Rachel L. **Rickard Rebellino** and Christine N. **Stamper**

"Sorry I'm not your little angel anymore":

Reading Good/Bad Girlhood through Mother–Daughter Relationships in Latina YA Fiction

At the end of Guadalupe Garcia McCall's (2011) Pura Belpré-winning verse novel, *Under the Mesquite*, the main character, Lupita, leaves her recently widowed father and her siblings to pursue her education. In a poem chronicling her feelings, she narrates that she feels "like Malinche when she walked / away from her own city, Tenochtitlán" (p. 203). This mention of La Malinche may be unfamiliar to some readers; however, those who know La Malinche's story will recognize the deeply ingrained ideas of femininity suggested by this reference. While the story of La Malinche is more legend than history, leading to layers of contradictory meaning, La Malinche is the traitorous mistress of the conquistador Hernán Cortés, who assisted the Spanish in the overthrow of her people (Petty, 2000). La Malinche has become synonymous with treasonous women, especially those women who use their sexuality for their own gain and, presumably, others' demise. She is contrasted with the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe, a divine appearance of the Virgin Mary who asked for a church to be built in Guadalupe, Mexico. Just as Malinche has come to represent sexually deviant femininity, La Virgen is understood to represent feminine purity and domesticity.

According to Petty (2000), these stories "sharply define female roles in Mexican culture based on physical sexuality; however, as historical and mythical figures, these two archetypes take on both political and social significance that also influence perceptions of femininity in the Latin American world" (p. 120). As evidenced by the reference to La Malinche in McCall's work, young adult novels featuring Latina girls and women must navigate these archetypes as they explore notions of femininity.

Other scholars have considered the distinct ways that representations of Latina mothers in YA literature are rooted in the division between La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche (Baxley & Boston, 2014); we see this dichotomy as equally at play in the lives of the young Latina protagonists themselves. Moreover, the duality between the two figures is enforced within the relationships between mothers and daughters in Latinx YA fiction. Through their implicit and explicit words and actions about how girls ought to behave, the mothers in the novels we discuss within this article perpetuate polarity between La Malinche (Bad Girlhood) and La Virgen (Good Girlhood). For the purposes of our study, we've chosen to concentrate on award-winning contemporary realistic YA fiction published between 2010–2015 written by Latina authors about Latina protagonists. Based on these parameters, our study focuses on three novels: McCall's *Under the Mesquite* (2011), Meg Medina's *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (2013), and Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (2014). In each work, the protagonists navigate the label of Good or Bad within their relationships with their mothers.

In order to better understand the ways these navigations of femininity through mother–daughter relationships work, we draw upon the framework of LatCrit and, specifically, the idea of counter-storytelling (Hughes-Hassell, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). LatCrit becomes particularly useful for exam-

ining these young adult books due to its attention to intersections of race, gender, and class—all of which significantly influence understandings of girlhood—and because of its attendance to understandings of race beyond a black/white binary (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), "The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (p. 32). Panlay (2016) further defines counter-storytelling as "a culturally powerful tool that has long been utilised by various minority groups to de/reconstruct their own reality and shape their own identity" (p. 161). The three young adult books that we examine function as counter-stories that challenge conceptions of race and gender in YA fiction through the ways the teenage characters push back against white supremacy by carving out their own understandings of femininity with respect to their other identities.

Within McCall's, Medina's, and Quintero's novels, mother–daughter relationships become vehicles for conceptualizing the cultural expectations surrounding girlhood, beliefs that are summed up in the idea of marianismo. Marianismo is a generalized cultural expectation for how Latina girls and women ought to act and is constructed across multiple dimensions, including sexuality, religion, body image, and familial obligation (Castillo, Perez, Castillo, & Ghosheh, 2010; Espinoza, 2010). Depending upon how a girl performs marianismo, she may be cast as either a Bad Girl, embodying La Malinche, or a Good Girl, following in the footsteps of La Virgen de Guadalupe.

More generally, many representations of femininity and girlhood, especially those in young adult media, explicitly or implicitly employ oppositional tropes: virgin/whore, cheerleader/tomboy, prom queen/nerd, etc.—a construction that mirrors the angel/monster dichotomy explored by Gilbert and Gubar (2000). This dichotomy is misogynistic and problematic, and within the novels we examine, the protagonists themselves are ambivalent toward what constitutes Good Girlhood and whether or not being a Good Girl is desirable.

We utilize Good and Bad as shorthand that weaves together the multiple forms of sometimes-conflicting constructs of femininity with which both the young adult characters and their mothers struggle. In analyzing the ways that mother-daughter relationships are used to navigate understandings of girlhood within the three novels, we examine the work that the authors are doing to deconstruct gender expectations. Following our analysis, we show how understanding these books as counter-stories might allow them to be used within classrooms as launching points for practicing critical theory.

