

“LA ESCUELA ES PARA ESTUDIAR”: REPRESENTATIONS OF CHICANA SCHOOLING
EXPERIENCES IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Chicana schooling experiences represented in young adult literature texts written by Chicana authors and explored how Chicanas grappled with their identity formation and current realities within their schooling experiences as depicted in selected texts. Guided by Chicana feminist perspectives, this study engaged in a critical content analysis of four young adult literature texts: *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014), *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2013), *What Can(t) Wait* (Pérez, 2011), and *The Tequila Worm* (Canales, 2005). Two themes emerged: (1) academicas and high achieving, and (2) escritoras y artistas: meaning-making in school. The findings have important implications for understanding and problematizing portrayals of Chicana protagonists and their schooling experiences. Recommendations are provided for teachers on disrupting narrow views of Chicanas in the classroom through the use of young adult literature.

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Para mis padres, esta es para ustedes.

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CHAPTER 1: REPRESENTATIONS OF CHICANA SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES

“What,” Sarita asks, ‘you think you’re Anglo now ‘cause you’re in Drama? You think you’re better than us?’
“No—”
“Then stop trying to act like *them*,” Mireya says accusingly.
“You’re Mexican, just like the rest of us. Look around you. Ninety-nine percent of this school is Mexican. Stop trying to be something you’re not!”
Under the Mesquite (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 81)

The above excerpt showcases Lupita’s experience during her lunch break at school. She is being accused of “wanting to be White” because she enjoys school and drama club, one of her passions since she aspires to be an actress. In her work with young adult (YA) literature, Herrera (2017) discusses that Chicanas are not “supposed” to have these types of interests and are stigmatized as wanting to “be White” because smartness and nerdiness are associated with whiteness (Hatt, 2012). Lupita’s experience is reflective of various Chicanas, including my own, in regards to schooling. Because of my interests in literature and reading, I was often labeled as being whitewashed in the later years of my high school experience.

Like many Chicanas, I had to grapple and negotiate my identities in school constantly. When my English language arts teacher decided to integrate *Under the Mesquite* by Guadalupe Garcia McCall into our class curriculum, I could wholeheartedly identify with and see my identity struggles within Lupita. I could relate to her efforts, mainly how she had to navigate her home life and schooling life. I related to how she navigated issues within her family, language, being the oldest daughter, and, overall, navigating multiple spaces as a Chicana within school and in the U.S. This was one of the few YA literature texts that my teacher integrated into the curriculum that was primarily filled with only canonical texts, which consisted of *Beowulf*, *The Iliad*, and Shakespearean plays, to name a few. Growing up in a predominantly White

community and being one of the few Chicanas in my class, I was grateful to my teacher for integrating YA literature.

YA literature texts offer an insight into contemporary issues and adolescent realities. Although canonical texts often possess themes that may connect to topics relevant today, students struggle to connect these themes through modern lenses because they do not see their current realities represented in the texts (Buehler, 2016; Rodríguez, 2019). According to Scherff and Groenke (2009), “we know that adolescents like young adult novels because, unlike classical, canonical works, they have been written *about* adolescents, *with adolescents readers in mind*” (p. 2, emphasis in original). For adolescents, it can be empowering to see themselves and their experiences in literature. However, the sphere of children’s and YA literature has traditionally depicted a majority of White characters and narratives. While there has been an increase in diverse representations in YA literature so far, there is still a scarcity of research and critical examination for these demographics. For my thesis, I intend to examine and further contribute to the research revolving around Chicana YA literature.

Problem Statement

In the last couple of years, Latinx communities have experienced a surge of xenophobic acts, anti-immigrant and “English Only” rhetoric, particularly during and after the 2016 presidential election (Braden & Rodriguez, 2018; Díez, 2019). According to the U.S. Census in 2015, 56.5 million Latinx were living in the U.S., comprising 17.6% of the total population, and just over 60% of that population being of Mexican descent (Flores et al., 2017; U.S. Census Bureau). As mentioned by Alamillo, Mercado-López, & Herrera (2018), this suggests that students of Mexican descent—or Chicanx—maintain a significant enrollment and presence in K-12 classrooms in the U.S (p. xi). Therefore, it is of high importance for those that work with and

for Chicana adolescents, such as teachers and librarians, to better accommodate and consider their experiences in the classroom.

One way to affirm students' experience in the classroom is through the use of diverse literature that accurately and authentically portrays Chicana youth (Garza De Cortés & Battle, 2013). As Bishop (1990) explains in her foundational work, children need to have access to the “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” in literature, which entails the following: 1) every child should see themselves reflected in the texts they read, 2) notice other's experiences in the windows of literature, and 3) empathize with other's experiences when they read literature. Chicana YA literature can serve the purposes outlined by Bishop (1990) by offering opportunities for Chicana youth to see themselves in texts. However, accurate and authentic representations of “Hispanic” characters in children's and YA literature significantly lack compared to their increasing population in the U.S. (Barry, 1998). Representation is even slimmer with depictions of Chicana protagonists because they are often erased under the umbrella of Latina and/or Hispanic.

Although representation is slim, there has been recent recognition of Chicana YA literature. Therefore, the need of scholarly work on texts written for Chicana youth has become necessary to examine and “recognize the heterogeneity within this body of literature and give special attention and credit to the range of experiences within the Chicana@ community” (Alamillo, Mercado-López, & Herrera, 2018, p. xi). With the evolving demographics of Chicana in the U.S. and in schools, it is vital to examine not only Chicana but particularly Chicana characters and their depictions within literature. Chicana's experience various sites of oppression, precisely that of racial and misogynistic violence. There is much to learn from stories that feature young Chicanas that are first-generation immigrants, often from working-class

backgrounds, and navigating their coming of age. Thus, it is vital to examine how these experiences are represented within texts targeted for this age group to ensure they are authentically and expansively portrayed.

The purpose of this study is to examine Chicana schooling experiences represented in YA literature. Specifically, to explore how Chicanas grapple with their identity formation and current realities within their schooling experiences as depicted in selected texts. This study intends to inform teachers, curriculum developers, parents, and librarians about integrating authentic portrayals of Chicana identities and their schooling experiences through YA literature. Furthermore, this study contributes to the evolving literature on Chicana YA literature and to normalize complex and expansive views of Chicanas. The following questions guide this study:

1. How are Chicana protagonists' schooling experiences represented in young adult literature written by Chicana authors?
2. How do Chicana protagonists grapple with their identity formation and current realities within their schooling experiences represented in selected texts?

Positionality and Background

I am a 2nd generation Chicana who grew up in a rural, predominantly White community, with the population being 67.2% White, 28.3% Hispanic or Latina/o/x, and 4.5% other races. These demographics were mirrored in my K-12 schooling. With this in mind, I want to bring into the conversation my academic trajectory from the time I was a freshman in high school to my senior year to provide context for my interest in this study. Upon entering high school as a freshman, I was classified as an average student, with a couple of Bs and Cs. I observed that students who were academically achieving, not average as myself, were treated better and were predominantly White students. For instance, teachers did not chastise them for arriving late to

class and allowed them extensions to submitting classwork in comparison to students who were labeled as average or below. Thus, teachers and administration did not pay particular attention to me. However, into my junior year, I was recognized in the honor roll because I began to enjoy my classes and began to obtain high marks in my classes. I noticed my peers referring to me as the “smart Mexican girl.” I also noticed how teachers and other peers began to recognize me and treated me “better” only because of this shift in my academic performance. Based on this shift that I noticed and my personal schooling experiences regarding my teacher including YA literature in the curriculum, this is what sparked my interest in examining representations of school in YA literature, specifically Chicana representations.

To discuss further, I was (and still am) an avid reader and observed that Chicanas were rarely in texts or the curriculum, aside from my English teacher, including *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011), and my history teacher incorporating Dolores Huerta into our discussions when I learned about the Farmworkers Movement. Besides these two instances, Chicana representation was practically nonexistent until I started my undergraduate career. Also, as an English language arts teacher now, I have utilized my prior knowledges and interests to inform my teaching. I have placed value on integrating diverse YA literature texts to reflect my students’ backgrounds and curiosities while also allowing room to critique these texts’ content. However, I realized that often depictions are not always completely accurate and often encompass diverse groups into clumps. Therefore, from this realization and my own personal schooling experiences as a Chicana, I draw on them to explore and critically examine the schooling experiences of Chicanas in YA literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Because of the marginal (yet growing) research on Chicanas in YA literature, the literature review is situated on the overarching representations of Latinx because, as Alamillo, Mercado-López, & Herrera (2018) mentioned, the experiences of Chicanas can often be lumped under “all Latino experiences” or under “multicultural experiences.” I intend to bring forward representations of Latinx in YA literature since most of the research has been centered in this area and then move towards Chicanas purposely to gather a holistic picture. This review of the research is divided into four main sections. These four sections aim to define and provide background on the purpose of YA literature, discuss overarching Latinx (mis)representations in children’s and YA literature, elaborate on Chicana identity building through reading and the importance of Chicana YA literature, and Chicana feminist perspectives that guide this study.

Foundations and Purpose of Young Adult Literature

Before diving into representations of schooling experiences by Chicanas in YA literature, I need to define what is “adolescence” and “YA literature” within my study. Beginning with YA literature, there are multiple definitions for this concept. According to Alsup (2010), YA literature is written for readers between the ages of 12 and 20, often regarded as adolescent years. However, Cart (2008) stated that it includes adolescents from ages 10 to 19. Choosing one clear-cut definition and age range is difficult; therefore, rather than creating an exclusionary binary when referring to adolescence, I want to emphasize that it does not have to be limited to this age constraint. YA literature can also be for anyone who identifies oneself as an adolescent. Additionally, I want to include Herz & Gallo’s (2005) list of characteristics as a definition for YA literature. Authors described texts that had teenagers as the main characters dealing with

issues may be most relatable to other adolescents. This is an all-encompassing working definition of YA literature and, in regard to adolescence, it is more than limiting it to an age range.

