged in discussions with the librarians and administration about services to the Hispanic and Latinx community was whether this truly was an under-served patron group that additional resources should be expended on. In other words, would expending more resources – such as increasing Spanish-speaking staff and offering more resources and programs they wanted to see – increase use of the library from this population? Or, should these finite resources be used more for populations that already use the library? These questions suggest gaps in our knowledge and are essential areas for future study.

It is also vital to remember that Hispanic and Latinx populations are not monolithic groups, but are communities composed of individuals including those who migrated to the United States from different countries as well as those born within the U.S. For example, people of Mexican origin accounted for 63.3% (36 million) of the nation's Hispanic population in 2015, but this has declined in recent years as fewer people from Mexico have emigrated to the U.S. and the number heading back to Mexico increased (Flores 2017). Furthermore, although the Spanish language is a common tie between many Hispanics, their information needs can differ and, at times, is influenced by the reasons they migrated to the United States in the first place. Our survey respondents primarily identified as Mexican and were between the ages of 25–44, so it is unsurprising that services such as programming for children and job assistance were mentioned. In communities with other demographics, programming needs may vastly differ, so conducting local community assessments is vital.

As was mentioned earlier, the Pew Research Center indicates that this patron group is more likely than White patrons to see public library services as important, which suggests that resources spent in providing outreach and services to these patrons could be a fruitful avenue for increasing library usage. More needs to be done to replace anecdotes with empirical data. This research is a step in that direction. When interviews with library staff members are viewed in light of survey responses from the Hispanic community in Mecklenburg County, it appears that librarians are on the right track in terms of what programs the library should be offering. Clearly, other barriers exist, and more research needs to be done to determine exactly how often such programming is being offered, how it is being promoted to those in the Hispanic community, and any potential barriers to attendance that librarians can mitigate.

Notes on contributors

LaTesha Velez focuses on uncovering invisible norms and bias that may hinder the LIS profession from providing its highest level of service. After working in libraries off and on since 1994, Dr. Velez is now focused on teaching new professionals to thrive in a growingly diverse and globalized field. LaTesha's research critically examines and contextualizes information in society and the role of information institutions in society. Her specific interests include the history of race and space in the academic library setting, social histories and theories of information communication technologies (ICTs) with a focus on race, gender, and sexuality, and a critical look at how information institutions can serve as counter-spaces.

Patricia Lyons has been working in the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library (CML) System at the Cornelius branch for six years. She was born and lived much of her life in Mexico and in our culture, libraries don't play a big role in communities. She is determined to change that idea particularly for her local Hispanic community! She wants to be able to keep providing services and programs that are meaningful to her community.

Anthony S. Chow passion is in helping people improve their quality of life and he believes faculty serve a privileged role in being active change agents by teaching the future professionals of the LIS field, by conducting meaningful and relevant research, and by being active in service that is value-added and makes a difference. Dr. Chow has over 20 years of experience in academia, private industry, and government and specializes in web design and usability, leadership and management, instructional technology, and analytics and informatics.

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Appendix A. Spanish-Speaking Librarians' Interview Questions

1. What activities do you think are important to Latino families?

After answered, ask: Children's homework, practice sports, attend church's service, read

2. What do you think Latino families do on their free time?

After answered, ask: Spend time with family/friends, practice sports, attend church services, read, relax, watch TV, go to the library

3. In your experience, do Latino families know where the closest library is?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. Do they normally have a library card?
   a. Yes
   b. No

5. Or use Library's services?
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. Do they attend programs at the library?
   a. Yes
   b. No

If yes, are those programs offered in English, Spanish, or bilingual?

7. What are some of the services/programs that they use from the library?

After answered, ask: Public computers, check out books, seek information from library staff, English classes, help with homework/reading, book club, storytime, none

8. What do you think are some of the reasons that they don't use the library?

After answered, ask: Don't know where the library is, don't know what the library has to offer, don't have a library card, transportation, lack of time

9. What would be a program that you could suggest the library to offer that could benefit Latino families?

Appendix B. Hispanic Library Patron Survey, English

The purpose of this research study is to find out what are the services/resources and programs that are most relevant to Spanish speakers. You are being asked to take part in a research study because you speak Spanish.

Being in a research study is completely voluntary. You can choose not to be in this research study. You can also say yes now and change your mind later.

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to answer a survey. Your participation in this study will take about 10 minutes.

You can choose not to answer any question you do not wish to answer. You can also choose to stop taking the survey at any time. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. If you are younger than 18 years old, please stop now.

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are your daily priorities?
2. What do you need on a daily basis?
3. In what ways the library can provide what you need?