"I'm tired of playing *mama*": Familial Obligations in *Under the Mesquite*

Guadalupe Garcia McCall's verse novel, *Under the Mesquite*, is structured as poems written by the protagonist Lupita, a Mexican immigrant who struggles to maintain normalcy in light of her mother's recent cancer diagnosis. As her mother's health worsens, Lupita takes on the role of caretaker for her eight siblings, an undertaking that becomes explicitly connected to her and her mother's ideas of what a Good Girl is. From the initial poem in McCall's novel, entitled "The Story of Us," Lupita and her mother's relationship is foregrounded, as the titular "us" is Lupita and her mother. Their closeness, though, serves as a base for conflict around how to fulfill the marianismo ideal of familial obligation (Espinoza, 2010). Lupita's mother is explicit about Lupita's role in the household; as the oldest girl, she must care for her younger siblings. When she is not allowed to go play with her friends because she must watch her siblings, Lupita responds angrily, but her mother is not swayed:

The three young adult books that we examine function as counter-stories that challenge conceptions of race and gender in YA fiction through the ways the teenage characters push back against white supremacy by carving out their own understandings of femininity with respect to their other identities.

> "I'm tired of playing *mama*," I complained.
> "You do it. They're *your* kids!"

I sassed her, and for that I had to mop
The entire house, which included
Four bedrooms, two bathrooms,
And the kitchen. (p. 43)

Not only is Lupita expected to care for her siblings, but the punishment for questioning the fairness of this expectation is more domestic tasks. In her attempted rejection of "playing" the role of parent, Lupita is given tasks that require even more work.

Without the regulating influence of her mother on how Lupita enacts girlhood, Lupita begins to reconcile the more traditional, marianismo-based understanding of femininity with her own desire for what she views as potentially traitorous independence.

Although initially frustrated with this expectation, Lupita internalizes and accepts these marianismo-based guidelines, as evidenced later in McCall's novel when she volunteers to become the full-time caretaker for her siblings when her mother has the opportunity to go to a cancer clinic several hours from home. For three months, Lupita is the often-frustrated head of her household, with the poems chronicling this period emphasizing how difficult the work is. Although she is not completely happy, Lupita perseveres until her parents return, fulfilling the ideals of marianismo. Her internalization of family obligation is central to her identity, not only as a Mexican but also as a Good Girl, which is directly addressed in the book. After she works to minimize her accent in her drama class at school, several classmates mock her: "[Y]ou talk like / you wanna be white" (p. 80). In response, Lupita defines what makes her Mexican: "Being Mexican / means more than that / It means being there for each other. / It's togetherness, like a *familia*" (p. 83). Lupita equates being Mexican with familial obligation, defined here as "being there for each other." This definition stems directly from her mother's repeated statements that taking on a caregiving role is necessary for Lupita to be a member of the family.

However, when Lupita's mother dies, Lupita's conception of what it means to be a Good Girl, and eventually a woman, fundamentally changes. Without the regulating influence of her mother on how Lupita enacts girlhood, Lupita begins to reconcile the more traditional, marianismo-based understanding of femininity with her own desire for what she views as potentially traitorous independence. In order to navigate her grief, Lupita's father suggests that she visit Mexico to stay with her grandmother. While in her parents' birthplace where her mother's ideas of womanhood emerged, Lupita considers what she wants from her life, independent of her family's expectations. She affirms her desire for education and travel, despite the wishes of her father for her to remain at home. After working through these feelings and the loss of her mother, Lupita tears out all of her older, sad poems about her mother and starts fresh:

I open my journal
to a blank page and begin
writing a whole new batch of poems,
poems filled with memories
and hope, because that's
what Mami would've wanted. (p. 196)

The absence of her mother allows Lupita to reconstruct what she believes her mother wished for her through her poetry. In writing as a way to contextualize her memories and work toward hope, Lupita takes ownership of her story. She moves from defining her girlhood and her Mexicanness within the context of her mother's desires to creating her own set of ideals through her creative power. In this way, McCall uses the space of Lupita's notebook to allow for counter-storytelling that defies the ideals of marianismo that she learned from her mother. Panlay (2016) notes that counter-storytelling is connected explicitly to the act of re-envisioning oppressive beliefs: in "[u]sing their own voice, which is often suppressed, untold, and thus unheard of, counter-storytelling gives the marginalised a means to (re)construct their own stories" (pp. 161–162). Through engaging in counter-storytelling in her poetry, Lupita is ready to move on both figuratively and literally, and she goes behind her father's back to buy a bus ticket to a northern town where she plans to attend college.