Adolescents had read YA literature since the late 1960s, when books, such as S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) and Robert Lipsyte's *The Contender* (1967) were first published. YA literature was then later adopted and taught in U.S. schools in the 1970s (Alsup, 2010). Generally speaking, adolescence is a central period in the development of one's identity. Incorporating YA literature into the classroom curriculum can aid identity development for adolescents and provide a foundation for exploring universality and the human experience. As proclaimed by Bishop (2000), "Literature enables us to interpret and shape our experience as humans. It transcends time and place and cultures and helps us to review the past, interpret the present, and envision the future" (p. 73). Although Bishop (2000) is making a case for literature overall, it is an essential consideration for the impact YA literature, in particular, can have in the classroom and for adolescents.

With the rise of YA literature and its expanding sphere in the classroom, scholars, teachers, librarians, and grassroots movement of We Need Diverse Texts (2021) have called for diversity and inclusion of texts that feature diverse characters where all children can see themselves. YA literature provides a platform for teachers and students to interrogate and examine what is presented in YA literature and make connections to students' lives (Scherff & Groenke, 2009). The exclusion of historically minoritized and People of Color (POC) stresses that their identities are not prioritized or worthy in publishing and/or in the classroom. Often, if they are included, it has been merely for performative allyship, a fad to be capitalized upon, or essentially for publishing companies to make extra money because of the growing demand for "diverse" literature. While this literature has provided representation and has been deemed

equitable and inclusive literature, there is still a need to interrogate the representations in these texts as they can still perpetuate deficit and narrow narratives, stereotypes, and misinformation.

Latinx (mis)Representations in Children's and YA Literature

In 1965, the article “The All-White World of Children’s Books” by Nancy Larrick problematized the lack of representation in children’s literature. Larrick (1965) evaluated over 5 thousand children’s books published in the early 1960s and revealed that 6.7% of those books contained African American characters. Larrick (1965) further discussed and showed that many depictions in that small percentage of texts carried damaging stereotypes. Although Larrick (1965) focused on the misrepresentation of African Americans in children’s books, she argued that children’s literature, as a whole, had erased the voices of People of Color altogether (p. 84). I want to expand Larrick’s problematizing of children’s narratives to include YA literature and argue that this same trend has continued currently. Furthermore, I want to bring into the conversation similar issues regarding Latinx children’s and YA literature.

Moore & MacCann (1987) examined the misrepresentations of Latinos in children’s literature and concluded that a majority of texts published before 1987 emphasized the “Anglo rescue” formula (in other words, the White savior trope) in the texts (p. 110). While this study was published in 1987, a more recent study by Koss & Teale (2009) examined current trends of published YA literature according to the United States' adolescent population. Authors examined 370 texts that consisted of books educators considered high quality, and young adults chose as favorites and popular best sellers at the time (Koss & Teale, 2009, p. 564). Findings showed that characters in the books were majority represented by European Americans and, in terms of Latinx characters, there were no representations out of the 370 texts chosen for the study. Koss & Teale (2009) noted that a couple of books did portray multiple cultures and ethnicities; however,

the characters played supporting roles rather than being the main protagonists. These studies demonstrate how Latinx characters in children's and YA literature at the time they were published were still being overlooked and lack representation. If Latinx characters were included and represented in texts, they had to be accompanied, or overshadowed, through the inclusion of a White character. Latinx characters were not afforded space to be the focus of their own.

Portrayals of Latinx individuals in literature and the impact of those portrayals on adolescents and children continue to be an issue of concern. Images in children's and YA literature have typically portrayed Latinx populations as part of a monolithic culture, involved in gangs, shiftless, dirty and poor, and all as undocumented immigrants (Naidoo, 2011). Negative images and misconstructions of Latinx identity are harmful. They can cause misinformation about Latinx children and youths' cultural heritage, not only to themselves but also to non-Latinx youth (Nieto, 1997). In an analysis done by Naidoo (2007), the author evaluated 90 *Américas* and Pura Belpré picture book award winners published between 1991 and 2004. Findings showed that most books have deficiencies in the “representation of cultural diversity, socioeconomic status, gender roles, sexual orientations, and physical/mental abilities” related to Latinx communities during that specific time period (Naidoo, 2007, p. 117). Although Naidoo's analysis was on picture books, it still is part of the conversation that there is a misrepresentation of Latinx communities and can perpetuate misconceptions about their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, Latinx children's and YA literature taught in the classroom must disrupt misconceptions while reflecting Latinx authenticity. Not only are there negative and stereotypical portrayals, but the rate at which texts with representations are being published is much slower than the rate at which the Latinx population is increasing in the U.S.

Between 1966 and 2003, Nilsson (2005) examined 21 content analysis studies on “Hispanic” portrayals in children’s books. The results of this study at the time showed that there is still a greater need for “Hispanic” protagonists in children’s and YA literature. The author discussed that, at the time of this study, “compared to the proportion of Hispanics who presently make up the United States population,” there is less “Hispanic” representation in children’s literature compared to its growing population (Nilsson, 2005, p. 545). This was in 2003; however, I argue that currently this is still an area of concern. Drawing on the current data compiled by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in 2019, out of the 3,717 children’s books from U.S. publishers, only 235 were about Latinx characters. However, in 2018, out of the 3,335 children’s books, only 243 were about Latinx characters. In terms of percentages, the number of books about Latinx content actually decreased from 7.3% to 6.3% (Cooperative Children’s Books Center, 2019). Furthermore, according to the preliminary data provided by the CCBC, children’s books written about Latinx content in 2020 slightly decreased to 6.2% (Fernando, 2021). With the decline of Latinx children’s and YA literature, Latinx adolescents have fewer diverse opportunities to see themselves in texts.

Chicana YA Literature and Chicana Identity Building through Reading

It is essential to point out that Chicano/a/x, generally defined as individuals of Mexican descent living in the U.S., encompass a large demographic of the Latinx population (Flores et al, 2017). However, without dismissing the contributions and significance of other Latinx groups, it is safe to assume that a large majority of Chicax children and adolescents maintain a significant presence in the K-12 classroom. In light of these demographics, it should also be noted the attacks on this population, such as Arizona’s SB 1070, ban of Mexican American studies program in Arizona, and restrictive language policies in the classroom (to name a few), are due

to anti-immigrant sentiment. With this as the current reality, Alamillo, Mercado-López, & Herrera (2018) argue for a more focused study on Chicana children's and YA literature by and about Chicana students in order to support students in the classroom. I want to further address and amplify on the urgency by Alamillo, Mercado-López, & Herrera (2018) to include Chicana YA literature.

Chicanas often experience racial and misogynistic violence. When describing Chicana identity, I primarily define a Chicana to signify of Mexican and Mesoamerican ancestry, and individuals that identify Chicana as part of their identity. Identity is a complex concept and is broadly defined “as self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonances, and often marked with socially constructed raced, gendered, classed, and sexual identity ‘labels’” (Hatt & Urrieta, 2020, p. 203). In order to avoid essentializing and provide further clarity about identity, Urrieta and Noblit (2018) remind us of the following: identity is (1) an unfinished process and ever-evolving, (2) subject of who counts as belonging, and (3) about power, explicitly who “counts” and who can self-identify. Identities are also understood as being multifaceted. In discussing this aspect of identity, Crenshaw (1989) offered us a lens of intersectionality, precisely the necessity of this analytic tool to examine and discuss the complexities of discrimination and power or lack of and how they intersect with identities. Furthermore, identities are not binary or additive; instead, all aspects of an individual's identity influence one another, and they also interact with each other.

In regards to Chicanas, they embody multiple identities that are rooted in their language(s), race(s), socio-economic class, immigration status, gender, sexuality, religion(s), culture(s), ability(ies), and spirituality(ies). Chicanas also navigate the meshing of nationalities and cultures between identifying as Mexican and American. These multifaceted identities and

the struggles that come with them are mirrored in the Chicana protagonists with in the selected texts of this study. As previously mentioned, YA literature can play a vital role in adolescents' development, particularly on finding one's identity, exploring universality and the human experience. In addition to this, Felski (2008) argued that the inclusion of reading and teaching literature that reflects readers backgrounds can provide recognition for readers. This involves readers being able to see multiple aspects of themselves reflected in the text(s) they engage with. According to Felski (2008), recognition can become a contributor to identity formation, and elaborated that "selfhood becomes self-reflexive, literature comes to assume a crucial role in exploring what it means to be a person (p. 25). Simply put, being able to relate to characters that Chicanas recognize as having similar experiences as themselves can help them learn the same lessons alongside the characters that they read about. With this in mind, incorporating Chicana YA literature into the classroom curriculum can allow Chicana adolescents to examine authentic and expansive representations of Chicanas and their schooling experiences. Education is a large part of Chicana adolescents' lives; they have their own educational ambitions in school and pursue higher education, that being from their choice or influence by their families (Ceja, 2004).

Pointing to work regarding Chicana's schooling and education experiences in YA literature, in a literary analysis conducted by Cummins (2016), the author examined representations of academic agency in four novels about Mexican American young adult women. The results showcased that, among the novels, there was an "idealized portrait of educational opportunity and parent-child relationships" (p. 55). Cummins (2016) concluded that there was an underscoring of family as a value, and the texts did not showcase the parents as impeding in their daughters' academic agency. Additionally, Chicana YA literature scholar Cristina Herrera also recognizes the significance of authentic Chicana portrayals and Chicanas educational

representations. Herrera (2017) conducted a literary analysis of *What Can(t) Wait* (Pérez, 2011) and *Gabi, a girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014). She elaborated on how Chicanas in these specific texts can disrupt the assumption that Chicanas cannot be “nerds.” Herrera (2017) argued that “Chicana YA literature expands existing nerd discourse by featuring intelligent and ambitious Chicana nerds who dare to embrace nerdy traits of academic excellence” (p. 322). In her more recent work, she has continued to expand further on this notion of “nerdiness” and disrupt Chicana YA literature that represents Chicanas as “outsiders” because of their desire to “geek out” (Boffone, Herrera, & McCall, 2020). In sum, these studies showcase how Chicana intellectual curiosity and learning should be normalized and disrupt beliefs that Chicanas are often “at risk.”

