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Experiences of Latinidad and First-Generation College Students in Jane the Virgin: Using Auto-Historia Teoria and Finding Coyolxauhqui

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EXPERIENCES OF LATINIDAD AND FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS
IN *JANE THE VIRGIN*: USING AUTO-HISTORIA TEORIA AND FINDING
COYOLXAUHQUI

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IN *JANE THE VIRGIN*: USING AUTO-HISTORIA TEORIA AND FINDING
COYOLXAUHQUI

by

GEMA LÓPEZ

THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the importance of Latinx and first-generation college student representation in media. By using autohistoria-teoría and content analysis, I aim to find the ways in which the show, *Jane the Virgin*, influences my experiences of Latinidad as well as how it represents the first-generation college experience and how those relate to my own. I use Gloria Anzaldúa's model to study identity dealing with nepantla, arrebataamientos, and the Coyolxauhqui process to discuss my own identity.

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Introduction

Being from both Mexico and the United States, I have always felt that I am a part of two worlds, like my life was two halves put together. Every weekend my mom drove my sisters and I across the border to visit our grandparents in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. I have come to realize the privilege it is to be from two countries and be able to travel back and forth as often as we did. I was born in El Paso, Texas, and I lived in Juárez for the first four years of my life. My mother, born and raised in Juárez, decided to move to the United States to create a better life for her daughters. I moved to the United States at a very young age, and I only spoke Spanish, but English is now my dominant language. I do not remember a time where I did not know English, and I know this has to do with my integration to the U.S. American school system since pre-kindergarten. These details about my life are relevant because they have to do with my identity. The more I grew up, the more my interests shifted into U.S. American popular culture, whereas in the years leading up to the fifth grade my interests were with Mexican popular culture. My identity has always been two separate halves: My Mexican identity and my U.S. American identity. It was not until I began my undergraduate degree that I was introduced to the term Chicana, and I now fully identify as a Chicana. This term allowed me to realize that I am not two halves; I am one whole of interconnected experiences between two countries and two cultures.

The streaming platform, Netflix, was popularized in my teenage years. This platform allowed me to spend much of my time watching various television series that would otherwise be inaccessible to me because my family did not have the money to afford cable television. I began watching shows such as *Grey's Anatomy*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Gossip Girl*, and *Friends* among many others. From the shows mentioned above I can think of one Latinx character, Calliope (Callie) Torres from *Grey's Anatomy*. She was a recurring character and I estimate that there were about

one or two episodes where we learned about her background. These episodes can be argued to be stereotypical because Callie is a bisexual character who struggles with being accepted by her homophobic Latinx family. Abdi and Calafell (2018) discuss Callie's character and add that while Callie is dealing with her father's ultimatums regarding her inheritance and her sexuality, another nonwhite character advocates for familial nondisclosure which marks the reification of homophobia that can exist within nonwhite families and cultures (Abdi & Calafell, 2018, p. 128). An important argument that Abdi and Calafell (2018) make is that "Callie's proximity to whiteness constructs her bisexuality to satisfy white heteronormative U.S. audiences" (Abdi & Calafell, 2018, p. 120). For this queer, Latinx character to continue to be accepted and liked by the audience, the writers of the show surround her with white characters to act as cushions. Being exposed to mostly white characters, I always felt like I was robbed of something I could never put my finger on. Now I can say that the white privilege presented in these shows always made me feel like I was missing out on those experiences.

I grew up watching telenovelas that catered to children through a popular Mexican multimedia mass media company called Televisa. Televisa created an extension of their programming called Televisa Niños, which aired telenovelas infantiles such as *Misión S.O.S.*, *Vivan los niños*, *Amy la niña de la mochila azul*, among others. These were my introduction to the Mexican world of telenovelas. Novelas are meaningful to me, because they were a way for my mother and I to spend time together. We would spend afternoons watching them and bonding over the drama. As Sowards and Pineda (2011) state, telenovelas are a transnational phenomenon with global resonance (p. 125). They add that telenovelas are easily described as Spanish soap operas, but they have distinct characteristics. "Telenovelas have a limited number of episodes per show with a clear conclusion and often, telenovelas serve as a vehicle for stardom in Latin

America” (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003, p. 125). Telenovelas have hour-long episodes that are broadcasted five days a week. Mayer (2003) adds, “Mexican telenovelas typically run between 180 to 200 episodes, allowing the narrative to unfold and close in short runs” (López, 1985, as cited in Mayer, 2003, p. 481). An important element that has been noted as successful within telenovelas is that this genre can connect with female audiences. “Viewers of telenovelas draw meaning and understanding about their own lives from the stories in telenovelas, especially when it comes to issues of identity and beauty” (Rivero & Mayer, 2003, as cited in Sowards and Pineda, 2011, p. 126). Sowards and Pineda (2011), explain that the ideas in telenovelas are “transnational and audiences outside of the countries of origin can also take away messages and themes about culture, gender, and the positioning of class” (p. 126). I can agree from first-hand experience that novelas play a huge role in my identity and understanding of issues. One of the novelas my mother and I watched was *La fea más bella*, the Mexican adaptation of *Yo soy Betty, la fea*, also known as *Ugly Betty* through the U.S. American adaptation. Jaime Camil, a Mexican actor, played a role in that novela and became a recurring actor in my childhood, along with Angélica Vale. After finishing my fifth rewatching of *Grey’s Anatomy*, I was browsing through Netflix and came across a show titled *Jane the Virgin (JTV)*. In desperate need of another show to binge watch, I clicked on the first episode and was immediately hooked. This show is like a telenovela due to its use of common tropes found in the genre. This genre is known for their cliché plot twists, such as the love triangle, the evil twin sister, or the dead character who comes back with amnesia, just to name a few. It also follows popular telenovela tropes like the rich bachelor falling in love with a waitress from humble beginnings. During the first episode, we are introduced to a character played by Jaime Camil, and I remember being shocked to see him in an American show. As soon as I saw him on *JTV*, I instantly felt connected to my past and I

remembered watching novelas with my mother, who passed away when I was seventeen. *JTV* has been one of the only shows that has ever made me feel seen. Representation and identity within the Latinx community is such an important issue to research. The growing Latinx population in the United States should directly translate to the amount of Latinx representation we see in entertainment media. It is important for younger generations to grow up watching people like them on screen.

In recent years, there have been very few television shows that include people of color as main characters, especially Latinx folks. The few shows with a Latinx person as a main character include, but are not limited to, *Ugly Betty*, *George Lopez*, and *Jane the Virgin*. As Valdivia (2004) states, “there [is] relatively little work on Latina/os and communications or the mass media, including the mainstream research areas of television, advertising, and journalism and the press – all three areas with a growing tradition in regard to African Americans in the media” (p. 107). *Jane the Virgin* follows a family of Venezuelan American women, which has meaning in its ability to represent a multitude of Latina identities.

Jane the Virgin is a U.S. American adaptation of a 2002 Venezuelan telenovela called *Juana la virgen*. The telenovela is about a seventeen-year-old student, Juana Perez, with a scholarship to study journalism in the United States. She attends a routine medical checkup at a hospital where she is artificially inseminated by mistake. This series aired from March 14 to October 16, 2002, through Radio Caracas Televisión. *Jane the Virgin* introduces Jane Gloriana Villanueva, a twenty-three-year-old Latina virgin, who, much like Juana Perez, becomes pregnant through accidental artificial insemination by her gynecologist. The five seasons focus on the decisions Jane makes based on her goals, religion, and status with personal relationships. Jane must face several challenges and obstacles throughout the series, some more realistic than

others. This show aired on October 13, 2014, on The CW Television Network with about 1.61 million viewers for its first season. It ended after its fifth season aired in March of 2019.

Additionally, *Jane the Virgin* was made available to a wider audience via Netflix. This show includes a variety of Latinx actors and actresses such as: Ivonne Coll, Gina Rodriguez, Jaime Camil, and Andrea Navedo. This show won the American Film Institute for Television Program of The Year, People's Choice Award for Favorite New TV Comedy, and three Imagen Awards for Best Primetime Television Program.