In leaving her family, Lupita confronts the archetype of La Malinche in the moment referenced in the opening of this article. Although she compares herself directly to Malinche, her poetry as a whole reveals that she understands herself to be forging her

own path that aligns neither with Malinche nor with La Virgen de Guadalupe. Lupita's mother's death has freed her to explore a more nuanced conception of womanhood. The final lines of the book evoke this newly assembled understanding of familial obligation in conjunction with Lupita's own desires:

> This feels right to me—
> starting to walk towards the doors,
> holding Mami's old, blue suitcase,
> and remembering
> the love I carry with me. (p. 207)

As Lupita moves toward independence, she carries her mother with her, both figuratively and literally. According to Trites (2000), although teenagers of both genders rebel against their parents in young adult fiction, books about teen girls traditionally feature a relatively short time of conflict followed by the protagonist complying with the parents' wishes. In *Under the Mesquite*, though, part of the counter-storytelling that McCall engages with is rewriting how girls' relationships with their parents are navigated. Lupita's growth stems from her ability to negotiate identity formation rooted both in her own desires and in those of her mother.

While for Lupita, familial obligation is focalized, in the novels we turn to next, mother–daughter relationships are a vehicle through which the protagonists come to understand their identity in terms of both familial obligation and sexuality.

"Put a bra on already, Piddy": Sexual Expectations in *Yaqui Delgado*

Expectations of marianismo within Meg Medina's *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* are largely defined through the ways the mother of Piddy, the protagonist, polices Piddy's sexuality, both through how she embodies femininity and through expectations regarding romantic attachments. The title of Medina's book references Yaqui, a classmate who bullies and physically attacks Piddy because she believes Piddy is trying to steal her boyfriend; however, Piddy's relationship with her mother, whom she calls Ma, is more central to the book than Yaqui's bullying. For Ma, part of her daughter's success in life comes from Piddy controlling and containing her developing body. Ma snaps, "Put a bra on already, Piddy. . . . You can't go around with two loose onions in your shirt for all the boys to stare at" (p. 3). Unlike Lupita's mother, who was most concerned with the ways that Lupita cared for her siblings, Ma focuses her attention on Piddy's embodied sexuality. In Ma's mind, having an exposed or uncontrolled body sets one up to be a sexual(ized) Bad Girl who is loose, skanky, slutty, or trampy, as opposed to a Good Girl whose body remains covered, contained, and controlled.

Ma has engrained in Piddy just how undesirable the Bad Girl label is, and Yaqui provides a prime example of what Ma envisions as a Bad Girl. Piddy recounts:

> They're her worst nightmare of what a Latin girl can become in the United States. Their big hoop earrings and plucked eyebrows, their dark lips painted like those stars in the old black-and-white movies, their tight T-shirts that show too much curve and invite boys' touches. The funny thing is, if I could be anything right now, I'd be just like one of them. (pp. 55–56)

Ma chooses, at least in Piddy's mind, to focus on what is outwardly read as Bad—a girl's choice of makeup, clothes, and accessories. Yaqui not only embraces each of these markers, but she also exposes how Piddy's body refuses to conform to Ma's expectations. At the start of the book, readers learn from a friend of Piddy why Yaqui is bullying her: "[S]he wants to know who the hell you think you are, shaking your ass the way you do. . . . She even called you a *skank*" (p. 2). Yaqui, whose disdain for Piddy stems from the way Piddy walks, reinforces the idea that having an uncontrolled, sexualized body gathers undesired attention. However, even when Piddy attempts to follow Ma's controlling guidelines, her body still betrays her. She is sexualized by others against her will, leading Piddy to question her mother's seemingly useless standards.

Expectations of marianismo within Meg Medina's *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* are largely defined through the ways the mother of Piddy, the protagonist, polices Piddy's sexuality, both through how she embodies femininity and through expectations regarding romantic attachments.

After Yaqui's torment of Piddy has worsened, Piddy experiments with physically embodying a Bad Girl. Staring in the mirror, she pulls her hair back in a manner similar to Yaqui, paints her lips a "dark burgundy that Ma would never let [her] wear," and takes tweezers to her eyebrows: "My eyebrows grow thinner and thinner until I'm teary and my skin is red and swollen, until there is only the barest line remaining. . . . If Ma walked by, she might not recognize me" (p. 152). Piddy's reinvention as a Yaqui-esque Bad Girl is explicitly connected to a separation not only from her mother's rules, but also, through changing her appearance in order to become unrecognizable, from Ma herself. While in *Under the Mesquite*, Lupita is able to rewrite her mother's understandings of femininity after her mother's death, because Ma is still alive, Piddy must find a different way to assert her power over Ma and Ma's expectations (Trites, 2000). By physically embracing the kind of Latina femininity that Ma fears, she does just that. Whereas Ma sees Yaqui and other Bad Girls as dangerous, Piddy views Bad Girls as tough and able to fit in at school. At the same time, though, Piddy admits that her new appearance frightens her, showing that despite the physical attributes that she conflates with Badness, an alteration to her appearance alone is not enough to change who she is.