These studies regarding the schooling and education of Chicanas in YA literature showcase how Chicana writers have crafted Chicana characters that reclaim traditionally negative associations to being “nerdy,” as well as representation of academic agency. My thesis adds to this line of scholarship. It explores the representations of Chicanas, particularly offering Chicana feminisms as a guiding framework to engage in examining set representations of Chicana schooling experiences in YA literature. In what follows, I outline the theoretical contributions of Chicana feminist thought and how it informs this study.

Chicana Feminist Perspectives as a Framework

As discussed by Ybarra (2018), Chicana feminist thought problematizes the production of knowledge, specifically related to colonized and Euro-Western knowledges that have been accepted as standard (p. 15). Ybarra (2018) has also explained that Chicana feminist perspectives explore and center the knowledges that come from the lived and embodied experiences of marginalized individuals, particularly of Chicanas, while simultaneously considering the

complex intersections of their social identities. Furthermore, Villenas (2014, as cited by Ybarra, 2018) discussed how Chicanas have been oppressed by heteropatriarchy, White supremacy, and colonialism. In sum, Chicanas are the “speaking subjects” and they become the foundation of knowledge, as well as the “center of intellectual discourse” (De la Torre and Pesquera, 1993, p. 1).

By utilizing Chicana feminist perspectives, Chicana feminist scholars have created epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical tools that regenerate educational research and practice (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Perez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, Flores Carmona, 2012; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). For example, Delgado Bernal (1998) developed a Chicana feminist epistemological framework that is “concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas, about who generates an understanding of their experiences, and how this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized” (p. 560). Along with this, Delgado Bernal (1998) brought forth the notion of cultural intuition, which recognizes the complexity and instinctive perspective that many Chicana researchers contribute to the research process. This includes understanding personal and collective experience, community memory, as well as engaging in the existing literature. Chicana feminist scholars have drawn on cultural intuition to inform their analysis and acknowledge their positionality as Chicana researchers (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Diaz Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villarreal, and Campos, 2009; Elenes, 2001). For instance, Cervantes-Soon (2014) utilized cultural intuition, along with *theory in the flesh* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), to examine issues of power and identity that emerged from her own experiences as a border-crosser researcher that returns “home” to do fieldwork in the city of Juárez, Mexico. Cervantes-Soon (2014) identifies as a Chicana feminist scholar and utilizes her intersectional identity to inform and guide her work in Juárez.

From a Chicana perspective, Chicana identity has been described as a name of resistance that individuals are not born with, rather, consciously and critically assume (Alarcón, 1990). Additionally, it has also been described as navigating the meshing of nationalities and cultures between identifying as Mexican and American. Drawing on Anzaldúa (2007), she identified this complexity as a physical and metaphorical borderland. She describes it as a “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 25). I utilize Anzaldúa’s (2007) and Alarcón’s (1990) description to inform my own definition of Chicana, specifically in understanding the complexities of Chicana identity and the concepts of Chicanas being both American and Mexican and what it means to identify with both simultaneously. To further clarify, when describing Chicana, I do not only refer to individuals that are biologically female and/or cis-gender, rather, anyone who identifies as Chicana. Furthermore, while Chicana is an important identity that signifies a political and social consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2007), I also primarily define Chicana to indicate of Mexican and Mesoamerican ancestry, and individuals that identify Chicana as a part of their identity. These identity markers and struggles are mirrored by the protagonists of the texts that I analyze, particularly how they navigate this “in-betweenness” in regards to their schooling experiences and their identities within school.

In the pursuit to grapple and explore their own Chicana identities, Chicana feminist scholars and writers have investigated their multiple identities through different literacy practices, such as writing, poetry, narrative, testimonio and autohistoria (Alarcón, 1990). Ybarra (2018) has also connected literacy and Chicana feminism by elaborating the following:

Literacy is, in many ways, central to Chicana feminisms. Chicana feminist scholars discuss literacies as liberatory processes of meaning making that continuously draw on personal experience and knowledges of the borderlands, or the in-between, marginalized spaces occupied by women of color, queer folks, and youth (p. 17).

Examples of this connection between literacy and Chicana feminism is demonstrated by autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría offered by Anzaldúa (2015). Anzaldúa (2015) explained, “it is a way of inventing and making knowledge, meaning, and identity through self-inscriptions” (p. 6). González Ybarra & Saavedra (2021) also discuss how autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría allows individuals to reflect on themselves and theorize from the experience itself, specifically drawing on Anzaldúa (2015). Chicana feminist scholars (Ybarra, 2018; González Ybarra & Saavedra, 2021) have also talked about literacy in expansive ways beyond reading and writing, particularly Anzaldúa (2015) describing the link between the body and feminism. She illuminated, “The body is a text. Writing is not about being in your head; it’s about being in your body” (p. 5).

In the same manner of connecting literacy and Chicana feminisms, storytelling is discussed by Chicana feminist scholars. Sanchez (2007) discussed storytelling as a literacy practice and resource utilized by Chicana/Latina youth as they document their transnational experiences. Additionally, Reyes McGovern (2020) discussed storytelling as a way to center the “power of stories from women who struggle for a better tomorrow” (p. 1). This thesis draws on these conceptualizations by to examine how Chicana protagonists grapple with their identities and reflect on their experiences in selected texts through different literacy practices.

As previously mentioned, Chicana feminist scholars have created epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical tools that regenerate educational research and practice

(Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Perez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, Flores Carmona, 2012; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). Particularly drawing on Delgado Bernal (2006), she has brought forth theory of pedagogies of the home, which include familismo. She emphasized how Chicana college students utilized knowledge of their families and homes to navigate higher education meanwhile work to be academically successful. In this same manner of drawing on the home, Smith-Morris, et al (2012, as cited in Martinez, 2013) theorize familismo “as a core cultural value that requires the individual to submit to a more collective, family-based form of decision-making, and responsibility for, and obligation to ensuring the well-being of family members (both nuclear and extended)” (p. 37). Research that uses familismo as a guiding framework can be seen from support during pregnancy (Campos, et al., 2008) to support by parents, particularly in academic performance (Niemeyer, Wong, & Westerhaus, 2009) or college choices (Martinez, 2013). I utilize these concepts to inform my ideas of Chicana schooling experiences, that education is not bound only in schools but can include home spaces and family.

To this end, grounding this work in Chicana feminist perspectives is helpful to explore and critically examine representations of Chicana schooling experiences in YA literature. In particular, I draw on their conceptualizations and interrelationship with identity formation to make sense of how Chicana protagonists grapple with identity formation and center their experiences regarding school.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

For this study, I used a critical content analysis to examine the representations of Chicana schooling experiences in YA literature. Beginning with what content analysis is, according to White & Marsh (2006), content analysis is a research method that analyzes texts and interprets written artifacts of society. The content of texts is interpreted through the identification of categories, themes and patterns, and by coding words, sentences, and/or entire texts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis is intended to examine *what the text is about* rather than *what authors do* (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2000).

The “critical” in critical content analysis is based on the understanding of texts and readings of the texts as situated within a social, cultural, and political context. Employing critical content analysis requires researchers to utilize a political stance to focus on locating power within social practices in order to challenge conditions of inequity (Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2017). Critical content analysis differs from content analysis in the sense that it prioritizes a critical lens to frame the study rather than only through interpreting the findings. Critical content analysis was chosen for this study because it moves beyond solely examining the narrative of the text, rather to examine deeper issues and assumptions in connection to power relations. Drawing on Chicana feminist perspectives will compliment a critical content analysis by revealing the gendered and racialized identities of Chicanas and their experiences. The following questions guide this study:

1. How are Chicana protagonists’ schooling experiences represented in young adult literature written by Chicana authors?
2. How do Chicana protagonists grapple with their identity formation and current realities within their schooling experiences represented in selected texts?

Research Design and Data Collection

The identification of the young adult texts was based on the following criteria:

1. The main protagonist is a Chicana or has Chicana identity indicators.
2. The text is published after 2000.
3. The schooling experiences of the protagonist is one of the main subplots.
4. The text is written by a Chicana author.
5. The text is published in the U.S.
6. The text is written in contemporary realistic fiction.

Although attention to YA literature featuring Chicana protagonists has increased in recent years, the identification of texts for this study was challenging to find. I decided to do a series of search methods. I searched via Goodreads wide range of texts. I found list titles such as “Chicana Book List” and “Chicano Chicana Chicanx,” children’s and youth literature blogs (e.g., Latinxs in Kid Lit, <https://latinosinkidlit.com>; Latino Stories, <https://latinostories.com>), and websites that are targeted for teachers (Social Justice Books, <https://socialjusticebooks.org/>). I read through the summaries of these texts to make sure they aligned with the criteria I had established. The following texts were identified for this study: *The Tequila Worm* (Canales, 2005), *What Can(t) Wait* (Pérez, 2011), *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011), and *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014). Before elaborating on my decisions for the criteria, I want to clarify these texts were chosen for this study as sample texts to go deeper into representations of Chicana schooling experiences. This is not to say that these are the only texts that can be utilized; instead, these are a starting point for conversation. I further explain in my limitations section.