Jane's life changes when her gynecologist, Dr. Luisa Alver, mistakenly inseminates her during a regular check-up appointment. Petra Solano and Jane Villanueva were Dr. Alver's patients for the day. Dr. Alver was distracted due to infidelity in her personal life and was not paying attention to which patient she was assisting. Petra scheduled an appointment to be inseminated with her husband's, Rafael Solano, frozen sperm. Rafael is Dr. Alver's brother who had to freeze his sperm after he found out he had cancer. Petra knew her marriage was in trouble and scheduled an appointment to use his sperm without his knowledge to try and salvage her marriage. She wanted the pregnancy to be a surprise to her husband. However, because of Dr. Alver's mistake, Jane was inseminated instead. Rafael Solano, the biological father of Jane's baby, turns out to be Jane's boss at the Marbella Hotel. Jane formerly had a crush on him when she met him at the yacht club she was working at when she was nineteen. They spent an afternoon together and shared a kiss. He promised he would call her but never did. Through all this drama, Jane is still experiencing other situations. For instance, Rogelio de la Vega, a famous telenovela star, is Jane's father, however, she is not aware of this. He shows up in Miami because he wants to meet Jane, but Xiomara, Jane's mom, decides to prolong their encounter to protect Jane from having more stress. During season one, Jane deals with her pregnancy, and trying to

decide whether she wants to continue her teaching career or begin her writing career. She also tries to navigate her love life because she is engaged to her boyfriend of two years, Michael Cordero, but begins having feelings for Rafael. Additionally, Rafael is dealing with legal issues regarding a drug lord who might be working out of his hotel while Michael Cordero, the lead detective in the case and Jane's fiancé, is trying to solve the mystery. Towards the end of the first season, Jane gives birth to Mateo, who is then kidnapped by the famous drug lord. Season two shows Jane struggling with motherhood and the trauma of having her baby kidnapped a few hours after giving birth, as well as co-parenting with Rafael, after he breaks her heart. Jane decides to apply for a graduate program to follow her dream of being a writer and faces struggles balancing work, school, and motherhood. At the end of this season, Jane gets married amid trying to perfect her thesis, and her husband, Michael, gets shot by someone working for the drug lord. Season three includes Jane working through the trauma from her husband's accident, as well as losing her virginity which is something she held close to her identity. She also tries to focus on writing her novel while balancing working part-time. Through this season, the viewers get to see Jane navigate motherhood and experience traumatic events, such as the death of her husband, Michael. On a positive note, she is published for her first novel about their love story. Season four involves Jane navigating life after being published. We also get to see her begin to move on from Michael and create strong friendships with Petra and Rafael. A highlight of this season is that Jane's grandmother, Alba, finally becomes a citizen of the United States. Finally, season five discusses Xiomara's cancer diagnosis and we see how the characters navigate this situation. Jane decides to write her second novel about her mother. During this season, Jane and Rafael get back together but Michael, Jane's dead husband, is found alive in Montana with amnesia. Jane finds herself having to figure out where her loyalty lies.

Jane the Virgin introduces a Venezuelan American family of three women: Jane (Gina Rodriguez, second-generation Puerto Rican), Xiomara (Andrea Navedo, second-generation Nuyorican), and Alba Villanueva (Ivonne Coll, Puerto Rican). The show has “received praise for bringing three passionate, flawed Latina leading ladies to the screen and for creating a cross-cultural accomplishment done so seamlessly and sincerely that it’s difficult to remember what entertainment looked like before this show upended our lives in 2014” (Evans-Zepeda & Reyes Garcia, 2021, p. 94). Jane Gloriana Villanueva is an aspiring writer and works as a waitress at the Marbella hotel in Miami, Xiomara Gloriana Villanueva is an aspiring singer and children’s dance instructor, and Jane’s grandmother, Alba Villanueva is the traditional religious, undocumented Latinx character we often see in media, who also works in the gift shop of the Marbella hotel. This show includes many different representations of Latinidad. It also introduces a Latina who is a first-generation college student and brings to light the different struggles and situations first-generation students find themselves in. Being interested in U.S. American television shows, most of my exposure about the college experience was through the lens of a white character who came from generations of college graduates. Watching Jane go through similar struggles that I was experiencing opened the door to a new perspective. My research aimed to understand how this show influenced my own experiences of Latinidad with themes around first-generation college experience, being raised by women, and overall being a Latina in the United States. My goal is to add to the conversation revolving around the importance of diverse representations of Latinxs and to begin filling in the gap in research about representations of first-generation college student in media.

The first chapter of this thesis included the above introduction. The second chapter consists of a review of the literature that is relevant towards Latinx representation and some

overview of first-generation students. The third chapter covers the methodology used in this paper, which are autohistoria-teoría, autoethnography, and content analysis. The fourth chapter is the analysis of *Jane the Virgin* and notes on how I identified with the series. Finally, the fifth chapter of my thesis is the conclusion which summarizes the study and discusses the interpretations. After this study, I can appreciate the representation of Latinxs in *Jane the Virgin*, especially their inclusion of the first-generation college student experience. I am also looking forward to more portrayals of first-generation students understanding from first-hand experience the importance of the representation of these narratives.

Literature Review

The literature relevant to this research will be drawn from studies regarding Latinx representation in media, research on identity, and an overview of first-generation college students. My thesis aims to focus on representation of first-generation students in media, however, the lack of research in this area proved difficult to discuss. Therefore, the discussion regarding first-generation students is general and limited because it is beyond the scope of this research. The following literature was discussed by answering the following questions: How have Latinxs been represented in media? How are first-generation college students represented in media? How do both questions contribute to identity making for audiences, especially Latina first-generation college students?

Latinx in Media

Latino is a term used to encompass many ethnicities within Spanish speaking countries. Atkinson et al., define the term Latino as a “generic label that includes all people of Spanish origin or descent” (Atkinson et. al., as cited in Bravo, 2004). Reyes (1998) adds, “Latinos in the United States are a heterogeneous population [...] that is often thought of as a single culture group because they share similarities in values, language, and tradition” (Reyes, 1998, as cited in Bravo, 2004). Like the word *Latino*, the term *Hispanic* is also a popular identifier, especially in the U.S. Census. These two terms are used to include all Spanish speaking ethnicities under one umbrella term. When a person hears the word *Latina/o* or *Hispanic* there is no identifying characteristics. Hernandez et. al. (2019) explain that:

Government documents introduced the term ‘Hispanic’ in the early 1970s, followed by the categories ‘non-Hispanic White’ and ‘non-Hispanic Black,’ laying the groundwork for complicated identity politics around race and ethnicity that continue to this day. The

term ‘Hispanic’ has been problematized in both academic and popular/activist discourses because of its focus on a shared Spanish culture and language and, because for some, it privileges the colonizer. (p. 9)

Molina Guzman (2006) states, “In the United States, the umbrella label ‘Latina/o’ is used to identify people from more than 26 countries of origin spanning the Spanish Caribbean and Latin America and consisting of multiple racial categories and linguistic backgrounds” (Molina Guzman, 2006, p. 234). The umbrella term Latina/o is used to describe different cultures without needing specific nationalities. This, in turn, causes many Latina/os to be grouped together even though being Puerto Rican, Mexican, Colombian, etc. mean very different things when it comes to our cultures. In this paper, I will be using the term Latinx, to be inclusive of all gender identities.

In recent years, scholars have begun transitioning from using the term “Latina/o” to using “Latinx” in order to be inclusive of all genders. Hernandez et. al. (2019) agree that “Latino/a and Latin@ do not sufficiently disrupt the gender binary” and so the identity label “Latinx” instead draws from queer online communities to “transcend gendered, ethnic, racial, class, and regional constraints of previous, older ethnic identity terms” (Hernandez et. al., 2019, p. 10). There is an argument, however, that “Latinx” alienates non-English speaking migrant communities and creates linguistic imperialism (Hernandez, et. al., 2019). It is important to acknowledge the differences in terms and allow Latinx folk to identify as they please;

In other words, when we have the discursive and physical power to name ourselves, we as Latinas/os/xs have the power to mark the boundaries of identity and experiential inclusion and exclusion. We can claim our historical legacies, define the contours of in-

group alliance building, and resist identity categories imposed upon us by governmental agencies, such as with the term “Hispanic”. (Hernandez, et.al., 2019, p. 9)

Additionally, there are many ways that people can assume you are Latinx by using signifiers of Latinidad. Molina Guzman (2006) defines Latinidad as “a performative and performed dynamic set of popular signs associated with Latinas/os and Latina/o identity” (Molina Guzman, 2006, p. 235). Ramirez Berg (2002) comments that within Hollywood, Latinidad is used to provide racial and national identity through psychological, behavioral, moral, and ideological information about people or characters associated with Latin America (Ramirez Berg, 2002). Guzman (2001) adds, “Levine suggests that Latina/o authenticity is an effective, yet unstable construct informed by the socially acceptable markers of Latinidad. In other words, those signifiers most associated with Latinidad produce a sense of authenticity within media texts” (Guzman, 2006). Guzman and Levine are implying that media creators know that audiences feel more comfortable with overused stereotypes because they have been consistently exposed to the same message, which inevitably causes people to internalize what they see or hear. For characters to be a successful representation of Latinidad, directors and writers will often resort to the socially acceptable markers set by society. Within this conversation, Molina Guzman (2006) explains that general market media representations about Latinx people include illegal immigration, sexuality, poverty, and crime.

De Los Santos Upton (2019) states, “Latinidad is fluid, diverse, multiracial, and multiethnic, and it includes groups with different geographic locations and national origins. Because of this, Latina/o/x identities are performed in multiple ways” (p. 132). Understanding that Latinx identity is performed in multiple ways, it can be argued that media representations of Latinx folk should also be more diverse. In television, the way that people assume characters are

Latinx is based on those signifiers of Latinidad. Common signifiers of Latinidad are language, linguistic accents, religion, brown skin, and names (Molina Guzman, 2016). These signifiers are meant for the audience to assume that someone is Latinx without having to mention an exact ethnicity. However, scholars note that Latinidad is also used to blur lines, “In *Ugly Betty*, and in popular culture more generally, *latinidad* becomes a strategy for commodification so that representations can simultaneously speak to multiple audiences” (Sowards & Pineda., 2011, p. 130). This blurring of lines makes it easier for Latinxs to feel represented without the shows saying that this family is Mexican or Puerto Rican. Additionally, Sowards and Pineda (2011) include an interview from one of the Latina actresses from the show *Ugly Betty*:

Ana Ortiz who plays Hilda Suarez reports that “When I first read the script, I said this is my family. This is how we are.” Even though Ortiz is of Puerto Rican descent, her reading of the script illustrates how producers have attempted to speak to pan-ethnic identity, or *latinidad*. For example, Hilda is a single, working-class mother who has big hair, hoop earrings, and wears brightly colored and sexy clothes, embodying several stereotypes of Latinas at once (Ramirez Berg, 2002). (Sowards and Pineda, 2011, p. 131).