Piddy's reinvention as a Yaqui-esque Bad Girl is explicitly connected to a separation not only from her mother's rules, but also, through changing her appearance in order to become unrecognizable, from Ma herself.

Piddy's navigation of what it means to be Good or Bad extends beyond these alterations to her appearance. While Ma repeatedly reinforces the idea that being Good is synonymous with protecting oneself from boys, Piddy struggles with this notion in light of her romantic relationship with Joey, a former neighbor. When Piddy and Joey have a romantic encounter, the new Bad Girl persona Piddy tries to cultivate competes alongside the Good Girl Ma has taught her to be. Piddy wonders what having sex with Joey would be like at the same time that she questions her desire: "There will be no way back, but would I want one? I'm nearly a woman, right? . . . I will make it No Big Deal. *Tears are stupid, a thing of little girls*, I tell myself" (p. 184).

Just as Lupita feels like La Malinche upon leaving home but sees that identification as both Good and Bad, Piddy's experimentation into sexuality here sees her trying to reconcile Goodness and Badness. The capitalization of "No Big Deal" highlights how big of a deal she actually understands sex to be, and although Piddy is frightened by the idea of having sex with Joey, she also feels desire for him. She works through this tension in the context of her femininity, attempting to connect herself to her nascent womanhood through deciding to have sex as she distances herself from the tears she associates with young girls. Piddy continues to try to put on a womanly, Bad Girl persona that is sexual and confident rather than scared or ashamed. In doing so, she represses her Good Girl modesty and discomfort in favor of embracing her sexual desires. Ultimately, Piddy is relieved from making this decision herself, as Joey stops their sexual encounter when he sees that she has been beaten up by Yaqui.

The tension Piddy experiences in attempting to negotiate understandings of Good and Bad Girlhood is only further complicated when she learns that her mother is not the perfect vision of La Virgen de Guadalupe that she has seemingly cast herself as. Ma's friend Lila reveals that Piddy's absent father was married to another woman when Piddy was conceived. Piddy and her mother's relationship becomes even more tense as Piddy accuses her mother of hypocrisy; however, her anger abates as she gains more information about the situation: Ma was engaged to Piddy's father and only learned afterward that he was already married. Embedded in this story is the breakdown of Good/Bad Girlhood, a breakdown that allows Piddy and Ma to reconcile. Knowing Ma's story lets readers understand her protection and regulation of Piddy's behavior as stemming from the lack of control she had on her own Good/Bad Girl status, and Ma ends her restorative conversation with Piddy with the question, "[W]ho are *you* going to be?" (p. 203). In raising this question, Ma allows Piddy to move freely between the dichotomous understandings of femininity that had previously dominated her life, asking Piddy to make her own decisions about how she chooses to identify

and relinquishing some of her attempts to regulate Piddy's behavior.

While not explicitly stated, Ma and Piddy's conversation shows Piddy that her understanding of her identity is complex, and as Medina (2016) herself has stated, *Yaqui* is "full of a whole tribe of women that defied the stereotypes. . . . [women who] are almost all Latina, in every variation: austere women and overtly sexual ones; the academically driven and school dropouts; successful business owners and hourly wage workers" (p. 58). This mixture of women leads to a richer, nuanced depiction of femininity, mirroring the complex understanding of womanhood that Lupita attains. However, while Lupita's understanding is realized because of her ability to rewrite her mother's expectations, Piddy actively negotiates these ideas in conversation with her mother and the other women in her life. It is important to note, though, that Piddy's forging of her own path is not entirely revolutionary; rather, it fits with Trites's (2000) understanding of rebellion in YA literature more generally: "[R]ebellion is only portrayed as effective in literature as long as it ultimately serves to sustain the status quo at some level" (p. 36). Though Piddy rebels against her mother's understandings of femininity and the duality of La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe, her rebellion also leaves her with a relatively similar version of femininity and marianismo as her mother—she is neither a traitorous, overly sexual woman, nor a virginal homemaker.

"Why is every mom's concern about sex?": *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* and Balancing Acts

While *Under the Mesquite* focuses on familial obligation and *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* emphasizes sexuality, Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* weaves these threads of marianismo together. Quintero's book, which is constructed as a diary, is also the most explicit of the three in its discussion of what defines Good and Bad Girlhood, with Mexican American protagonist Gabi directly addressing the narratives she has heard from her mother and from other sources. Within her diary, Gabi speaks candidly about the oppressive forces in her life, which include not only the narratives that stem from her mother, but also those from society at large. Panlay (2016) states that "[o]ne of the main reasons that victims of internalized racism are perpetually trapped within the vicious cycle of self-condemnation is because they hold majoritarian stories or master narratives as true representations of themselves" (p. 165). Gabi's written entries are a means for both Gabi, the protagonist, and *Gabi*, the diary's author, to openly push back against the narratives of white supremacy and patriarchy that lead to the oppression of Latina girls and women. This form of counter-storytelling often leaves Gabi at odds with what her mother expects of her.