First off, I decided to focus on Chicana protagonists and Chicana YA literature for specificity and because of my own background as a cultural insider and desire to contribute

further to the evolving literature on Chicana YA literature. As previously mentioned, I primarily described a Chicana to be of Mexican- and Mesoamerican descent, a person who or character that identifies Chicana as an ideological part of their identity and navigates the physical and metaphorical borderlands. Based on this, it is essential to clarify that the protagonists in the texts do not specifically identify themselves as Chicanas; however, based on their identity markers presented, I argue they align with descriptors of being a Chicana.

For example, Gabi, the protagonist from *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014), described how being “Mexican-American is tough sometimes” (p. 34) and interrogated comments made by her mom regarding how a young Mexican-American girl should act. Gabi constantly has to defend that she is Mexican enough or American enough while disrupting her mother’s constant gendered reminders of “ojos abiertos, piernas cerradas” (Quintero, 2014, p. 7) that are towards her but not her younger brother. Lupita, *Under the Mesquite*’s (Garcia McCall, 2011) protagonist, described how her classmates classified her as “wanting to be White,” still, she could not be “more Mexican/ if you stamped a cactus on [her] forehead” (p. 83). Additionally, Lupita’s family reminded her that she needed to become an excellent comadre to her friends and family. Marisa, the protagonist from *What Can(t) Wait* (Pérez, 2011), argued against her teacher that she could be Mexican and smart, indirectly associating smartness to whiteness. Marisa’s family, to an extent, also suggested that Marisa should be more worried about getting married and staying nearby instead of leaving for college. Lastly, Sofia, the protagonist in *The Tequila Worm* (2005), described she would be made fun of by her classmates for eating tacos at school because her family could not afford the food at school then she would take food from home. Moreover, Berta, Sofia’s comadre, discussed how Mexican women were not lawyers but are wives and mothers (p. 45). All of the protagonists exhibit similar negotiations

and identity markers to Chicana identity. Again, I do not intend to essentialize that they are all the same because. As Urrieta and Noblit (2018) remind readers, identity is continuously altering. Nonetheless, all of these protagonists' identities are aligned with those of Chicanas.

After focusing solely on Chicana protagonists, I focused on defining the timeline for my sample of texts. I decided to focus on texts published after 2000 based on the influence from Delgado Bernal's (1998) call for scholars to center the unique life experiences of Chicanas and Barrera and Garza de Cortes (1997) urgency toward accuracy and authenticity regarding "Chicano" characters in texts. In addition to this, 2000 was the year with the least published texts about and by Latinx populations since 1994 when Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison began to compile data on texts with Latinx content (Cooperative Children's Books Center, 2000). Next, I decided that one of the main subplots should have content related to school and education, texts published in the U.S., text written in contemporary realistic fiction genre, and the author should identify or have identity markers similar to Chicanas. The only exception to this was *What Can(t) Wait* by Ashley Hope Pérez due to the author identifying as a White woman who married a Chicano man and grew up in Houston, Texas. Although the author is not Chicana and is considered a cultural outsider, she has written notable texts like *Out of Darkness* that won a Tomás Rivera Book award. Ashley Hope Pérez has insight into Chicana adolescents, as well as the Latinx community overall. As Cai (2002) reminds readers, authors can be cultural outsiders and still write authentic texts about other cultural groups when authors have immersed themselves in the communities they are writing about and partake in the experiences of the community as well. For this reason, I made an exception and included *What Can(t) Wait* by Ashley Hope Pérez. In what follows is a synopsis of each text in Table 3.1 and an explanation of data analysis.

Table 3.1*Synopses of Books*

Title	Author	Date of Publication	Synopses
<i>The Tequila Worm</i>	Viola Canales	2005	Sofia grew up in a family of storytellers and enjoyed various traditions with her family. However, she is offered a scholarship to an elite boarding school away from her family and McAllen, Texas. Sofia encounters a different world and navigates what it means to have comadres and honoring your roots.
<i>What Can(t) Wait</i>	Ashley Hope Pérez	2011	Marisa’s family immigrated from Mexico to Houston, Texas. As a senior in high school, Marisa has to apply to college, ace her Calculus AP exam, and keep a strong relationship with her best friend and boyfriend. Caught between two worlds of meeting her family's expectations and going off to college to be an engineer, she learns that she must do what’s right for herself.
<i>Under the Mesquite</i>	Guadalupe Garcia McCall	2011	Lupita is a border crosser, born in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, and moved with her family to Texas. She is the oldest of eight siblings, and when she discovers her Mami has been diagnosed with cancer, she faces a new set of challenges. She juggles life as a high school student, her passions as an actress, dealing with her friends, and her mother’s diagnosis.
<i>Gabi, a Girl in Pieces</i>	Isabel Quintero	2014	Gabi grew up in Santa Maria de los Rosales, CA. She lives with her mother, younger brother, and sometimes with her dad, a meth user. She documents her senior year of high school in her diary, from dealing with college applications, Cindy’s pregnancy, Sebastian’s coming out, and her family.

Data Coding and Analysis Process

I began my analysis by reading each text twice to obtain a sense of what each text was about and engage myself in the story. This entailed reading *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014) first and then moving through the rest of the texts. Once I finished reading each text at least once, I started with *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014) again to read a second time and continued to read the text set in the same order. After completing my aesthetic reading

(Rosenblatt, 1978), I defined which data sets were to be analyzed and how they were defined before conducting my investigation, according to Krippendorff (2013). Therefore, to clarify, the data sets that were analyzed consisted of scenes related to school and education from each text in the sample population. For instance, a “scene” could be the setting of school or the protagonist talking about school, teachers, and other aspects of education and school. With this definition outlined, I began to isolate words, sections, and pages related to education and school during my third reading. Because I was focusing on the schooling experiences of Chicana protagonists, I made notes in the margins and on post-it notes to separate passages that caught my eye and related to school, as mentioned before. Johnson, Mathis, & Short (2017) discuss this as essential in the initial reading of texts (p. 8). An example of an isolated scene in *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014) is as follows: “Less than a month before school starts again. Ugh. It is not like I do not want to go back to school (because I do), but I also want to lie around and do nothing for a little bit longer” (p. 7). The example showcases how Gabi discusses school even though the setting is in her home. Still, based on the previously established definition, this scene was isolated due to the protagonists talking about school. I conducted this process of separating scenes related to school in each book, moving from one book to the next, and then doing a second round in the same manner. See Table 3.2 for the number of scenes isolated for the study in each selected text.

Table 3.2

Number of Scenes Isolated

Title	Number of Scenes Isolated
<i>The Tequila Worm</i>	31
<i>What Can(t) Wait</i>	47
<i>Under the Mesquite</i>	43
<i>Gabi, a Girl in Pieces</i>	46

After isolating scenes in each text, I immersed myself in Chicana feminist perspectives in order to develop a Chicana feminist lens to guide and inform my analysis of how Chicana schooling experiences were portrayed. This lens allowed for a focus on different aspects of Chicanas' embodied and lived experiences within school. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) argue for researchers to read deeply within the critical theory they intend to utilize and think *with* the theory when reading the data. I also engaged in related readings focused on Chicana academic agency and nerdiness. After engaging with studies related to Chicanas in YA literature and Chicana feminist perspectives, I moved to a close reading focused around broad critical issues guided by Chicana feminist perspectives:

- Connection between literacy practices and Chicana feminist perspectives (Alarcón, 1990; Anzaldúa, 2007; Anzaldúa, 2015; Ybarra, 2018; González Ybarra & Saavedra, 2021)
- Autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría (Anzaldúa, 2015; González Ybarra & Saavedra, 2021)
- Storytelling (Reyes McGovern, 2020; Sanchez, 2007)
- Pedagogy of the home and familismo (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Smith-Morris, et al., 2012)

Also, the following questions by Botelho & Rudman (2009, as cited in Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2017):

- Focalization—Whose story is told? From whose point of view?
- Social processes of characters—Who has power? Who has agency?
- Closure—How is the story resolved? What are the assumptions in the story closure? (p. 11).

These questions served as an additional guide, along with Chicana feminist perspectives, while I engaged in “open coding” (Saldaña, 2013) of the isolated scenes that consisted of words, sections and pages related to schooling and education. Saldaña (2013) explains “open coding,” or initial coding, as an open-ended approach to coding and “is breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (p. 100). However, I specifically drew on “process coding,” where initial codes represented human action in the data (Saldaña, 2013, p. 96). For instance, “expressing through writing,” “performing,” “writing when sad,” etc. I transferred the information to an Excel spreadsheet to ease the initial coding process.

After the initial coding process, I revisited Chicana feminist perspectives and theories before reassessing each text a second time. This recursive process involved conducting multiple rounds of coding to ensure all codes were consistent and included. Next, I consolidated these codes into broader categories primarily based on relationships and commonalities from all texts. An example of the coding and category process is included in Table 3.3. Based on this process, two major themes emerged: (1) academicas and high achieving, and (2) escritoras y artistas: meaning-making in school. The first theme emerged from the codes that described the protagonists’ achievements in school such as: being academically excelling, recognizing accomplishments, teachers encouraging their academic endeavors, and obtaining awards. These codes illustrated the academic excellence of the Chicana protagonists represented in their schooling experiences. The second theme emerged from other process codes that were representations of Chicanas utilizing different literacy practices for meaning-making. Examples of these codes include: expressing through writing, performing to cope with pain, and creating zines to critique.