Please choose the option or options that apply to the following statements:

4. Activities that are important to my family and me
    a. My children's homework
    b. Practice sports
    c. Attend church service
    d. Read
    e. Other:

5. In my free time I:
    a. Spend time with family/friends
    b. Practice sports
    c. Attend church service

d. Read
e. Relax
f. Watch TV
g. Go to the library
h. Other:

6. I know where the closest library is
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. I, or somebody in my family, has a library card
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. I use the library's services
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. I attend programs at the library
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. These are some of the services/programs that I use from the library

	1 (Not at all)	2	3	4	5 (All the time)
Public computers					
Check out books					
Seek information from library staff					
English classes					
Help with homework/reading					
Book club					
Storytime					

11. Reasons that I don't use the library
    a. I don't know where the library is
    b. I don't know what the library has to offer
    c. I don't have a library card
    d. Transportation
    e. Lack of time
    f. Other

12. I, or somebody in my family, would benefit from a library service/program
    a. Yes
    b. No

13. Top three services or programs that I would like the library to offer:
14. I am

a. 18 to 24 years old
b. 25 to 34 years old
c. 35 to 44 years old
d. 45 to 54 years old
e. 55 to 64 years old
f. over 65 years old

15. Country of origin
16. My English proficiency
    a. I don't speak English
    b. I speak some English
    c. I speak English
    d. I am fluent

Appendix C. Hispanic Library Patron Survey, Spanish

El proposito de esta investigacion es averiguar cuales son los servicios/recursos y programas mas importantes para las personas que hablan Espanol. Usted ha sido seleccionado para participar en el estudio porque usted habla Espanol.

Su participacion en el estudio es completamente voluntario. Usted puede escoger no participar en el estudio. Usted tambien puede elegir participar y despues cambiar de opinion.

Si usted decide participar en el estudio, usted debera contestar una encuesta. Su participacion en este estudio sera de aproximadamente 10 minutos.

Usted puede decidir no contestar las preguntas que no desee contestar. Tambien podra elegir dejar de contestar la encuesta en cualquier momento. Usted debe de tener por lo menos 18 anos. Si usted es menor de 18 anos por favor pare ahora.

Por favor conteste las siguientes preguntas

1. Cuales son sus prioridades diarias?
2. Cuales son las cosas que usted necesita diario?
3. En que cree usted que la biblioteca podria ayudarle con lo que usted necesita?

Por favor encierre en un circulo la opcion u opciones (todas las que apliquen) que contesten las siguientes preguntas:

4. Actividades que son importantes para mi familia y para mi
    a. La tarea de mis hijos
    b. Practicar deportes
    c. Ir a la Iglesia
    d. Leer
    e. Otro:

5. En mi tiempo libre, yo
   a. Paso tiempo con mi familia/amigos
   b. Practico deportes
   c. Voy a la Iglesia
   d. Leo
   e. Me relajo
   f. Veo television
   g. Voy a la biblioteca
   h. Otro

6. Yo se en donde queda la biblioteca mas cercana a mi casa
   a. Si
   b. No

7. Yo, o alguien en mi familia tiene una tarjeta de la biblioteca
   a. Si
   b. No

8. Yo utilizo los servicios de la biblioteca
   a. Si
   b. No

9. Yo voy a los programas que ofrece la biblioteca
   a. Si
   b. No

10. Estos son los servicios/programas que yo uso de la biblioteca:

	1 (Nunca)	2	3	4	5 (Todo el tiempo)
Usar Computadoras					
Sacar libros					
Buscar ayuda de las personas que ahi trabajan					
Classes de Ingles					
Ayuda con la tarea/leer					
Club de lectura					
Cuentos					

11. Razones por las que no utilizo la biblioteca:
    a. No se en donde queda la biblioteca
    b. No se que servicios o programas se ofrecen
    c. No tengo tarjeta
    d. No tengo medio de transporte
    e. No tengo tiempo
    f. Otro:

12. Yo, o alguien de mi familia se beneficiaria con servicios/programas de la biblioteca
    a. Si

    b.   No

13. Me gustaria que en la biblioteca ofrecieran estos tres servicios principalmente:
14. Mi edad:
    a.   18 to 24 anos
    b.   25 to 34 anos
    c.   35 to 44 anos
    d.   45 to 54 anos
    e.   55 to 64 anos
    f.   mayor de 65 anos

15. Pais en el que naci
16. Mi nivel de Ingles
    a.   No hablo Ingles
    b.   Hablo un poco de Ingles
    c.   Hablo ingles
    d.   Hablo Ingles con fluidez