For Gabi's mom, Good Girls embody the marianismo qualities of staying close to home and being chaste, while Bad Girls leave home and are sexually promiscuous. Gabi's mindset about both sexuality and pursuing a future that would require leaving home becomes clear early in the novel when she states: "Why is every mom's concern about sex? There are more important things in life like school, careers, poetry, books, ice cream or learning how to make the perfect chocolate cake" (pp. 51–52). Although Gabi as writer may be performing a stance of nonchalance toward sex in this narrative, linking it to more lighthearted concerns, her diary continually reaffirms that she views sex and sexuality as only a part of her identity. Throughout her entries, she discloses a belief that being a Good/Bad Girl should not be decided solely based on her choices about sex. In this way, Gabi, like Piddy, refuses to let the narrative of La Malinche, licentious and eager to denounce her family, define her. Rather, she strives for a form of femininity where sexual pleasure is not damning and does not distance her from her family.

Gabi, like Piddy, refuses to let the narrative of La Malinche, licentious and eager to denounce her family, define her. Rather, she strives for a form of femininity where sexual pleasure is not damning and does not distance her from her family.

Early in the novel, Gabi sets goals for herself that include self-discovery—both sexual and intellectual in nature—that rebel against her mother's ideas that "all of [women's] worth is between [their] legs. Once a

man has access to that, then there is no future for [the woman]" (p. 146). As she accomplishes these goals, Gabi becomes simultaneously conflicted and excited about becoming more sexually active. When discussing a make-out session with her boyfriend, Martin, Gabi states that he asked before touching her breast for the first time. She reflects that she's glad he asked because even though she wanted more, she "didn't say anything because [she] thought that [she] would have seemed way too slutty . . . because girls are not supposed to think that way" (p. 240). Here, Gabi's desires intersect with her internalized societal and maternal expectations about what Good Girls are "supposed" to do.

Gabi does not conform solely to her mother's wishes, nor does she rebel entirely. Instead, she reconciles her mother's ideals with her own desires in order to find the space for expressing and existing as an independent woman.

Despite this, Gabi recognizes her own wants and desires, ultimately deciding to have safe sex with her boyfriend, even as she is unsure of how to reconcile the duality between her opinions and those of her mother. As Younger (2009) notes, "In YA literature, females are punished in myriad ways for being sexual. Frequently the punishment takes the form of an unplanned, unwanted pregnancy, although a few novels provide more complex depictions of young adult sexuality" (p. 23). Quintero's novel fits into the latter description, as Gabi is able to come to terms with what sexuality means for her organically, without receiving punishment for having sex with Martin.

As Gabi grapples with her sexuality, she also works through an understanding of the marianismo tenet of familial obligation. For Gabi's mother, the possibility of Gabi going away to college means abandoning the ideals of marianismo for multiple reasons: leaving her family, becoming sexually promiscuous, and— implicit in both of these—trying to become less Mexican:

> My mom is always going on about how good Mexican girls stay home and help their families when they are in need and how that differentiates us from other people. Kind of wishing I was other people right now if that is what is going to determine my Mexicanness at the moment. (p. 83)

However, soon after expressing her frustration with this obligation, Gabi shows that she has internalized this belief. When Gabi's addict father returns home, Gabi considers not letting him into the house. Ultimately, though, she does let him in, explaining that "Good Mexican girls never turn away their parents, no matter how awful they've been. My mother taught me that" (p. 88). Thus, Gabi echoes Lupita's belief that familial togetherness is entwined with being Mexican, yet Gabi, unlike Lupita, explicitly expresses her resistance to this concept as pivotal to her "Mexicanness." Gabi finds her mother's reasoning outdated and ridiculous; she is determined to live her life the way she wants: "If that means moving away to college to do whatever it is that I want to do . . . then that is what I have to do" (p. 185). The diary format of the book emphasizes Gabi's agency in choosing how and in what direction she grows. She comes to the realization that moving away from home and following her dreams will allow her to become comfortable with being simultaneously Mexican, sexual, and independent.