Table 3.3

Examples of Coding

Text Excerpt	Code	Category
“Writing when you’re sad is so much easier. And it makes you feel a little better” (Quintero, 2014, p. 101).	“Expressing through writing” “Writing to cope” “Writing when sad”	Literacy practices for meaning-making

Trustworthiness

To maintain qualitative trustworthiness in the study, I employed close reading and rigor in my analysis. A close reading of the text, as mentioned before, is where I read each book for this study multiple times. The first couple of times were to experience the texts as an average reader and the following times were through a critical lens and for the purpose of my analysis. Additionally, I engaged in bi-weekly peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with my advisor, Dr. Idalia Nuñez Cortez, and discussed my analysis process with the texts.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Guided by Chicana feminist perspectives, I identified two main themes that stood out in my analysis of the sample text set: (1) academicas and high achieving, and (2) escritoras y artistas: meaning-making in school. The first theme has two subthemes of (a) interrogating assimilation and “being white,” and (b) drawing on culture and family to succeed in school. The second theme has one subtheme of (a) literacy practice for critiquing identities and environment. Below I describe each theme with its subthemes.

Academicas and High Achieving

The first theme that emerged is related to how Chicana protagonists were portrayed as excelling academically and high achieving in school, essentially that they were “good” at school. Each Chicana protagonist had their own educational aspirations throughout the novels and were regarded as the best in either all school subjects, a particular subject, or just overall school. This was recognized by either the protagonists themselves, teachers, parents, or friends. Moreover, their education endeavors were also narrated with pointers of academic success such as Chicana protagonists obtaining awards. Cummins (2016) discussed similar findings in relation to her discussion relating to self-assertion and achievement, where Chicana YA literature she examined assert academic agency. It should also be noted that other characters often were the complete opposite of the Chicana protagonists, such as not being high achieving and not having educational aspirations, which would emphasize how high achieving each Chicana protagonists was.

In *What Can(t) Wait* (Pérez, 2011), Marisa primarily showcased how she struggled in her AP Calculus class, yet this was not to position her as not academically achieving. Instead, Marisa is an aspiring engineer and, because of this, she is taking the AP Calculus class. Throughout the

novel, there are no specific examples of teachers or friends commenting that she is high achieving compared to other protagonists, but they suggest that she is “good” at school. For example, her brother calls her “nerda” and “schoolgirl” (Pérez, 2011, p. 9-10) because Marisa wants to go to college and is always studying; she even gets a tutor to help her with the class she struggles. Additionally, Marisa ended up getting into the University of Texas, and the end of the text concludes with her leaving to attend her freshman year of college. Although Marisa is not overtly well-known for her achievements by winning awards and medals, she achieved her academic goals, attends her dream college, and is on her way to become an engineer. In contrast, Marisa’s best friend, Brenda, is going to attend the local community college in the area. When Marisa confides in Brenda about her aspirations to go to UT, Brenda commented, “I just thought I’d be at junior college and you’d be at U of H and we’d do our homework at Burger King or the taqueria” (p. 32). Marisa’s friends and her family expected her to stay locally at University of Houston rather than go farther away to University of Texas. In this instance, there is an evident contrast between the aspirations of both Marisa and Brenda, which makes Marisa be portrayed as higher achieving than Brenda because Marisa wishes to go to a prestigious school for engineering.

Another specific example where we see a Chicana protagonist excelling and being recognized for it is by Sofia. In *The Tequila Worm* (Canales, 2005), Sofia experienced bullying from students because she ate tacos at school. As a result, Coach Clarke, the girls’ PE teacher, asked Sofia to sit with her at lunch and if she would share tacos with her. After this encounter, Sofia confided in Coach Clarke and shared how she wished that she had kicked the girl who made fun of her. Coach Clarke suggested to Sofia that she “learn to kick with [her] head instead” (Canales, 2005, p. 39). Sofia takes Coach Clarke’s advice and explains how “that year [she]

kicked that girl in all classes and sports, especially soccer” (Canales, 2005, p. 40). In fact, Sofia surpasses her friends and comadres. The second instance we see her as being represented as high achieving is when she is recognized for her grades and is recommended to go to a prestigious private school, Saint Luke’s Episcopal School. The principal, Mr. Thomas, discussed with her the following: “Since you’re at the top of your class, I want to recommend you. You’ll still have to go through tests and interviews. But I think you have a *great* chance. And going to such a good school will open many doors for you” (Canales, 2005, p. 42). Although these two instances exemplify how Sofia is regarded as academic excelling and high achieving in the text, her comadre Berta comments that Sofia should stay in McAllen rather than attend the private school because it is so far away.

Chicana protagonists are also recognized for their achievements with awards and encouraged by teachers to feed their passions. For example, in *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011), Lupita is an aspiring actress who also loves to write. When she became a sophomore in high school, she started taking drama classes, and even her Mami would talk to her comadres about how she couldn’t wait to watch Lupita in the telenovelas someday. Although Lupita indicates that writing has always been easier for her, acting is where her true passion lies. She discusses this in the following: “Writing has always come easily./Acting, however, is a newfound /passion—and a trophy is the Holy Grail of awards...” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 93). Here we see that Lupita is recognized for her performance in a competition and Lupita herself acknowledged her potential in acting and her growing desire to continue on this path. As Lupita continued to act and practice at school, even her drama teacher encouraged her to flourish in her aspirations. In the chapter titled “the natural,” Mr. Cortés encouraged Lupita during drama class

to excel in her craft and affirmed that she is the only actress in the school that can cry on cue, that she's a natural.

Similarly, in *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014), Gabi is encouraged by Ms. Abernard to keep writing poems because she thinks her poetry is really good that she even suggested that Gabi put it in the Black Cloud journal that the class is starting (Quintero, 2014, p. 68). In addition to her poetry, Ms. Abernard also encouraged Gabi to be critical, and an example of this is through Gabi's zines. Gabi shared:

Ms. Abernard loved my zine, but she said I definitely couldn't share it with the class because she'd get in trouble—probably for promoting critical thinking instead of preparing us for a state test or some other ridiculous reason our wonderful school district could cook up. I know she agreed with what I had to say, but I didn't want to put her job in jeopardy” (Quintero, 2014, p. 203).

Ms. Abernard is one of Gabi's most vigorous supporters when it comes to her writing and uplifting her creativity, that being with her zines, poetry or writing overall. Aside from being recognized by Ms. Abernard, Gabi's friends also acknowledged that Gabi is a “creative genius” (Quintero, 2014, p. 204) and her boyfriend is also one of her supporters. He even has helped her with her poetry before they began dating. However, because Gabi is considered high achieving by her friends, it should be noted that her closest friend, Cindy, is pregnant during their senior year of high school. Because Cindy has a completely different trajectory than Gabi, it emphasizes how much of a “creative genius” Gabi is and how high achieving she is.

While these Chicana protagonists were portrayed as excelling academically and high achieving, two subthemes become relatively prominent in these portrayals: (a) interrogating

assimilation and “being White,” and (b) drawing on culture and family to succeed. In the subsequent sections, I discuss these subthemes further.

Interrogating Assimilation and “Being White”

A subtheme within this category is related to how Chicana protagonists challenged and problematized assumptions by others that they “want to be White” due to their pursuit of academics and their high achievements. Chicana protagonists center how even though they have their educational aspirations, it does not mean that they want to dismiss their cultural backgrounds and identities. This is specifically seen in *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011) and *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014). Herrera (2017) argues how Chicana protagonists reclaim and accept their nerdiness that is typically associated with White males. However, I include Chicana protagonists interrogate and resist this notion of “wanting to be White” and sustain their Mexican cultural background.

In *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011), although Mr. Cortés has told Lupita that she is a natural at acting, he has mentioned that she needs to lose her accent if she is serious about becoming an actress. Lupita has noted that in drama class, they “clown around a lot,” yet Mr. Cortés has still told her that she should lose her accent. Though this may have been said jokingly, it is essential to problematize this instance because Lupita thinks to herself, “I wonder if this is how Mr. Cortés got rid of his own accent” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 67). To provide more context, Lupita is talking about how Mr. Cortés made her put blow pops in her mouth as an exercise to lose her accent. Lupita is conscious of how her voice sounds. Because she noted that Mr. Cortés does not have an accent, she problematized how a “Mexican accent” should sound like or is considered Mexican depending on their voice. Backlash ensues with Lupita’s classmates because she is in drama and bully her for how she talks.

In the chapter titled, “to be or not to be Mexican,” Sarita tells Lupita, “You talk like/ You wanna be white” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 80). Sarita continued and said, “you think you’re/ Anglo now ‘cause you’re in Drama?/ You think you’re better than us?” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 81). Lupita responded that she does not think she’s better than anyone. Her little sister, Victoria, comes to her rescue and the following conversation happened between them:

“Don’t listen to them, *manita*,” my sister

whispers. “They’re just jealous.”

“Jealous of what?” I ask.

“I don’t know. Your acting?”

Maybe they think

You don’t want to be part

Of their group anymore.”

“Just because of how I talk?”

I ask heatedly. “What—

Because I’m Mexican

I’m supposed to speak with an accent?” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 82).

Again, Lupita is interrogating what it means to be Mexican. Her classmates associate Lupita with “acting White” and “wanting to be White” because of how she speaks and her involvement in drama class. As mentioned, Anzaldúa (2007) identified the complexity of Chicanas struggling between their Mexican and American background as a physical and metaphorical borderland. This includes negotiation between languages, such as the clash between English and Spanish. Lupita questions what it means to be Mexican and interrogated how she should talk as a whole.

Another example of the notion of “acting White” is *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014). Towards the end of the text, Gabi is accepted into Berkeley and discusses with her mother about her leaving. Gabi says, “So, because one of her biggest fears is that I will become less Mexican, she has said that the only way I am leaving this house will be if I get married, but now here she is giving me her blessing—expecting me, even, to leave” (Quintero, 2014, p. 185). Here, Gabi’s mother associated going to college with whiteness and being less Mexican. However, throughout the story, Gabi consistently questioned what it means to be Mexican and identifies herself as Mexican. When Gabi obtained an acceptance to attend Berkeley, she said, “I GOT ACCEPTED INTO BERKELEY! Me. The Mexican fat girl. Accepted to Berkeley!” (Quintero, 2014, p. 186). Gabi continues to situate that even if she is Mexican, she can still attain an education. Additionally, her mother supports her in her pursuit of an education.