This interview fortifies the observation that representations of Latinxs are created in a one size fits all perspective. Aparicio (2003) states, “A Latina actress is discursively defined in the public sphere because of her generalizability as a Latina rather than because of her uniqueness as a Boricua or Mexican American or Cuban American” (pp. 91-92), confirming that Latinx characters are rarely associated with one specific ethnicity and are instead given markers of Latinidad or stereotypes that can fit into most Latinx ethnicities.

Within the United States’ media lies an issue of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of minorities. The U.S. Latinx/Hispanic population in 2019 was 60.5

million, which is 18.5% of the overall population. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Figueroa-Caballero et. al. (2019) discuss the statistics of Latinxs in media from a few years back: “Today, Latinos comprise roughly 17% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014, as cited in Figueroa-Caballero, 2019) but remain stagnant at a mere 3% of the characters appearing on U.S. broadcast television (Mastro & Sink, 2017b, as cited in Figueroa-Caballero, 2019) and 1.6% of characters in top grossing films (Smith, Choueiti, & Pieper, 2014, as cited in Figueroa-Caballero, 2019). The 3% of Latinx characters that are seen do not accurately embody what Latinx communities are, illuminating the need for diverse representations. Oppression of minorities continues through media whether it is in films, television shows, social media, or news.

Latina Representation

Misrepresentation of Latinx folks results from stereotypical beliefs about different cultures. Angharad Valdivia and Isabel Molina Guzman’s (2014) article *Brain, Brow, and Booty: Latina Iconicity in U.S Popular Culture* introduces the trope of tropicalism:

Tropicalism erases specificity and homogenizes all that is identified as Latin and Latina/o. Under the trope of tropicalism, attributes such as bright colors, rhythmic music, and brown or olive skin comprise some of the most enduring stereotypes about Latina/os. [...] Gendered aspects of the trope of tropicalism include the male Latin lover, macho, dark-haired, mustachioed, and the spitfire female Latina characterized by red-colored lips, bright seductive clothing, curvaceous hips and breasts, long brunette hair, and extravagant jewelry. (p. 211)

As an example, we can observe Eva Longoria’s recurring character in the television show *Desperate Housewives*. Her character, Gabrielle Solis, is a Latina who is always dressing provocatively and serves as a trophy wife. This illustrates the way that the sexualization of the

bodies of Latinas are often used for the commodification of ethnic authenticity. Merskin expresses that “markers of sex and sexuality in Latinas posit them as “exotic, sexual, and available, and as more in touch with their bodies and motivated by physical and sexual pleasure than white women” (Merskin, 2007, p. 136). The sexy, promiscuous Latina is an overused stereotype in many television shows, not just *Desperate Housewives*. Merskin explains the stereotypes implemented on Latinas in media:

“Stereotypical behavioral characteristics assigned to Latinas include ‘addictively romantic, sensual, sexual, and even exotically dangerous’ (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005, as cited in Merkin, 2007, p. 136), self-sacrificing, dependent, powerless, sexually naïve, childlike, pampered, and irresponsible. Others include ‘they all made good domestics,’ mispronounce words, speak Spanish, are Catholic, are impulsive dancers, and are known for ‘cooking up a storm’” (Cofer, 2005, as cited in Merkin, 2007, p. 136).

These persistent depictions of Latinas can be found in most television shows, including *Jane the Virgin*. When it comes to Latinx characters, directors tend to follow markers of Latinidad or commonly known stereotypes. They do this because of the need for audiences to feel the authenticity of the characters, but they are often negative portrayals of Latinx people. For example, the overused stereotype of the uneducated criminal who speaks broken English or the single mother who can barely afford rent. These portrayals affect the attitude non-Latinx people have towards Latinxs because if the audience is continuously told that, for instance, Mexican’s are criminals, then they will always believe that and will treat Mexicans with less respect.

Many of the television shows that portray Latinx culture do so by incorporating attributes that fit slightly into every culture, regardless of how different each culture is. For instance, Sowards and Pineda (2011) mention how the Latinidad in *Ugly Betty* is authenticated by their

Mexican choice of food, which indicates deep connection with Mexican Latinx heritage, however, sometimes viewers do not get this sort of hint and so non-Latinx people tend to pile all Latinx people into an inaccurate grouping. Merskin (2007) elaborates on the diminishment of Latinx identity stating that, “Stereotypes, as hegemonic tools, reduce individuals to a single, monolithic, one-dimensional type that appears and is presented as natural and normal as they fit into ideological patterns of representations that serve, among other functions to establish “in-group categorizations of out-groups” (Merskin, 2007, p. 135). When we see a stereotypical role, it becomes harder to think that the group portrayed by the stereotype can be anything else other than the stereotype. The stereotype of the hot Latina is an example; the audience automatically assumes that these women are gold diggers and are not independent at all. Media should begin representing Latinas with multi-dimensional characters.

Identity

In my analysis, I decided to use Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of identity because she explains how Chicanxs struggle with identity creation and understanding because of our position in the middle of two cultures. She puts forward concepts that allow Chicanx scholars to work through their identity. Her theories have not been used in media analysis research, however, because our identities are influenced by the environment we are exposed to, I argue that it is important to analyze media relating it to identity formation. The media that we are constantly consuming influences what we think and how we feel about ourselves. Anzaldúa explains that we form our identities through cultural knowledge and our relationships with others:

For me, identity is a relational process. It doesn’t depend only on me, it also depends on the people around me. Sometimes I call this “*el arbol de la vida.*” Here’s *el arbol de la vida* [while drawing] *y tiene raices y cada persona is her own arbol. Y estas raices son la*

raza – the class you come from, the collective unconscious of your culture and *aquí tienes* a little body of water I call “*el cenote*.” *El cenote* represents memories and experiences – the collective memory of the race, of the culture – and your personal history. (Anzaldúa, 2000)

De Los Santos Upton (2019) adds that “we create our identities partially based on the feedback we receive from others. While we sometimes move on, we pull up our roots and bring them along, maintaining a connection to our culture, race, and class” (De Los Santos Upton, 2019, p. 127). Adding to the conversation of identities being intertwined with other factors, De Los Santos Upton (2019) describes Chicana identity:

Talking about Chicano identity specifically, Holling and Calafell explain that Chicana/os have both been given and assumed such a variety of labels that we find ourselves confronted by a ‘storm of identities’ resulting in ‘psychic trauma’. There is a constant push to choose between groups which causes Chicana feminists to lose their identity, and so many have chosen to write in a style that creates allegiances and allows them to proclaim self-named identity. (De Los Santos Upton, 2019, pp. 131-132)

De Los Santos Upton (2019) explains that Chicanos have a sense of being neither truly Mexican nor truly American and may find that they do not belong in their land. Additionally, Chicana feminists reject labels imposed on them by others and construct their own sense of identity” (De Los Santos Upton, 2019, p. 133). De Los Santos Upton argues that Latinx identities should not be characterized: “The study of Latina/o/x identity is further complicated by the tension between the pursuit of a pan-Latino identity and the recognition that Latina/o/x identities cannot (and should not) be essentialized. Latinidad is fluid, diverse, multiracial, and multiethnic, and it includes groups with different geographic locations and national origins. Latina/o/x identities are

performed in multiple ways” (De Los Santos Upton, 2019, p. 132). Identity and Latinidad are fluid concepts and it is important to explore the way that they are represented in media. De Los Santos Upton (2019) explains identity using Anzaldúa’s theories, which hopefully inspires Latinx people to explore their identities in a different way.

Anzaldúa (2015) introduces the term *nepantla*, which is the Nahuatl word for an in-between space, *el lugar entre medio*. Anzaldúa describes, “*Nepantla* is a kind of an elaboration of *Borderlands*. I use *nepantla* to talk about the creative act, I use it to talk about the construction of identity, I use it to describe a function of the mind” (Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 176 as cited in De Los Santos Upton, 2019, p. 232). Anzaldúa (2015) argues that perceiving something from two different angles, [*nepantla*], creates a split in awareness (p. 548). It is common for Chicanas to experience *nepantlismo* because they are constantly in an in-between space of not being Mexican enough or American enough. Additionally, Anzaldúa discusses *arreatamientos* and the *Coyolxauhqui* process as a part of forming and healing our identities. *Arreatamientos* are explained as ruptures, something that was snatched from you. Anzaldúa (2015) describes it as an awakening that causes you to question who you are and what the world is about. She says that with each *arreatamiento* we suffer a shock, *un susto*, that knocks one of your souls out of your body, causing estrangement. Every *arreatamiento*, which can be a violent attack, a rift with a loved one, illness, death, betrayal, systemic racism, and marginalization rips you from your familiar home (p. 547). De Los Santos Upton (2019) states that the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative is the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us” (p. 239). *Coyolxauhqui* is the process of putting ourselves back together after these *arreatamientos* happen.