Gabi's rebellion is similar to Piddy's in that she looks for ways to reconcile her independence and her relationship with her mother, as evidenced in a poem she writes titled, "Questions I Would Like to Ask My Mother But Am Afraid to Because She Will Probably Think I Am: A) Bad, B) Whitewashed, and/or C) All of the Above" (p. 147). Gabi's questions focus on many facets of identity: sexuality, gendered expectations, and ethnicity, such as, "Do I have to get married to be happy?" "Why do you tell me that sex is bad, but you tell my brother to use a condom?" "If I don't like beans, does that mean I am not Mexican enough?" and, lastly, "How will I know when I'm a woman?" (pp. 147–149). Although the title of the poem and some of the questions themselves are positioned as facetious, they represent very real fears Gabi has about her life, concerns that she wishes she could discuss with her mother. According to Cardell (2014), "the diary is considered by feminist critics as a particularly important site for the expression of female subjectivity . . . [and] has been considered a location where processes of resistance or compliance to cultural proscriptions of feminine identity can be seen" (p. 21). Thus, the choice to structure *Gabi* as a diary

can be read as a feminist act, reinforcing the content of the book and forming quasi-answers to the questions Gabi poses. While she may not have responses from her mother, she is able to write her own counter-story about how the world works.

By the end of the novel, Gabi has come to the conclusion that she and her mother will not agree on what makes a girl Good or Bad, but that their disagreement is okay. Gabi discovers that the questions she raised do not necessarily have one right answer:

> I know my mom and I have our differences . . . but I love her with all my heart. . . . She's a walking contradiction—she wants me to be a strong woman and not let any man tell me what to do, but she also wants me to be obedient and behave like a nice young lady (whatever the hell that is): a virgin, I am sure, but what else? . . . Being a virgin can't be the only thing that makes you a "nice young lady" because I know plenty of girls who are virgins, but could never be called nice-young-anythings because they are straight-out spawn of Satan. (pp. 274–275)

Gabi does not fully understand or agree with her mother's rules and values, but she does respect her mother and wants to find a balance of respect and independence; while she is not a virgin and will not stay home for college, she also does not use drugs and clearly has her family's best interests at heart. Like both Lupita and Piddy, Gabi does not conform solely to her mother's wishes, nor does she rebel entirely. Instead, she reconciles her mother's ideals with her own desires in order to find the space for expressing and existing as an independent woman.

La Malinche in the Attic: Bad Girls in the Shadows of Latinx YA Literature

Within *Under the Mesquite*, *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*, and *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*, mother–daughter relationships become vehicles through which the books stress the impossibility of one singular definition of Good and/or Bad Girlhood. This message is made possible by the ways in which the teen protagonists' stories are told in connection with the stories of their mothers. As we've explored in our analyses of the three books, the protagonists actively grapple with reconciling their own understandings of femininity with the messages their mothers have imparted to them. Beyond this, though, the inclusion of both the girls' mothers' visions of what ideal girlhood looks like for their daughters and pieces of the stories of the girls' mothers themselves illustrates the ways in which the mothers' expectations are paradoxical and inconsistent.

In Quintero's book, Gabi's father's addiction and eventual death force Gabi's mother to take on increased independence, a behavior that does not fit directly with the more demure ideas about femininity she tries to impart to Gabi. Piddy's mother in *Yaqui Delgado* clearly attempted to be a Good Girl; however, her plans were foiled when it turned out that the man she was in love with was already married. Instead, she is placed into the Bad Girl category as an unwed mother having an affair with a married man. Lupita's mother in *Under the Mesquite* fits most closely with the expectation of Good Girlhood as embodied in the characteristics of La Virgen de Guadalupe. She is family oriented, docile, and religious. However, the book's central narrative is about Lupita's mother's illness and eventual death, a death that allows protagonist Lupita to rewrite her ideas about womanhood onto her mother's legacy. Thus, the text positions her mother's "abandonment" of her family as a loss of idealized motherhood similar to that of the other mothers we discuss. The gap between the mothers' ideas about femininity and the realities of their situations reveals that the behaviors and attitudes associated with Good Girls would not benefit the protagonists if they were placed in the same scenarios as their mothers. A traditional marianismo trajectory does not serve the three daughters well as they progress toward womanhood. Ultimately, each of the three books suggests that in order to successfully be a girl, and eventually a woman, a girl must embrace a more nuanced understanding of femininity that draws together notions of Good and Bad Girls,

Ultimately, each of the three books suggests that in order to successfully be a girl, and eventually a woman, a girl must embrace a more nuanced understanding of femininity that draws together notions of Good and Bad Girls, subverting the false duality of La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche.

subverting the false duality of La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche.