Drawing on culture and family to succeed in school

The portrayal of Chicanas related to their educational aspirations and achievements in school are influenced by their family and culture. Delgado Bernal (2001) offered how the home can provide strategies of resistance to challenge educational norms and help Chicanas survive and succeed in their educational journeys. Although Delgado Bernal (2001) is primarily drawing on the experiences of Chicana college students, the same can be seen within the Chicana protagonist in the text, who are K-12 students. Chicana protagonists in the texts draw from their family, comadres, and culture to succeed in their educational endeavors meanwhile honoring them.

For example, in *The Tequila Worm* (Canales, 2005), the first chapter titled, “The Storyteller’s Bag,” Sofia and her family listened to Doña Clara, the best storyteller in their family. While sharing a story about Mama Maria, Sofia’s great-great-grandmother, Doña Clara

pointed to Sofia and tells her that she does not only look like her but “[has] inherited her gift for mule-kicking” (Canales, 2005, p. 2). Sofia received strong support from her family, comadres, and is connected to her ancestors. In Sofia’s family, describing Mama Maria as a mule represents that she was “always kicking her way through things,” (Canales, 2005, p. 2) which Sofia does related to school. As previously mentioned, when Sofia shared stories with Coach Clarke about her family, she specifically talked about what Doña Clara had said about Sofia having a gift for kicking like a mule, just like Mama Maria. Throughout the entire story, Sofia draws on her ancestors to kick like a mule in everything she does, particularly as it relates to school. Sofia “kicked” the girl that was bullying her by succeeding in all her classes and “kicked” the girls in the private school that bullied her by attending Harvard.

Another example is in *What Can(t)Wait* (Pérez, 2011), with Marisa drawing on her mother’s strength to pursue a higher education and achieve in school. In Marisa’s admissions essay, she writes, “Because I want to make something of myself. Because I want my mom to look at me in ten years and finally understand why a high school diploma wasn’t enough for me” (Pérez, 2011, p. 29). Throughout the novel, Marisa’s mother wants her to stay close by; however, Marisa wants to attend the University of Texas. Although this is the tension between Marisa and her mother, Marisa acknowledged how hard her mother has worked and endured when immigrating to the U.S. If anything, Marisa honors her mother and utilized her as a strength to continue working harder and achieve her own educational aspirations. This is resolved at the end when Marisa’s mother supports her daughter to go to University of Texas and confesses to Marisa that she never knew how to support her fully. Marisa’s mother commented, “I was never like you, so much confidence, so much brains. I was always *burra*, slow. But I have been lucky. I got you and your brother and sister. And you are all fine *hijos*,” and Marisa responded, “We want

to make you proud,” (Pérez, 2011, p. 224). Marisa finally communicated with her mother how she wants to make her proud and excel in school and go to college.

The theme of academicas and high achieving demonstrates how each Chicana protagonist is depicted as being “good” at school. Within their schooling experiences, Chicanas develop their educational aspirations and frequently challenge notions of “wanting to be White” because they are high achieving. Also, Chicanas honor and draw on their families, comadres, and ancestors to navigate and utilize strategies to succeed in their educational endeavors. In the following section I elaborate on the second theme that emerged and its subtheme.

Escritoras y Artistas: Meaning-making in School

The second theme that emerged is focused on how each Chicana protagonist utilized various literacy practices, such as writing, poetry, or performing as a way to connect, grapple, and make meaning out of their evolving identities in school. According to Alarcón (1990), the documentation process by Chicanas is central to investigate and grapple with their multiple identities and Ybarra (2018) has elaborated that literacy is central to Chicana feminisms. Also, drawing on Anzaldúa (2015), she has elaborated that writing can be a creative and spiritual process. With this all in mind, Chicana protagonists have utilized different literacy practices to grapple with their evolving identities in school and also with difficult situations they may be experiencing in and out of school. Regardless of each Chicana protagonist’s issues, they reflect on their distinct concerns through their respective literacy practice. In these texts, writing, performing, and poetry showcased their triumphs, struggles, and processing of their complex identities.

There are various degrees of literacy practices being utilized by Chicana protagonists; however, this is not to say that they all utilized all of them but some showcased specific practices

more than others. In *The Tequila Worm* (Canales, 2005), Sofia focused on being connected to her family and Mexican roots by writing letters and stories within those letters after leaving for Saint Luke's boarding school. Because Sofia had always been close to her family, which was the first time she ventured out into the world outside McAllen, Texas, she realized that Saint Luke's made her appreciate her family and background more. Sofia reflected in her dorm room: "I feel like I'm here for my family, too, not just for myself. I love *so much* about my family, my barrio. Saint Luke's makes me appreciate them more" (Canales, 2005, p. 160, emphasis in original). As a result, throughout her time in Saint Luke's, Sofia wrote letters home detailing her experiences and continuing to retain her family ties. As Delgado Bernal (2001) has mentioned, drawing on the home can help Chicanas survive and succeed in their educational journeys. Also, Smith-Morris et al (2012) described that what Sofia is doing with sustaining her family ties is familismo, specifically Chicanas situating their families as a core value and responsible for their well-being. Sofia also described, "I went to my desk, took out Tía Petra's plastic-covered notebook, and started writing my first letter home" (Canales, 2005, p. 136).

Although Sofia does not precisely share what she wrote in her letters, she described that she often wrote stories within them or stories on the side and opens up a new world for Sofia. As Sánchez (2007) has expressed, storytelling is one of the mediums in which Chicanas can express and narrate their experiences. For example, after her father died, Sofia mentioned, "I was writing stories to conjure up Papa, and these stories, especially, had opened up a whole new world for me" (Canales, 2005, p. 190). Aside from only storytelling, Sofia's writing is also an example of autohistoria. Sofia utilized writing letters to document and communicate her school experiences, how she missed home, and often wrote stories to help her cope with the pain of losing her father.

As mentioned, Sofia does not allow the reader to view her writing; yet, it is evident that it will enable her to feel connected with her family and herself.

Another example where writing and performing are used as part of the grappling with identity and personal issues is exemplified by Lupita, the protagonist in *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011). For example, in the chapter “the actress,” Lupita is practicing an upcoming performance. As she comes out of the bathroom, her mother confronts her because she heard her crying. Lupita reassured her and explained that her drama performance from school required her to go “from melancholy to desperate to angry” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p.108) to portray her role, a scene from *The Trojan Women* between Hecuba and Andromache after Troy has fallen. Mami asked her to perform in front of her, and, nervously, Lupita accepted. After she performed in front of her mother, Lupita said to herself, “I don’t tell her that this is / how I’ve dealt with / the last two years of seeing her suffer” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 109). Though Lupita is not directly performing or narrating her own life in the verses she recites, rather, she intuitively embodied, channeled, and performed her pain and anger that she’s felt since finding out her mother has cancer. Anzaldúa (2015) reminds readers how the body is the center, the ground of thought, and it is a text. Lupita is performing and acting in and outside of school was her way to cope with her feelings and understand what her life would be if her mom were to die. As the oldest of eight children, Lupita had to take on the responsibility of care taker of her siblings, juggling being a high school student, and support her ill mother. She could not let her mother know of her suffering to protect her—make her last moments with her Mami be joyous and ones to remember.

Lupita reflected on herself and described that “acting has been my life raft” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 160). Lupita recognized that acting and performing have kept her afloat, and

metaphorically, it has been saving her from drowning in her sorrows and an escape from her current life. In coming to this realization, she also admitted to herself that there is not much she can control or be promised, particularly with the possibility of her Mami being at graduation or surviving cancer. Lupita utilized performing as an outlet and exposed her vulnerability and gathered her strength to handle her Mami's diagnosis.

In the quest to write her private thoughts, Lupita has written poems in a journal to reflect and invoke her feelings. After class, Mireya found and returned Lupita's journal filled with poetry. In a panic, Lupita flipped through her journal and realized that Mireya placed a pink sticky note on the poem she wrote the day in the cafeteria, the day her classmates were making fun of the way Lupita spoke. Lupita explains:

The note is strategically placed
next to the stanza
in which I described how
“all the girls around me
dropped their scarlet
mouths wide-open, like a circle
of Venus flytraps, and laughed
hysterically at me.”
In Mireya's distinct, quiet
handwriting there are only
two words: “I'm sorry” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 90-91)

This example allows the reader to observe Lupita's inner thoughts and acknowledge the emotions she felt the instant she was made fun of at school. In sum, writing and performing have

been literacy practices utilized by Lupita to grapple with her experiences, evolving identity, and circumstances as a Chicana youth navigating her life at school and her life at home with her family.

Literacy practice for critiquing identities and environment

One subtheme emerged of Chicanas utilizing their literacy practices to critique their identities and their environment. Drawing on Anzaldúa (2015), she described how literacy can be a creative and spiritual process, but can allow individuals to reflect on themselves and then, as a result, theorize from the experience of reflection (González Ybarra & Saavedra, 2021). She offered autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría as a “new discursive mode” and Ybarra (2018) described how personal narratives can be a powerful literacy practice. Chicana protagonists utilize their literacy practices to critique what others have said about them or expectations by society as a whole. They reflect on themselves and create new knowledge. In what follows, I discuss *What Can(t) Wait* (Pérez, 2011) and *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014) as prime examples.