It is important to understand that Latinx identity is performed in diverse ways. Media representation of these different ways Latinxs express their Latinidad is vital because it introduces others to our cultures. Having an accurate portrayal of different ethnicities and cultures is crucial because for many, media is their only exposure to different people. My thesis focuses on the representation of Latinidad and the first-generation college experience in *Jane the Virgin* to understand how those portrayals influenced my Latinidad and related to my own experiences.

First-Generation College Students

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2011-2012 the group of U.S. undergraduates whose parents had not attended college was one-third of students enrolled in U.S. post-secondary institutions (Skomsvold, 2015, as cited in Forrest Cataldi et.al., 2018). Pascarella et.al. (2004), state that most research about first-generation college students falls into three categories: 1) studies that compare first-generation and other college students in terms of demographic characteristics, secondary school preparation, the college choice process, and college expectation. 2) studies that attempt to describe and understand the transition from high school to postsecondary education. 3) Studies that examine first-generation college students' persistence in college, degree attainment, and early career labor market outcomes. First-generation college students are students whose parents did not attend college. Pascarella, et.al., found in their research that "Compared to their peers, first-generation college students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (e.g., costs and application process), level of family income and support, and academic preparation in high school" (Pascarella, et.al., 2004, p. 250). This is evident in my upbringing. In high school, there were so many conversations surrounding college applications, scholarships, financial aid,

and moving out of my hometown to attend college. I would hear teachers talk about the importance of all those items, but they felt like such foreign concepts to me that it was hard to grasp just how important they were. I blamed my high school for not preparing me more, but I feel that they did their best and my lack of understanding could be a product of growing up in a house where college was never discussed past the usual “you have to go to college” statement.

Pascarella, et.al. (2004), state that there is little research regarding the college experience or the cognitive and psychosocial development during college of first-generation students (Pascarella, et.al., 2004). In their study they found that “first-generation students are more likely to be handicapped in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making beneficial decisions about such things as the importance of completing a college degree, which college to attend, and what kinds of academic and social choices to make while in attendance” (Pascarella, et.al., 2004, p. 252). Their study proved that first-generation students complete less credit hours and work more hours per week than the students whose parents had a high level of postsecondary education. They were less likely to live on campus, had significantly lower levels of extracurricular involvement, athletic participation, and volunteer work than other students, and significantly lower levels of non-course-related interactions with peers (Pascarella, et.al., 2004). I find that my college experience matches these findings years later. I did not understand the significance of joining extracurricular activities. As a student, you hear professors pushing this and discussing it but for me, it was more important to pay my bills and find time to reset from work and school. At this point in my life, I wish I had volunteered and applied to internships because now I know how it could have helped me gain experience and figure out exactly what it was that I liked working in. After beating myself up about not doing more for my future, I now

understand that it was also a product of my circumstances and not just a lack of effort from my part.

“Parental encouragement for students’ educational aspirations is one of the most important factors impacting students’ decisions to pursue higher education” (Bergeson, et.al., 2009, as cited in Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Growing up, my mother emphasized the importance of going to college but that was about as much advice about college I received from her. Much of my childhood and teenage years surrounded my mother’s health due to her terminal illness. As my peers were busy preparing for college applications our senior year, I was asking to leave class early because my mother’s nurse predicted that she only had two weeks left to live. August, September, and October of 2014 my mother declined fast and eventually passed away on October 31st. I was not focused on college applications those months. After her death, I quickly realized how I needed to start applying and just chose schools I found after googling “best communication programs in the U.S.” Due to my mother’s recent passing and my older sister giving birth to my nephew, I decided to attend our local university to be close to home and to avoid creating a bigger financial burden on my family. Again, my knowledge of the college process was slim to none, except for what I had been exposed to in media.

I watched movies like *A Cinderella Story* with Hilary Duff, where from a young age her father introduced an Ivy League school into her dreams – Princeton. Her entire academic life was built around the goal of attending Princeton. Movies and shows surrounding the theme of college are similar in the sense that these children grow up knowing what an Ivy League education means and what they must do to get there. Schools such as Harvard, Stanford, Berkeley, etc. were never named in my house. As a Chicana who grew up in a border city, and whose parents did not graduate from high school, I never knew what an Ivy League school was or what it

meant. The first time I set foot at our local university, The University of Texas at El Paso, was in 2015 during my freshman orientation. It was rare that my family and I ever drove near UTEP, and so my high school ACT teacher had me follow his car the day of my orientation so that I learned how to get to UTEP. There is a gap in research when it comes to media representations of first-generation students. Most research is quantitative and focuses on the difficulties that those students face. However, it is important that we discuss the way the first-generation college experience is portrayed in media especially for Latinxs who have no guidance through the process.

This thesis aims to add to the conversation of the importance of representation of Latinas in media. Focusing on the way my identity might be influenced through a television series I watched often and continue to be a fan of after years since its end, I aim to add to the research that exists regarding how people might be affected by the media they consume. More specifically, I aim to initiate a conversation on the importance of including first-generation Latinx student narratives in popular media.

Method

For my methodology I use autohistoria-teoría, coined by Gloria Anzaldúa. In *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa (2015) states:

In enacting the relationship between certain images and concepts and my own experience and psyche, I fuse personal narrative with theoretical discourse, autobiographical vignettes with theoretical prose. I create a hybrid genre, a new discursive mode, which I call ‘autohistoria’ and ‘autohistoria-teoría.’ Conectando experiencias personales con realidades sociales results in autohistoria’ and theorizing about this activity results in autohistoria-teoría. It’s a way of inventing and making knowledge, meaning, and identity through self-inscriptions. By making certain personal experiences the subject of this study, I also blur the private/public borders. (pp. 5-6)

Like an autoethnography, autohistoria-teoría aims to bring in personal experiences into research. As a Chicana, my perspective brings an important aspect to Latina media representation. For academic knowledge production we are taught to remove ourselves entirely from the production to remain unbiased (Arfuso, 2021). Arfuso (2021) adds, “Autohistoria-teoría is from the vantage point of writing within oppressive structures instead of a colonial outsider perspective” (Arfuso, 2021, p. 2). Writing from within oppressive structures allows our voices to be heard. Anzaldúa adds, “a methodology that helps us piece together history and personal experience toward the goal of thickly understanding culture through an intersectional, critical lens, as well as formulate new understandings of the self and our surroundings; it is the formation of a theory of the flesh (Anzaldúa, 2007; Yep, 2015, as cited in Andrade & Gutierrez-Perez, 2019, p. 316).

Anzaldúa argues that personal narratives are a “form of resistance to cultural erasure in which women of color are the authors of their own meaning” (Rodriguez, 2020). Rodriguez

(2020) adds that self-writing is an effective way to communicate with others and sharing one's experiences allows other to resonate in positive ways that can create understandings between people and increase opportunities for meaning-making and community-building (Rodriguez, 2020). My experience as a Chicana, born and raised in a border city, growing up in the middle of the rise of television media, social media, and streaming services is highlighted within this method because autohistoria-teoría places individual experiences as an important part of social relations.

As a research method, autohistoria-teoría is closely related to autoethnography. Allen and Piercy (2005) define feminist autoethnography as a 'method of being, knowing, and doing that combines two concerns: telling the stories of those who are marginalized and making good use of our experience' (Allen and Piercy, 2005, as cited in Ettore, 2017). These methods call for women of color to tell their stories and to learn that their voices and experiences are important. Adding to the idea that our voices and experiences are important, Ghabra writes:

Autoethnography allows us to write and reflect on our pain within connections and disconnections (Spry 125, 2011). Agency is gained through critical reflection and our goal remains to engage in patterns of meaning with our audience. (Spry 126, 2011). Vulnerability is agency and agency is needed to further resist dominant structures and move within scholarship. What is at stake in both autoethnography, and performative writing is the production of culture – how identities and culture are produced through representation (Berry and Warren 603, 2009). When 'I' tell my story, it is a reflection of my pain and of the truth of my reality. Autoethnography allows this connection to occur and speaks back to the system. It allows for a critical cultural disruption that could in turn be a site of resistance, reflexivity, representation, and voice. *As I perform my words out*

onto this paper, I am revealing to you, the wounds, the pain, and the privileges that I have been carrying on my shoulders for years.” (Ghabra, 2016, p. 3)

My biggest worry while using autoethnography was that it would mean that I was full of myself and thought that my thoughts and experiences were somehow important enough to write about. Calafell and Moreman (2009) explain that “The charge of vanity or narcissism leveled against scholars of color who embrace the personal voice as method and/or the personal experience as data, particularly against an academic backdrop that fails to acknowledge Whiteness within narrative work, has become common practice.” (pp. 124-125). Additionally, they state, “Work that engages issues of identity is often perceived to be naive, fixed in static positions, or essentialist. The move to see experience as theory as argued by Alcoff and Mohanty has been a prominent theme in the works of feminists of color.” (Calafell & Moreman, 2009, p. 128). Statements such as these were reassuring as someone who learned that academic work could never be about the self and writing in first person is unprofessional. I am offering different ways of knowing and filling in gaps about the first-generation experience.