At the same time, one of the most important takeaways from these books is the way each emphasizes the reconciliation of the protagonist with her mother—or the idea of her mother in Lupita's case. Each work allows for a more complex, intricate understanding of the place that the mothers are coming from in their concern for their daughters, and indeed, the mothers' ideas are not fully rejected. Instead, they are problematized and negotiated, and each book ends with the girls' relationships with their mothers intact, even as Lupita, Piddy, and Gabi are able to achieve independence. The relationships presented between the girls and their mothers in these books provide nuance to the widely accepted idea that parents in YA fiction are either absent or sources of conflict (Nilsen, Blasingame, Donelson, & Nilsen, 2013; Trites, 2000). In these works, there is conflict in the mother–daughter relationships, but the overarching narratives of the books construct the girls' mothers as both sources of conflict and sources of support, something that seems to be explicitly connected to the books as works of Latinx literature.

The three books examined in this study illustrate tension between Good and Bad Girls using girls who fall decidedly on the Good end of the spectrum. However, Bad Girls haunt these books, presenting unredeemable counterpoints to the protagonists.

Thinking about these three books as Latinx literature also allows for interesting implications regarding the ways that femininity is constructed in them with respect to ethnicity. As a group, they set up an intersectional understanding of femininity that considers both notions of traditional American girlhood and more culturally specific understandings of femininity. In thinking about the competing ideas of La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe, Petty (2000) states that Chicana authors, such as Sandra Cisneros, face a dilemma wherein they are "creating a role model for [themselves] and other Chicanas that is neither limited by this good/bad duality ingrained in Mexican culture, nor too 'Anglicized' [Rodríguez-Aranda, 1990, p. 65] to adequately represent their experience" (pp. 122–123). Each book actively takes up this question of Anglicization: Lupita is criticized by her friends at school for actively working to lose her accent (McCall, 2011, p. 8); Piddy is not considered "Latina" enough because of her light skin, lack of an accent, and academic performance (Medina, 2013, p. 6); and Gabi is repeatedly questioned by her mother for trying to "act white" because she wants to leave home for college. At various points in the books, women in the lives of all three protagonists claim that the girls are sacrificing their Good (Latina) Girlhood for Bad (Americanized and white) Girlhood. In drawing this underlying issue to the forefront of the narratives, each book emphasizes the intersectionality of the texts and the ways in which multiple narratives about femininity and race operate in constructions of identity.

That being said, a review of these three books and their depictions of Good and Bad girlhood reveals one noticeable gap in representation. Although the books problematize what it means to be Good and Bad, they offer relatively similar depictions of successful girls: all three protagonists are academically successful, college bound, have good relationships and/or closure with their mothers, and have an ultimately healthy view of their sexuality. These books do work to deconstruct the assumptions of docile, abstinent, innocence that comes with La Virgen; however, they do not place the same care into fully reclaiming the negativity associated with La Malinche. Across these books, the perspective of characters like Yaqui from Medina's book is sorely missing—girls who come from so-called "broken homes," flounder academically, consistently have discipline issues, and potentially have unhealthy romantic relationships.

The three books examined in this study illustrate tension between Good and Bad Girls using girls who fall decidedly on the Good end of the spectrum. However, Bad Girls haunt these books, presenting unredeemable counterpoints to the protagonists. Medina's Yaqui comes from an unsupportive family, misses a great deal of school, and is considered a thoroughly Bad delinquent by the adults in the text. Despite the fact that her name and not Piddy's appears in the title of the book, Yaqui does not receive any kind of resolution within the text. Similarly, Quintero's novel offers a Bad Girl counterpoint to Gabi—a girl named

Georgina who has an abortion and is positioned as an annoying gossip who is not liked by any of the main characters.

The Bad Girls within these texts loom as warnings of what not to be and are not given space or voice to tell their counter-stories, making these books not altogether different from the monster/angel complex that Gilbert and Gubar (2000) explored in their foundational writing on Victorian literature. While Lupita, Gabi, and Piddy are not perfectly Good, they are given the narrative space to explain their lives and justify their Bad Girl turns; perhaps this is a reason why these books have been the recipients of so many awards. They show a particular kind of girlhood that is potentially more palatable to adult gatekeepers of young adult literature.

According to Jiménez Garcia (2017), "The lens of Latinx literature is one that magnifies issues of transnationalism, language, race, ethnicity, gender, and class for how they shape ideals about U.S. literary, historical, and scholarly canons" (p. 120). Indeed, a close analysis of what stories are represented within these books draws attention to the perpetuating dominance of certain kinds of narratives about race, gender, and class in youth literature. While this analysis has focused on girlhood and identity through the lens of mother–daughter relationships, the looming presence of Bad Girls in these texts offers an even greater tension and potential for more in-depth analysis of how girlhood in YA literature is portrayed through the lens of other female relationships.