In *What Can(t) Wait* (Pérez, 2011), Marisa asserted herself as an aspiring engineer who excels in STEM, with her favorite class being AP Calculus. However, she described how she despises writing essays. Marisa explained how her English teacher discussed writing as a way to open yourself up to the world; nonetheless, Marisa sees writing essays as “always asking you to put yourself in little boxes, to make yourself fit in three to five pages” (Pérez, 2011, p. 26). Although Marisa communicated this throughout the text, she writes essays and letters to express her feelings, particularly feelings that she’s too afraid to say directly. This first happens as Marisa applies to the University of Texas (UT). Marisa reflected how she’s worried about writing that her life because some aspects have no impacted her positively. She explained, “I

can't just make up some pretty story about how coming from Mexico was difficult for my parents, and education is now the number-one priority in our house. Maybe that's true in Lifetime movies, but not in my house" (Pérez, 2011, p. 27).

Marisa chronicled her life in her statement for UT: how her older sister got pregnant at seventeen, her brother obtained a GED, her parents are not interested in learning English, her dad is emotionally distant and only tolerates her because of the paychecks she can provide, and her Mami's biggest dream is for her to get married and have kids. Although this is a piece of writing she is required to do for an admissions essay, Marisa is beginning to wrestle with her current reality. Specifically, being caught between her desires to excel in school and attend UT and her parents' expectations to help provide income and care for her niece. She recognizes her family's struggles; however, she wants her hard work in school and being high achieving to get her somewhere. That being somewhere outside of the socio-economic class her family is in and not only worrying about physiological needs, instead focus on worrying about which obtaining good grades at UT and eventually graduating with an engineering degree. Marisa ends her essay by pondering why she wants so many other things and writes, "Because I want to make something of myself. Because I want my mom to look at me in ten years and finally understand why a high school diploma wasn't enough for me" (Pérez, 2011, p. 29). Here, Marisa wants to also be understood by her mother but also recognized that she wants to do much more than what is expected of her.

In addition to writing about her struggles, Marisa writes to her AP Calculus teacher, Ms. Ford, following an altercation about Marisa's recent low grade on an exam. Because Marisa has to work at a grocery store after school and take care of her five-year old niece, she begins to struggle in her AP calculus class. As a result, Marisa obtained a low score on her most recent

exam because of all the responsibilities she is juggling. In an attempt to reconcile with Ms. Ford and get back on track in her AP Calculus class, Marisa wrote a letter of apology where she states:

Dear Ms. Ford,

I'm sorry for the way I talked to you after the last test. You were just trying to help me. I wish you knew how disappointed I am in myself for getting so behind in your class. I want to turn things around. But first I need to tell you a few things. ...I take care of my niece, Anita, every afternoon. At first I tried to do my calculus while I watched Anita because that was the only time I had...There's that after school, plus the job I have at Kroger at night...But I've been making good grades for years, and my parents still don't get why it even matters. My dad thinks that college is just a way to put off working for the family. So maybe you can understand how I felt like there was no way to make it. But I've changed my mind. I want to pass the class and the AP exam and be ready for college math. If you help me, I think I can catch up. I'm not just doing it for me. I want my niece to see that women just like her mom and grandma and aunt *can* do hard things...Will you help me?

Sincerely, Marisa Moreno" (Pérez, 2011, p. 106-107)

While Ms. Ford is well-meaning in her beliefs that Marisa can excel in AP calculus and attend University of Texas, this letter showcases how Marisa battles to accept her help because her father distrusts Ms. Ford's interests in Marisa's education. Given that Ms. Ford is White, Marisa's father has told Marisa repeatedly that gringos "want to feel like they're helping out some poor *Mexicana*" (Pérez, 2011, p. 13). Through her writing, Marisa has problematized the White savior trope that her teacher may be perpetuating and also is reflecting on her socio-

economic status. Herrera (2017) expands on this notion as well, particularly how “Marisa refuses to be Ms. Ford’s charity case” (p. 315). As Marisa described, she has to work to support her family meanwhile juggling other aspects of her life. Additionally, Marisa centered that she is doing it for her niece and will not be engulfed in perpetuating the idea that she needs to leave her family behind to achieve academic success. She is doing it for her family, her community. This is some of the realities that Chicana youth experience, specifically attempting to juggle all of their responsibilities they have at school and at home.

The final letter that Marisa writes is addressed to Anita, her five-year-old niece. Marisa wrote to Anita before leaving for UT and reminded her that she’s leaving to find a job that she’s dreamed of, becoming an engineer. She also reminded Anita that she’s never going to forget about her and writes, “I’ve got a whole stack of postcards just like this one, and I’ll send you something new to read every week. Love, Tía Marisa” (Pérez, 2011, p. 223). Marisa is reclaiming her family and keeping in touch with her roots, especially since Anita is the next descendant of her family. Marisa embraced this shift in her life that she’s leaving; however, she still honors her past. Although Marisa has voiced her dislike for writing because it can “put you in a box,” she ultimately utilizes writing letters to share her suffering, express her fears and aspirations, and remind herself of the significance of who she is and where she’s going. She also uses it as an intergenerational practice with her five-year old niece, explicitly reminding her niece that she can do anything she wishes to do regardless of being a young Mexican girl from the barrio.

In contrast, Gabi is an aspiring writer. When reflecting on her own writing, she states, “Writing when you’re sad is so much easier. And it makes you feel a little better” (Quintero, 2014, p. 101). She used writing and poetry to express her feelings and cope with particular

situations that she endured. Through poetry, Gabi creates her own understanding of loss, pain, suffering, and her appearance, specifically with the poems she has crafted. In the text, Gabi creates and shares various poems with her classmates, family, teachers, and community members. In particular, the poem she writes and shares at the Grind Effect poetry café with all her classmates is about her fear regarding her father dying, titled “In Light of the Fear of My Father’s Death I Write This Down.” Gabi’s liberating poem and speech are dedicated to her father with repetition of the verse, “But you don’t know my dad” (Quintero, 2014, p. 122). She proclaimed how others do not really know her dad despite his drug addiction. Aside from grappling with her pain and making sense of her loss, Gabi has also disrupted gendered policing within her family. Prior to her poetry reading, Gabi was discontent by Tia Bertha’s lack of support for her poetry and her opportunity to share it, remarking,

“I already had to listen to her go on about the poetry reading and how horrible it is that I’m going. She says that a nice young woman does not expose her thoughts like that to the public. That writing is something that only men should do, like going to college. She still hasn’t wrapped her head around the fact that I am going to college (I hope)” (Quintero, 2014, p. 122).

Gabi was asserting her own voice and thoughts through creating and performing her poetry by resisting misogynistic expectations by her family. Again, poetry has been her outlet to cope with pain. Also, her teacher, Ms. Abernard, encouraged Gabi to continue creating and expressing her emotions. Zines become another outlet for Gabi, particularly critiquing familial and social expectations.

From writing and creating poems that address pain and loss, Gabi has also created ones about her self-image—principally about the body. Because Ms. Abernard assigns a creative

project, Gabi, in turn, designed a zine titled “The Female Body.” Gabi created and illustrated a seven-page diagram showcasing aspects of the biological female body. In this illustration, Gabi evidently critiques misconceptions about the biological female body, but also societal ideologies about sexuality, how mujeres should behave, and the Chicana body. Her zine is an ideological space where Gabi reflected on messages perpetuated regarding teenage identity overall, but precisely of her as a Chicana. In “Diagram One,” Gabi critiques the politicizing of the hourglass figure by noting, “The hourglass figure you will probably never have but always strive for? / You might not want to eat some days” (Quintero, 2014, p. 196). Here, Gabi is commenting on the ideal body type, especially since she’s noted in one of her poems that she has wanted to lose weight; however, this idea stems from comments made by her mother like “No comas tanto. You’re getting fatter than a pregnant woman” (Quintero, 2014, p. 26). Again, this zine is a critique and reflection by Gabi of not only her body but societal expectations overall.

Despite feeling like this about her body and the comments made by her mother, Gabi asserts her agency and concludes that she owns all the words that come out of her mouth. For instance, in “Diagram Seven,” Gabi concluded with critiquing of the mouth and described,

Giggle, keep them sweet, keep your thoughts to yourself

You are a girl, speak accordingly.

You will forget all this

and learn to speak and think

and become a woman.

And think thoughts that will change what comes out your mouth.

Thoughts like:

If words are our weapons, we must ask ourselves, why should we use rocks

And sticks when we have tanks available?

And you will know how to answer (Quintero, 2014, pg. 202)

Following a feminist approach, Gabi critiqued the notion of girls as need to be silenced and needing to be soft spoken. Also, she alludes to the cultural proverb of *calladita te ves mas bonita*. She asserted that becoming a woman should require learning how to speak and think your mind rather than holding back or speaking softly to be perceived as a young girl. Furthermore, this last diagram of her zine concluded Gabi's process of claiming her thoughts and reflecting on her own process of her racialized and gendered identity.

The theme of *escritoras y artistas: meaning-making in school* demonstrates how each Chicana protagonist utilized their respective literacy practice that showcased their triumphs, struggles, and processing and articulation of their complex identities. Through writing, performing, and poetry, Chicana protagonists grappled with their surroundings and current realities and attempted to make sense out of them. Also, through these same literacy practices, they critiqued social expectations, themselves, and others within their schooling experiences.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For this final chapter, I first discuss the significance of my findings across the selected sample texts and the limitations of the research study. Then I conclude with implications for teachers and future research studies.

This research is rooted in the necessity of authentic and expansive representations of Chicanas in YA literature, particularly in their schooling experiences and the shortage of scholarship that assesses these representations. In examining the depictions of Chicanas in the sample of YA literature texts, two themes emerged that answered my research questions. For the first research question on how Chicana's schooling experiences are represented in YA literature by Chicana authors, as stated in the findings, Chicana protagonists are portrayed as being academically excelling and high achieving.