Autoethnography can be used to write about ourselves and ways our identities are changed or rewritten. Amaya (2007) says, “In this essay I use autoethnography to understand and theorize how immigration led me (and leads other Latinos) to radically rewrite my self” (Amaya, 2007, p. 195). Similarly, I use autoethnography to write about my identity and how connecting to a character in a television show helps me understand parts of myself I could not put into words. Amaya (2007) adds that this type of research relies on author’s experiences “for purposes of extending sociological understanding” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21, as cited in Amaya, 2007). Amaya (2007) states that as a method, autoethnography has the advantage of allowing him to use himself to get to culture and of exploring the most complex and controversial elements of identity

without filters. He expresses that autoethnography highlights his voice, ‘which in this research is an essential datum of my self in US academy’ (Amaya, 2007, p. 196).

Adding to the topic of using autoethnography to research identity, Clair states:

Of late, some autoethnographies have been less culture centered and more individual (self) centered than others (Bochner & Ellis, 2002) and have moved to personal testimonials, memoirs, epiphanies, epistles, novels, poems, and short stories. Focusing on the self while listening to the related stories of others, according to Bochner and Ellis (2002), may provide a therapeutic effect. Pollock (2009) agrees adding a caveat, ‘Testimony may pass on trauma. It may also invite its resolution in and through referential identification’ (p. 644, as cited in Clair, 2011).

Galarza (2021) uses “Anzaldúa’s *autohistoria-teoría*, autoethnography, and autobiographical analysis to theorize about the role of *JTV* and immigration policy in shaping and rewriting [her] self-identity” (Galarza, 2021, p. 239). She writes about her first-generation Mexican American experience and explores the role of media representations contributing to and challenging her self-knowledge/ignorance regarding immigration and Latinx citizenship (Galarza, 2021).

Similarly, I use *autohistoria-teoría* by keeping a journal and including reflections on my own experiences as I remember while watching *Jane the Virgin*.

This research study uses content analysis, which is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18, as cited in White & Marsh, 2006, p. 27). Evans-Zepeda and Reyes Garcia (2021) use media content analysis to examine the “conceptualization of how immigration is presented, featuring emergent and reoccurring themes [in *One Day at a Time* and *Jane the Virgin*]” Evans-Zepeda & Reyes Garcia, 2021, p. 94). In the same way, I analyze

episodes of *Jane the Virgin*. Content analysis allows researchers to “read through the data and scrutinize them closely to identify concepts and patterns, some patterns and concepts may emerge that were not foreshadowed but are, nevertheless, important aspects to consider” (White & Marsh, 2006). *Jane the Virgin* is available to watch through Netflix. I streamed the five seasons of the show, which include about 22 episodes each that last 42 minutes. I kept notes as I watched the episodes, focusing on moments where I felt I could relate to the characters. I tried focusing on themes surrounding grief, the relationship mothers and daughters had in the show, and any moments where education was mentioned. I also noted moments Jane had with her father because I found those to trigger anger, sadness, and jealousy, which I thought were important towards my identity. Then, I typed out each note into a word document to print and organize. Per my advisor’s recommendation, I read through each note and came up with a one-word summary that would encompass the theme of the note. Eventually, I began seeing recurring themes. First, I noticed the Mexican-American Culture theme, which included moments such as the many cameos of both Latinx and American actors in the show. Then, first-generation students, where I included conversations revolving around education, then Jane’s relationship with her father, the different ways that motherhood was represented, and lastly, the grief surrounding my mother’s illness.

Research questions: How does *Jane the Virgin* relate to/influence my own experiences of Latinidad? How does *Jane the Virgin* represent the first-generation college experience and how did that relate to my own?

Analysis

I grew up on the border of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Every day I would come home from Newman Elementary around 3:30 PM, run towards our small kitchen to sit at our high white oak table that held our small, black 1990s Panasonic television. My mom would serve me *sopita de fideo*, *estrellitas*, or *conchitas* that she made along with the one can of coke I was allowed to have for the day. I would turn the tv to channel 32, “El Canal de las Estrellas”, on the live television network since we could not afford cable. This was around the time that children’s telenovelas aired - *Vivan los niños*, *Misión S.O.S*, *Alegrijes y rebujos*, *Amy la niña de la mochila azul*, *Pablo y Andrea*, *Cómplices al rescate*, among others. I vividly remember watching *Alegrijes y rebujos* every day after school, asking my mom how much I had missed of the novela and how much was left, she always said “le falta media hora” but at that age, I didn’t know what that meant - all I heard was that I still had time to watch.

As I got older, my mom would let me watch novelas with her. We sat together every night and watched *Destilando amor*, *Amor real*, *La fea más bella*, *La rosa de Guadalupe*, and many more. This was our routine for a while. Most of my friends grew up with cable and listened to U.S. American artists, while my interests revolved around Mexican media and artists. For instance, I would listen to Reik, Camila, Marco Antonio Solís, Dana Paola, Rebelde, and artists either my mom or my older sister introduced me to. Aside from telenovelas, I watched *El Chavo del 8*, *La familia P. Luche*, *XHDRbZ* and channel 56, which aired reruns of *Spongebob*, *Drake and Josh*, and *iCarly* with Spanish voice overs. As soon as I started hanging around more people who had access to U.S. American pop culture either through their parents, cousins, or siblings, my interests changed. I began tuning in to channel 7, ABC-7 on Saturday mornings to catch *That’s So Raven*, *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, and other Disney Channel reruns. I would

listen to the *Jonas Brothers*, *Demi Lovato*, *Miley Cyrus*, and became obsessed with *Camp Rock*. I started speaking English more often and struggled remembering Spanish words. I also grew up reading books, and around this age I read the *Twilight Saga* and, like many young teens, was obsessed (#TeamJacob). To paint a picture, I was also into *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and authors like John Green. My interest in watching telenovelas ended in sixth grade due to a mixture of decrease in interest as well as my mental health being affected by my mother's continued health decline from her terminal illness. This is when I would say the process of nepantla began for me because of the split I felt between my interests. I was no longer a part of one culture, now I shifted into the in-between space.

During my sophomore or junior year of high school, around 2013, we started paying for Netflix and I was exposed to many TV shows I never had access to. At this point my exposure to popular culture was mainly from the U.S. American media and I was not interested in watching anything in Spanish anymore. I wanted to fit in with my peers and be in the know of what was going on so I could participate in conversations. I wouldn't say this is all necessarily a bad thing, however, I have felt very disconnected from my roots since 6th/7th grade; my first arreatamiento. After my mother passed away in 2014, my second arreatamiento, I had even less of a reason to speak Spanish and know anything about Mexican popular culture. She was mainly the reason why I was still in touch with my roots. Her death created a rupture that disconnected me from many aspects of my life. Suddenly, I was the girl whose mother died during her senior year, and I felt alone because my friends had no idea what it was like to lose their mom. I often felt angry and jealous during class as I stared at each of my classmates and thought about them going home to their moms and telling them about their day. I kept myself busy with school by binge watching shows on Netflix. I would watch *Grey's Anatomy*, *Criminal*

Minds, How I Met Your Mother, and Gilmore Girls. Around 2016 I was a year into my bachelor's degree, had no idea what I really wanted to study, and felt lost. Like many first-generation students, I had to figure out my way through academia on my own. It was different from what I had seen in the movies. I attended The University of Texas at El Paso and was a commuter student for the entirety of my undergrad while working part-time jobs. In my free time, I began watching *Jane the Virgin*. I remember feeling a sense of relatability because I pictured myself around her age and realized some of the things she went through could and did apply to me. It was the first time I felt recognized by a series, and I fell in love with it. Through my graduate program, I learned that I could research representation in media. I learned about the importance and began wondering how it applied to my own life. Through this analysis, I focus on answering these questions: How does *Jane the Virgin* relate to/influence my own experiences of Latinidad? How does *Jane the Virgin* represent the first-generation college experience and how did that relate to my own?

Watching *Jane the Virgin* was a different experience back in 2016 through 2019 than it is rewatching it now in 2022. I was able to remember certain emotions evoked by various scenes, and different things stuck with me now more than before. I knew that watching this was immediately going to trigger grief related to my mother's death and the relationship I did not get to build with her. I noticed also being reminded of the lack of relationship I have with my father through Jane's own experience. I also had moments where I felt pride in recognizing different actors and cameos that appeared on the show. As I watched, I used my iPad to write notes about scenes focusing on my emotions and the exact thoughts that crossed my mind. I organized my data by writing one word on a paper that encompassed each note. I found that my notes focused

on how I could relate to the scenes that spoke to me. The following themes emerged: Mexican American Culture, School, First-Generation, Father, and Mother's Illness.

Mexican-American Culture

In navigating this theme through the show, I felt that both of my cultures, Mexican and American, were bridged in one way or the other. The in-between space I was in suddenly felt validated. Through this section I will be discussing the following subthemes: Language, Translation, and American Popular Culture.