Conclusions and Implications

As award-winning texts, these novels are likely housed in most libraries and bookstores, which gives them great potential for librarians, educators, and others to interact with their ideological disruptions. Considering that American political rhetoric builds literal and figurative walls around Latinx and other black and brown bodies, these texts can provide a human face to help majority readers understand the multiple, intersecting oppressions that minoritized groups face, while also providing much-needed mirrors for Latinx readers (Sims Bishop, 1990). The teenage girls in the texts we examined show intersectional lives; not only are the elements of rebellion and self-exploration familiar to white, middle-class, suburban teenagers, but they also incorporate elements that do not mask the characters' ethnicities. By foregrounding ethnic and cultural differences, the books allow educators to introduce narratives like La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe to their students. While this dichotomy is culturally specific, it can be easily linked to other dualities placed upon women, opening up the ability to create broad dialogue about the treatment of women and girls.

Saldaña (2012) advocates for viewing multicultural literature as "capital L" literature, stating that, "We don't deny [Latinx] works' cultural value—we will even bring it up in class—but we don't treat it as a lesser literature (lowercase "l") by assigning it *because* of its cultural significance" (p. 70). The books we have discussed are important for their culturally specific representations; however, they also provide fertile space for teachers to guide students in using critical frameworks, such as LatCrit, to work toward "literary study as social change" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Through acknowledging the books as capital L literature, rich with opportunities for critical readings and ideological deconstructions, teachers can work toward an antiracist pedagogy that empowers students to tell their own counter-stories.

Rachel L. Rickard Rebellino *is a doctoral candidate specializing in Literature for Children and Young Adults in the College of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University. She received her MA in Children's Literature from Eastern Michigan University and has taught courses in composition, children's literature, and adolescent literature. She has published work on reader interaction and do-it-yourself diary books as well as on the affordances of verse and graphic novels as multicultural young adult literature. Her research interests include multimodality in books for young readers, fan-made responses to literature for children and young adults, and adolescent diary books.*

Christine N. Stamper *is a doctoral candidate at The Ohio State University in Literature for Children and Young Adults with a Graduate Interdisciplinary Specialization in Sexuality Studies. She researches representations of LGBTQ populations within young adult literature. With Rob Bittner and Jennifer Ingrey, she published a review of trans-themed books for* Discourse *and has co-written an article in* English Journal *about the potential for non-prose*

multicultural texts in classrooms. Her dissertation project studies award-winning LGBTQ-themed YA literature, looking at the identities, subject matters, and themes present and examining how these texts both disrupt stereotypical narratives, while also supporting oppressive tropes.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to extend their thanks to Dr. Ashley Hope Pérez for her invaluable guidance and thoughtful feedback during the early stages of this project.

References

Baxley, T. P., & Boston, G. H. (2014). *(In)visible presence: Feminist counter-narratives of young adult literature by women of color*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Botelho, M. J., & Rudman, M. K. (2009). *Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cardell, K. (2014). *Dear world: Contemporary uses of the diary*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Castillo, L. G., Perez, F. V., Castillo, R., & Ghosheh, M. R. (2010). Construction and initial validation of the marianismo beliefs scale. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, *23*, 163–175.

Espinoza, R. (2010). The good daughter dilemma: Latinas managing family and school demands. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *9*, 317–330.

Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (2000). *The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Hughes-Hassell, S. (2013). Multicultural young adult literature as a form of counter-storytelling. *Library Quarterly*, *83*, 212–228.

Jiménez Garcia, M. (2017). Side-by-side: At the intersections of Latinx studies and ChYALit. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, *41*, 113–122.

McCall, G. G. (2011). *Under the mesquite*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books.

Medina, M. (2013). *Yaqui Delgado wants to kick your ass*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick.

Medina, M. (2016). On writing the American *familia*. *The Horn Book Magazine*, *92*(1), 54–61.

Nilsen, A. P., Blasingame, J., Donelson, K. L., & Nilsen, D. L. F. (2013). *Literature for today's young adults* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Panlay, S. (2016). *Racism in contemporary African American children's and young adult literature*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.

Petty, L. (2000). The "dual"-ing images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros's *The house on Mango Street*. *MELUS*, *25*(2), 119–132.

Quintero, I. (2014). *Gabi, a girl in pieces*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press.

Rodríguez-Aranda, P. (1990). On the solitary fate of being Mexican, female, wicked, and thirty-three: An interview with writer Sandra Cisneros. *The Americas Review, 18*(1), 65–66.

Saldaña, R., Jr. (2012). Mexican American YA lit: It's literature with a capital "L"! *The ALAN Review*, *39*(2), 68–73.

Sims Bishop, R. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, *6*(3), ix–xi.

Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001). Critical race and LatCrit theory and method: Counter-storytelling. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *14*, 471–495.

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*, 23–44.

Trites, R. S. (2000). *Disturbing the universe: Power and repression in adolescent literature*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.

Younger, B. (2009). *Learning curves: Body image and female sexuality in young adult literature*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.