Across all of the texts, there were various portrayals of Chicana protagonists aspiring to excel in their classes and being “good” at school, that being from winning awards, a teacher supporting their specific endeavor, or other characters acknowledging the achievements of Chicana protagonists. Like Cummins' (2016) examination of academic agency, I found that different attributes related to education were a prominent theme in the sample texts and the value of drawing from the home. Additionally, I found that although Chicana protagonists were high achieving, typically their closest friend was portrayed almost the complete opposite. For example, when Sofia found out she was accepted to a prestigious private school, Berta commented that Sofia should just stay in McAllen because she would be too far away.

One of the subthemes that emerged was drawing on culture and family to succeed in school, where Chicana protagonists utilize strategies from the home—specifically their ancestors, family, and culture—to succeed in their educational endeavors. For example, in *The*

Tequila Worm (Canales, 2005), Sofia uses her inherited “mule-kicking” gift from Mama Maria to overcome obstacles in school. Rather than dismissing their families and culture, Chicana protagonists use what they learned from them as strengths and tools to navigate their educational trajectory.

It is also vital to note that each Chicana protagonist also interrogated the constant assumption and association between education and whiteness. Examples were drawn from *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011) and *Gabi, a girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014). This second subtheme exemplifies how Chicana protagonists interrogate and resist this notion of “wanting to be White” imposed by other characters; for Gabi, it was her mother. For Lupita, it was her classmates, and sustain their Mexican cultural background. Chicana protagonists questioned what an individual that is Mexican should look and act. A prime illustration is made in *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011). Lupita heatedly asks her sister, “Because I’m Mexican/ I’m supposed to speak with an accent?” (Garcia McCall, 2011, p. 82).

The second question, how do Chicana protagonists grapple with their identity formation and current realities within their schooling experiences represented in select texts, is answered by the second theme. As mentioned before, Chicana protagonists utilized different literacy practices to grapple with their identity formation and current struggles. Ranging from writing letters to performing, each Chicana protagonist uses a literacy practice as a tool to showcase their triumphs, struggles, and processing of their complex identities. Yet, one subtheme emerged in this finding: literacy as critiquing their identities and environment.

Chicana protagonists throughout all of the texts analyzed for this study used literacy practices to various degrees to aid them in grappling, connecting and make-meaning out of their current realities and evolving identities. Examples were drawn from *The Tequila Worm* (Canales,

2005) and *Under the Mesquite* (Garcia McCall, 2011). For instance, in *The Tequila Worm* (Canales, 2005), Sofia wrote letters to her family from her dorm room in Saint Luke's boarding school and, often, would write stories within the letters. Sofia sought to retain and sustain her family ties and narrate her experiences to "open up a new world" for her (Canales, 2005, p. 190). Drawing on Anzaldúa (2015), writing can be a creative and spiritual process, which is what Chicana protagonists did throughout selected texts.

A subtheme that emerged was related to Chicana protagonists using their literacy practices to critique their own identities, and their environments. For example, expectations imposed by society or what others have said about them that they need to do or change. As Anzaldúa (2015) reminds us, writing can be a form to reflect on ourselves and then, as a result, theorize from the experience of reflection. A particular example in *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014) is when Gabi creates a zine for a school assignment. In this zine, Gabi critiques the notion of girls being silenced and problematizes societies—as well as her mother's—expectations of the biologically assigned female body. Following a feminist approach, Gabi reflects on her own racialized and gendered identities through her zines.

Limitations

This research does not encompass all that there is to be known about representations of Chicana schooling experiences in YA literature. With this in mind, I would expand the sample size of this study; however, this study was kept small due to time constraints. To keep the project manageable, I needed to limit the texts that could be analyzed, which, in turn, limited deeper examination of texts. Aside from expanding the number of texts for the project, this study was also limited to YA literature texts published within the U.S. after 2000 and written in contemporary realistic fiction.

Implications, and Future Research

For readers of Chicana YA literature, the protagonists in the sample texts offer a view into the lives of Chicana protagonists, precisely that of their schooling experiences. For this reason, I want to problematize possible tropes presented in these texts based on the findings. Based on the first theme regarding portrayals of Chicana protagonists being academically excelling, high achieving, and having educational aspirations, it is vital to problematize how this can be considered a trope. While education is an integral part of Chicana's lives, it does not mean that being academically excellent is true of all Chicanas. Portraying that all Chicanas experience school the same and are “good” at school can be harmful, particularly to Chicanas that do not share similar aspirations. A Chicana does not need to be high achieving or academically excelling to be valued as a person, especially within schools.

I argue that even though these representations disrupt deficit narratives of Chicanas being “at risk” in schools, it creates a harmful (and false) dichotomy that in order to disrupt deficit thinking, then must Chicanas be high achieving. It does not showcase the complexities that Chicanas endure in schools or the intricacies of their identities or what Chicana students offer in schools. Additionally, this could also lead to a false notion of meritocracy. For instance, because Chicanas are high achieving then, in turn, they will get ahead in their socio-economic class. This is not always the case. In contrast, drawing on the second theme, I would argue focusing on other aspects that Chicanas offer, such as their literacy practices, can combat the potential dichotomy between “at risk” and “good” student because it centers their own experiences as a way to grapple with their identities and current realities. Chicanas deserve to be seen for other aspects they bring into their education. They can also define what a “successful” education means to them.

I offer the texts utilized in the study as tools that educators can use to foster inclusivity and interrogate representations of Chicana schooling experiences in YA literature within their classrooms. Adolescents, both Chicanas and non-Chicanas, deserve an opportunity to engage with authentic texts that discuss Chicana experiences with their peers. For teachers and librarians, both cultural insiders and outsiders, who choose to utilize these texts as a tool for students to see the windows and mirrors (Bishop, 1990) into the schooling experiences of Chicanas, should be done critically not to essentialize the identities and knowledges of Chicanas. The books discussed in the study are an appropriate starting point for educators to encourage discussions about how Chicanas grapple with their Chicana identity formation and current realities in schools, their various school involvements, and assumptions regarding education.

With this in mind, I encourage attempts to connect young Chicana adolescents to texts with Chicana protagonists that have a wider array of stories and experiences where Chicanas do not only have to be portrayed as high achieving in school. We need to see Chicanas for other aspects that they bring into education. Being academically excellent is not the only thing that Chicanas should be associated within school, rather center their literacy practices that can aid them in grappling with their identities. Possible questions for interrogating representations of Chicanas in YA literature in the classroom are: (1) How are Chicana protagonists represented compared to Chicanx secondary characters that we're deemed non-academically successful? (2) Why did the authors portray these characters so differently? (3) What would happen if the roles of these characters were changed? And (4) What are other ways success in school can be defined? These are starting questions into conversations that can be utilized by the selected texts in the study; however, additional questions can be drawn from Botelho & Rudman (2009, as cited in Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2017).

Despite the findings that I have presented, it is vital to bring into the conversation possible examinations of all Chicana characters within Chicana YA literature. Based on some of the observations I had made, I want to note that every Chicana protagonist had a comadre that was the complete opposite of themselves. For example, Gabi and Cindy (Cindy is pregnant and decides to stay in their hometown) and Sofia and Berta (Berta stayed in McAllen to raise a family). Further research is necessary for this area and should be considered because it situates a dichotomy for Chicana adolescent characters; you can either be academically achieving or not. I argue this can reinforce exceptionalism, especially that the Chicanas that go to college hold greater power than the rest. Lastly, I would also expand this study by doing literacy circles with Chicana adolescents and examine their reactions to these texts and how they may relate them to their own lives.

Conclusion

In sum, these portrayals of Chicanas in YA literature and their schooling experiences showcase a narrow view of their educational trajectory and depicts them as only high achieving, when in reality, they have much to offer through their literacy practices. Chicana youth deserve to be seen and valued as themselves and what they bring into their education. With a decline of novels with Latinx content, even fewer regarding Chicana content, and the Latinx population growing, there is an urge to integrate authentic representations of Chicanas and consider the possibilities for examination.

There needs to be advocacy for literature that genuinely incorporates a diverse representation of the wide range of experiences that Chicana youth experience. These representations have the power to validate the language, culture, background, and most importantly, the identity of youth needed in the current anti-immigrant context. These narratives

can push students to learn from each other and disrupt negative and narrow portrayals and assumptions of communities of Color.

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APPENDIX A: IRB EXEMPT FORM



Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research & Innovation

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Not Human Subjects Research Determination

May 19, 2021

Principal Investigator	Idalia Nunez Cortez																						
Protocol Title	“LA ESCUELA ES PARA ESTUDIAR”: REPRESENTATIONS OF CHICANA SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE																						
Protocol Number	21962																						
Funding Source	Unfunded																						
Study Description	Examining Chicana schooling experiences as they are respresented in published young adult literature books written by Chicana authors.																						
Study Components	<table><tr><td>Y</td><td>N</td></tr><tr><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td><td><input type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">The project is a systematic investigation designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge.</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">The project involves obtaining information about living individuals.</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">The project involves interaction or intervention with human subjects or their identifiable private information.</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">There is a way to access a code to re-identify coded data.</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/></td><td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">The project involves human subjects as recipients of tests articles and/or medical devices.</td></tr></table>	Y	N	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The project is a systematic investigation designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The project involves obtaining information about living individuals.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The project involves interaction or intervention with human subjects or their identifiable private information.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	There is a way to access a code to re-identify coded data.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The project involves human subjects as recipients of tests articles and/or medical devices.	
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The project involves human subjects as recipients of tests articles and/or medical devices.																							
Determination	It has been determined that this project, as described, does not meet the definition of Human Subjects Research as defined in 45CFR46(d)(f) or 21CFR56.102(c)(e) and does not require IRB approval.																						

The Office for the Protection of Research Subjects has reviewed and determined that the research study, *as described and reported to OPRS*, does not meet the criteria for Human Subjects Research. IRB approval is not required. This determination only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that modifications may need to be submitted to OPRS for review, status determination, or approval before the modifications are implemented.

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