Language

My Mexican and American cultures were bridged together watching this show. Even though Jane is raised in a Venezuelan household, her father comes from a Mexican background. Coming from a Mexican family, I was able to feel represented through his character. Jaime Camil is introduced through a telenovela that Jane and her family are watching. It is not as often that I hear Mexican actors speaking Spanish on television shows in the United States, if anything it's mostly Puerto Ricans or Cubans. At the time he joined *JTV*, Jaime Camil was already a huge star in Mexico. He appeared in several telenovelas, and I grew up watching him. Seeing him on *JTV* was very nostalgic and felt so familiar. The type of Spanish he was speaking was the Spanish I learned and have heard my entire life, as opposed to Puerto Rican accents or Dominican. It was a breath of fresh air being able to listen to a Mexican actor speak Spanish in an American show. Rogelio also speaks to Alba in Spanish the entirety of the show. Alba is known to only respond to her family in Spanish so hearing one of the characters talk to her in her native language feels familiar, especially because their accents are so different.

Translation

Jane's grandmother moved to the United States from Venezuela, making Xiomara the first-generation to be born in the United States, and Jane a first-generation college student. Through this series, the women dealt with circumstances many first-generation U.S. born people deal with. For instance, as a teenager Jane began using public transportation on her own. This is something I saw often growing up. Personally, I was lucky enough not to have to ride the bus as a teenager, but I know that it was my mom's main way of transportation before she was able to get a car. It was very common to hear parents tell their kids to take the bus to work or to school. Additionally, in season one, episode five young Jane has to translate medical documents and research what things meant to help her grandmother. Many Latinx children in the U.S. have to learn about medical or legal terminology for their parents. It is normalized but as I grew up, I realized that it wasn't a universal experience. Jane should not have had to worry about diabetes and her grandmother's health, she looked to be about eleven years old in this scene. I recall having to read many Medicare letters, discharge paperwork, food stamps letters, and legal documents regarding child support and custody, and translate for my mom. It was hard because I was maybe eight and had no idea what any of the words meant, much less trying to translate them. Throughout this time, Jane wished for someone responsible, instead of her mother, so that she could feel like she was taken care of. I have a similar experience, but not because my mom wasn't responsible. Mine was more out of knowing that I would lose my mother and I wouldn't have anyone to rely on afterwards. My father was never around, and I didn't feel comfortable asking people for help. Since I was seventeen, I have had to care for myself and figure out how to navigate this world. It is exhausting and many times I have wished to have parents so that I knew I would be okay in the end. Another scene that felt important to me was where Jane is trying to translate to her grandmother that she was accidentally artificially inseminated. I have

struggled countless times to translate a job description, class, my major, and so on and so forth to my grandparents. It's hard living in a world where I get by only speaking in English, but I struggle translating in Spanish and then get a disappointing look from my grandparents because I should know Spanish better than English. Anzaldúa (1999) talks about linguistic terrorism and says, "Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 80). She argues that Chicano Spanish is a border tongue that we developed naturally because we are a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language. She adds that we live in a country where English is the reigning tongue, but we are not Anglo, so we adapted and created our own language (Anzaldúa, 1999). Anzaldúa (1999) shares an impactful statement regarding how linguistic terrorism has affected Chicana feminists:

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn't figure it out. Then it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like looking in the mirror. We are afraid of what we'll see there. *Pena*. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. [...] Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure. (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 80)

American Popular Culture

As equally as one half of my identity was represented through this show, the other half also felt recognized. During season two, episode fourteen, the directors do a *Scandal* style section. *Scandal* is about a woman named Olivia Pope, who is a professional "fixer". High

profile people hire her and her team to fix any scandals that may arise. In this episode of *JTV*, the characters sit in a set like Olivia Pope's office and begin trying to solve a mystery in the same steps and style as Pope and her associates do. I binge watched *Scandal* when I first discovered it on Netflix, and I was so surprised to see that the directors were using references to pop culture. This goes hand in hand with the number of cameos and name drops this show presents. From Bruno Mars singing at Jane's wedding, to Rogelio having drama with Britney Spears, to Jane yelling at Gloria Estefan, this show did not shy away from inviting multiple stars. We also see David Bisbal, Charo, Paulina Rubio, Kate Del Castillo, Diego Boneta, and Angélica Vale. Watching Jane balance her identity as a U.S. American with her Venezuelan roots by contacting her family in Venezuela and making sure she introduces her son to traditions as well as trying to break away from the machismo Latinx cultures are notorious for was comforting and something I could relate to. So much of Latinx culture feels like it revolves around patriarchal structures that I end up having arguments with my own grandparents when I am trying to break away from those traditions, such as serving my boyfriend a plate of food at every gathering and making sure I am the one who cooks and cleans etc. Jane finds herself in similar situations creating those dialogues and showing the struggles that most first-generation Latinx grandkids face.

First-Generation Student

I quickly related to Jane's dedication to her education. School has always been a part of my identity. Ever since I was little, the most common praise I received from my mom was that I was smart, and I could see the way her face brightened whenever I would bring good grades from school. She always pushed me to do my best and never accepted grades lower than an 89. She would tell me, "Estudia para que nunca dependas de nadie." She believed in my ability to do well in academics. Jane has a similar story. From the start, the audience is aware that Jane is

working on her undergraduate degree to become a teacher. There are various conversations related to what Jane is studying versus what she was passionate about: writing. In season one, episode nine, we see a flashback of young Jane where she's listening to a conversation between her mother, Xiomara, and her grandmother, Alba. Alba is telling Xo that following her dream of dancing and performing is not practical because they are behind on rent. Jane is about nine in this scene where she learns that it is more important to choose a practical career than following her passion. In season one, episode fourteen, the audience is watching a flashback where Jane is deciding to attend the University of Miami instead of a university in Iowa with a great writing program. Jane says, "I can write on the side while I'm getting my teaching degree plus if I live at home, then I'll save money, which will put me a little ahead on my five-year plan." As a first-generation student, I felt the pressure of choosing a major and career based on the level of income. I knew I had to make money to have a different life than what I did growing up. Many first-generation students feel the pressure to attend a community college or a university in their hometown to be near family because Latinx culture is family oriented. Putman and Thompson (2006) state:

The Hispanic culture, collectivist in nature, places much emphasis on close family relationships, resulting in yet another set of challenges for Mexican American college students. One such challenge is the economic constraints faced by students of this population. Such constraints prevent many Hispanic students from living on campus; residing at home produces additional responsibilities (i.e., chores or childcare) which causes a conflict with their educational responsibilities. However, many students find it difficult to break away from their families, in part because they feel compelled to assist financially.

Similarly, I chose to attend the University of Texas at El Paso to stay near my family after my mother died. I was in the top 2% of my graduating class, which meant I could attend any university in the state of Texas. I was admitted to the University of Iowa and the University of Minnesota, but I knew I could not afford it and that I would not have a support system away from home. In this section I will be discussing the following subthemes: Choosing a Career, Working Student, Paying for Graduate School, and Struggling in School as an Honors Student.

Choosing a Career

On season one, episode two, Jane mentions almost being done with her teaching degree and that she needs to finish her last semester, which includes student teaching. We learn that Jane decided to take the route that would secure a job for her after graduating. She begins applying to schools and eventually gets a student teaching position at a Catholic school. The writers also begin sprinkling hints about Jane's passion for writing. During a conversation with Rafael, Jane's baby's father, he asks her what she wants to be writing and Jane responds Romance. Her passion for Romance stems from her love for telenovelas. Fast forwarding to season one, episode eleven, Jane is offered a full-time teaching position at the Catholic school as well as a position for an internship for the telenovela her father stars in. She struggles with deciding to follow her dream to be a writer or play it safe by accepting a full-time job to help cover her expenses. The line "Dreams don't pay the bills" pops up again. Alba reminds Jane that her teaching job will give her maternity leave, it's a secure job, stable, with a good schedule while Xiomara is trying to encourage Jane to chase her dreams because Jane felt butterflies when she thought about it. Her grandmother reiterates, "Las mariposas no pagan las cuentas."

Working Student

In season one, episode six, we learn that Jane has been in school for six years because she has had to have part time jobs while attending school. Many first-generation students take longer than four years to graduate due to low income. Putman and Thompson (2006) add:

First Generation College students typically come from families of a low socioeconomic status. FGC students also tend to work long hours in full- or part-time jobs while attending college (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Inman and Mayes (1999) support these findings and add that these students have conflicting obligations to school and work due to their familial responsibilities and lack of financial support from their families of origin. (p. 124)

Growing up watching American movies or television series, I saw different types of college students: the party animals, the sorority girls, the bookworms, etc. They all experienced the traditional U.S. American college experience of living at the dorms, being able to focus on school, and having internships to further their career rather than needing a job to pay for their bills. From the start, we are aware that Jane worked at a yacht club and the Marbella Hotel as a waitress. In season one, episode six Jane exclaims: “Oh yeah, I’m definitely working while I’m in college. I mean it may take me a little longer, but I don’t want to graduate with debt” (Snyder Urman, 2014-2019). To Putman and Thompson’s (2006) point, FGC students have a lack of financial support from their families when it comes to attending college and we rely on our part-time or full-time job, scholarships, grants, or Financial Aid packages to be able to attend school. In season one, episode eight, Jane begins working two jobs, which many first-generation college students must do to make ends meet, including myself.

Paying for Graduate School

Unlike undergraduate degrees, graduate students cover costs through grants, loans, or out of pocket payments. To attend graduate school, students either receive grants, take out loans, or pay out of pocket. In season one, episode twenty-one Jane decides to apply to a graduate program to pursue her dream of being a writer, but the audience is not aware of her plans to pay for her master's degree. After Jane completes a semester of her master's degree, Jane is in a situation where the Graduate School Office asks if she will be re-enrolling since her tuition has not been paid. Jane finds out that the "need-based scholarship" she received was her wealthy father paying for her tuition anonymously, but he fell into financial hardship and would not be able to cover her tuition. Jane creates a plan to save money and pay: "1) Participate and win in a fiction writing contest. 2) Trade in her car for a cheaper one. 3) Waitress again, at night, of course. Lastly, 4) Take out a very, very limited loan." Eventually, in season two, episode eight Jane is offered a TA position. My experience was different. At the end of my undergraduate degree, I was working at the Department of Communication at UTEP as the Peer Advisor and was getting paid \$8/hour but was only able to work twenty hours a week. I knew that the moment I graduated, I would not have a form of income and I was waiting to hear back from the Communication M.A. program. I applied to several jobs and was hired at Walmart. When I tried resigning from my position at the department, my mentor/supervisor said, "I do not accept your resignation. I can't help you if you leave. If you get accepted into the master's program, we will have a few openings for TA positions. Don't accept the offer at Walmart." I took her advice, and I became a TA for my first semester of graduate school and received a grant to pay for my tuition for that semester. For my TA-ship, I was getting paid \$900/month and was barely making enough to make ends meet. During my first semester, I moved out of my uncle's house after living with him for about 4 years and finally moved into my own apartment. For the summer, I

had to return to my first job, Domino's, to make money since my TA-ship was not offered during the summer. In August 2019 I was offered a position at the Academic Advising Center at UTEP where I began my first full-time job. During the Fall of 2019 I decided to take a break from school because I was struggling to keep up a full-time course load and working part-time and I also had mental health issues affecting me. The following semester I returned to school but could only afford one class at a time paying out of pocket. I decided it would take me too long to finish if I continued taking one course per semester and I decided to take out student loans to be able to take an additional class; I am now about \$25,000 in debt.

Struggling in School as an Honors Student

Throughout the series we continuously hear Jane being praised for doing well in school and pursuing higher education. In season one, episode five she states, "I'm an honors student." These scenes show the audience part of who Jane is and to what standard she holds herself. However, in season two, episode six Jane is a graduate student studying Creative Writing and gets her first C minus on a paper. Her professor advises her to participate in a writing retreat and the narrator says, "Like an away from home retreat?" Then Jane asks if attendance is mandatory and her professor replies, "This is grad school Jane, nothing is mandatory, you chose to be here." Jane is struggling with prioritizing motherhood, which I will discuss in a later section, and school but eventually decides to go to the retreat and misses her son's appointment to get fitted for his corrective helmet. Although Jane only began struggling in school after she became a mother, it was a feeling that related to my own experience. I have had conversations with other honors students who felt that they were no longer "smart" after beginning their undergraduate degree. College was a different experience, and I received a lot more B's than I would have expected to. It was a harsh thing to accept because I felt that I should be doing better. When I started

struggling in graduate school, I felt like a failure. Impostor syndrome became more apparent, and I felt like I did not belong because I was having a hard time getting through it. Jane eventually falls into Academic Probation because she fell asleep in class. Watching a character that I felt identified with struggle with school when she used to excel was comforting. Having difficulties during your graduate program is not a topic I have heard many discuss. It was important for me to realize that I was not alone in struggling with a graduate degree. I didn't have anyone to talk to about this because no one in my family has been through a master's program. Many of my classmates seemed to have more than enough time to read and comprehend what we were discussing while I had a hard time keeping myself motivated. I would watch my friends travel and go out while I had to work and get through three-hour classes. I do understand the privilege I had being able to pursue higher education, but I was truly struggling. Watching Jane go through this as well validated my experience. I could see that graduate school is hard for everyone, and that it had nothing to do with my level of intelligence. If Jane was struggling, and she was a dedicated student and was always on top of her responsibilities, then maybe it was okay that I was struggling too.

Father

A topic I found myself relating to and grieving over was Jane's growing relationship with her father. This topic triggered my third arrebataimiento: being abandoned by my father. To summarize, Jane did not meet her father until she was twenty-three years old. Xiomara kept Jane's father's identity a secret because she got pregnant as a teen and Rogelio asked her to get an abortion. Rogelio was not aware of Jane's existence until a few months before they met. In season one, episode two, the audience sees Rogelio fighting to be a part of Jane's life. This scene caused feelings of sadness and anger because I thought about how my father has known about

me from the start and has never made the effort to get to know me. When Jane and Rogelio finally meet, she is having a hard time connecting with him. In season one, episode four, Jane longs for a connection with her dad and she finally bonds with him, “I’ve thought about you every day for the past 23 years” (Snyder Urman, 2014-2019). I remember spending countless nights crying and wanting my dad to be around. I felt like I was missing a part of me, and I felt alone and worthless. I did not understand why he did not want to be a part of my life or why he could not bother getting to know me. I can say that I have spent the last twenty-five years of my life thinking about him. In season two, episode twenty-two Jane and Rogelio are dancing at her wedding which reminded me that one of the main reasons I decided not to have a quinceañera was because at that age I still struggled with the absence of my father, and I could not bear the thought of not having a moment with my dad at my quince. Although this specific theme was not something I thought I would write about in this analysis, I was surprised to learn how much I was still being affected by the absence of my father. It was surprising to see the anger, sadness, and jealousy that I spent my entire teenage years feeling resurface at twenty-five years old. It reminded me that aspects of my childhood still influence me as an adult. My feelings stem from a place of abandonment, whereas Jane is navigating a relationship that has not been tainted by that kind of betrayal.

Motherhood

Season five, episode eighteen is a retrospective of the series. In this episode, the director says, “The love story at the center of the show is Jane and her mom and her grandmother.” The show revolves around these three women and how they manage to be there for each other in any way that they can. Much of this show helped me deal with the loss of my mom in a special way. In season one, episode one, the Villanueva women are watching a telenovela together, which

reminded me of all the nights I spent watching novelas with my mom. It feels like a cliché when people talk about Latinas being obsessed with telenovelas and drama, but I created core memories sitting in my mom's room watching them and bonding with her. There are several moments where we see the Villanueva women bond over telenovelas. For instance, in season one, episode fourteen, Jane and Xiomara are gossiping about the drug lord in their town named Sin Rostro and bringing in Reina del Sur references. Seeing Jane and her mom bonding over their love for telenovelas makes me miss having a bond like that. It is fun seeing how Jane and Xiomara gossip with each other and how invested they are in each other's lives. It is like they have a built-in best friend. I always think about what my relationship with my mother would have become at this age. Would I go to her for everything? I remember coming home from hanging out with friends and just telling my mom what we did, and if we happened to watch a movie, I would tell my mom the entire plot of the movie and she would just sit and listen. I also remember reading so many books and just telling my mom those stories as well. A few months after my mom died, I dated an old friend from elementary school. I thought I was so in love with him, and when we broke up three months later, I was devastated. About a year later, he and I had a conversation where he told me he was expecting a baby with his ex-girlfriend. I told my sisters and my best friend, but I had this nagging feeling that I needed to tell someone else, but I couldn't think of who. That night I dreamt about telling my mom and I woke up and realized the one person I wanted to tell was her. I wanted to catch her up on everything that happened after she died. I was craving having a conversation with her and letting her know about my life.

Grief

Much of *Jane the Virgin* focuses on the relationship between mother and daughter, whether it's Jane and Xo, Xo and Alba, or even Petra, Rafael's ex-wife, and her mother. There

were many instances that made me want my own mother, and many situations that made me realize what was taken from me when she died. For instance, in the first episode of the show Jane faints and Xiomara accompanies her to the Emergency Room and the OB/GYN. I was taken back to my first doctor's appointment after my mother passed. I was taken into the room to wait for my doctor, and I sat in one of the chairs in silence. I looked around at the walls and I felt cold. I looked at the empty seat next to me where she used to wait with me and realized she would never be there again. I was eighteen and I cried until the doctor showed up and I remember wishing he would ask if I was okay so I could cry and be comforted by an adult, even though all I wanted was my mom. I was slapped with the realization that I will continue to lose my mom in different situations. Grief is never ending.

Before Jane gets married, she and Xo are fighting and not speaking to each other over Xiomara's immaturity. Rogelio hires actresses to play Jane and Xo in a skit he prepared to show them the real reason they are fighting. The actress playing Jane says, "Es que siempre he vivido con mi mama." This is when they realize that they are fighting with each other because they are afraid of leaving each other. My mom and I fought the last few months she was alive. I joined my school's student council and had to go out of town in the summer of 2014. I was gone for five days and when I returned my mom was very hostile towards me. After she passed, one of her best friends told me that my mom had been so upset about my trip because she was afraid that she would not be here when I came back. It made me realize that maybe the reason we were fighting was not out of me being a "bad daughter" or my mom not caring about me, it was because we were afraid of what was coming, and we did not know how to process those feelings. During season one, Xiomara is afraid that her job as a mother is almost done because Jane is about to become a mother. This reinforced the feeling in myself that a mother's job is never

done. I will never be done needing or wanting my mom and it is incredibly difficult being in a world where I can't pick up my phone and call her or wake up and walk to her room to cuddle her when I am not feeling well.

Mother's Sacrifice

It was interesting to see how much mother's sacrifice for their children throughout the show. I think this is a lesson most people learn when they are older because we finally realize everything our mother's do for us. One of the first instances of this is when Xiomara wants to date Jane's father but decides against it because she does not want to jeopardize Jane's relationship with him if any drama happens. In many scenes, Xiomara puts Jane's needs above her own with her relationship with Rogelio. In season one, episode nine Xo tells Jane she hasn't dated anyone seriously to protect Jane from getting hurt if they break-up. Jane eventually tells her, "Enough with the sacrifices" and encourages her to date Rogelio. One of the first sacrifices Jane makes for her son is that they need to do a procedure to check if Mateo has a heart defect and the procedure was scheduled for the day of her graduation which she decides to miss to be able to have the procedure as soon as possible. After this procedure, Jane is on bed rest and her mom makes a graduation speech for Jane. It was a sweet moment between mother and daughter.

Jane realizes early on that she is in danger of losing herself in motherhood once Mateo is born and she asks her mother to remind her when motherhood is about to hijack her goals. When Jane decides to apply for a graduate program, she learns that the school has prerequisites and Jane is missing World Literature. They are offering the class that summer but she would have to start the following day and she's not ready to leave her son yet. This is a moment where Xiomara steps in and tells her motherhood is about to hijack her goals. Later in the season, Jane tries to

bring Mateo into her class so that she wouldn't have to leave him, but it ends up being a disaster and she has to decide whether she wants to continue going to school or stay home with Mateo. She is a part of a mommy group where she opens up about going back to school and feeling guilty. The moms in the group share their struggles with guilt in their own motherhood journey and how much they want to be able to be their own person. They all validate Jane's feelings and Jane decides to return to school. In season two, episode six, Jane is late to class and then answers a call from Mateo's pediatrician. Her professor kicked her out of class for the disruptions. Her priorities were still with Mateo and school was not going well for her, which was a hard choice for her because she was used to being top of her class and was suddenly struggling with academic probation, tardiness, C minus', etc.

Styles of Parenting

Lastly, *Jane the Virgin* touches on the subject of different styles of parenting. As someone who has never had a child and is aware that I will have to figure out how to be a mother without my mom, I learned a lot from the way this show represented motherhood. In season one, episode seventeen, Jane is getting parenting advice from a white woman while she is at Target. The woman asks, "Did you sign up for a lactation class?" Jane says, "No, I didn't even know they had that." Jane also shares that she does not know what a doula is. I was also not aware of the many resources available for women, and I feel that as a Chicana, it is because the women in my family did not have the money to use any of these resources or even be aware of their existence. All I knew growing up was that you had to figure motherhood out on your own or with the help of the women in your family. It is surprising to learn that all these things are available to you, if you have the money. Related to this scene, later in the episode the three Villanueva women are having a conversation about how they all decided to do certain things

differently with their babies and it did not mean they were bad moms or that they thought each other were bad parents. It is empowering to hear that regardless of how you decide to raise your babies, you will always know what is best for them as their parents and not feel guilty by other women.

This show further emphasized the sacrifices women make for their children and it allowed me to appreciate my mother even more. In season one, episode nine Jane submits a short story and has an opportunity to be published but decides not to take it because it's about Xiomara and doesn't want to hurt her feelings. However, Jane finds out that her mom submits the story on her behalf because "I'm not going to be the reason you miss your window." Xiomara put Jane's needs first once again so that Jane would follow her dreams. Then, when Jane is feeling unaccomplished, Xo reminds her, "You graduated college, you wrote an episode for a telenovela, you were offered a teaching job, which you turned down to write your novel. Come on, how ballsy is that? Be proud of where you're at. I know I am." My own mother sacrificed so much to be the best parent she could be. She had a terminal illness named Scleroderma. The life expectancy for this illness is three to fifteen years and my mother battled for fourteen. Every person that knew my mother has said that she fought this illness so hard because she wanted to make sure her daughters would be okay. They say that the only reason she found the strength was for my sisters and me. I cannot imagine what it was like to live one day in her life. Scleroderma is an autoimmune rheumatic illness. She would explain that her skin felt like someone was constantly stretching it to the point where it would burn, and she had a ton of sores all throughout her body that needed to be cleaned every other day. There were so many nights where I would wake up to her calling my name at three A.M. so that I could pick her up from her bed and take her to the bathroom because she couldn't do it on her own. During the summer of

2021 my boyfriend, who is an EMT, looked through our mom's hospice binder full of nurse's notes during the last year of her life. On the last week she was alive I remember specifically our aunts telling us to go into our mom's room to say our goodbyes. My older sister, Melissa, and I went in right after but Denise, the youngest, waited a few days. She says she remembers that our mom was unconscious when she walked in and talked to her. My boyfriend was explaining our mom's vitals and noticed that they were steady until the final three days before she passed. He showed us how they declined rapidly from one day to the next and asked us if anything happened during those days. I told him Denise went in to talk to her, and then I asked Denise if she remembers what she told her since she was only fourteen when this happened. She said, "Te quiero mucho y te voy a extrañar mucho pero voy a estar bien y ya no tienes que pelear si estás lista para irte, no te sientas mal por irte." All three of us strongly believe that she waited for Denise to come in and say goodbye and once she heard she would be okay, she let go.

Mom's illness

During season four, Jane's mom finds out that she has cancer. This specific situation hit close to home because the audience could see how Xo was losing a little of herself to this illness. Jane was struggling watching her mother fight cancer and she learned so much about her mother's strength through this time. She also became more aware of how much she needs her mom and how close she is to her. In one specific scene, Jane is talking to her baby's father about his sister whose mom died. Jane says, "I can't imagine how hard it must have been for her to lose her." I felt that many of these conversations applied to me, and I found myself crying because it was hard for me to lose my mom. Realizing my mother's mortality sent me into a spiral. It was the summer before sixth grade, and I watched the *Selena* movie. At the end of the movie, there is a scene where Selena's family is in the waiting room and Selena's doctor comes out and shakes

his head indicating that Selena did not survive the gunshot. I pictured my family and me in that situation and replaced Selena with my mother. At this age, I was aware of my mom's illness, but I didn't know the extent of it and still had hope that she would be cured and live forever. This scene, however, made me realize that people really do not live forever. I was terrified of death after this. I became so afraid that I would sleep in my mom's room every night. I stopped saying bad words and I started behaving better. At this point I still believed in religion and God, and I did everything in my power to not upset Him. I figured if I behaved then He would not take my mother away. I don't know how I managed to get over this fear but one day I just stopped being afraid. Throughout high school I used to come out of my room at night and stand on my mom's doorway to check if her chest was still moving. I lived right next door to my high school and every time I heard an ambulance on the side of the school where I lived, I would try to listen closely to make sure they were not headed into my street (not that I would be able to tell just by listening, but my heart stopped every time I heard sirens.) The worst part of it all was feeling like I was just watching my mother lose herself a little every day. It was hard watching her change simple things from her routine because her body would not allow her to do them anymore. She used to put her pills into Ziploc bags and grind them with a hammer and add them to her drinks because she could not swallow big objects anymore. We used to leave containers half open so she would not struggle opening the peanut butter jar or the sugar. She had to use both hands to hold things such as utensils, cups, plates, etc. Eventually, I had her coffee recipe memorized because she stopped being able to serve herself. She did not like going out to stores or restaurants because people would stare at her, and she would rarely let us take pictures of her. As I am writing this, I am at a loss for words at how someone as strong and beautiful as her had to go through something so intense. She deserved so much more than what this life gave her, and it

hurts to think of everything she lost due to this illness. Watching Jane's family give each other advice about grief allowed me to take in that advice and apply it to my own life.

Conclusion

Finishing this show for a second time left me feeling empty. I felt at home every time I dove into Jane's world. I felt nineteen again and could almost experience the exact feelings from when I first watched it, but I also learned more lessons watching it as a twenty-five-year-old. It is embarrassing to admit that I felt like I was a Villanueva too. Through the loss of my mother, I have felt like I am missing a part of myself, and Jane's family gave me the space to grieve and get a sense of what I could have possibly experienced. I lost a part of my culture when my mom died, and I could never really pinpoint exactly what parts of my culture I had forgotten. *Jane the Virgin* bridged both of my cultures together and no other show has been able to do that for me. Jane, Xiomara, and Alba gave me room to grieve, miss, and long for my mother. Rogelio opened up an old wound that I have always struggled with, the need and want for a father figure. Jane's character touched on my own identity as a first-generation college student going for her master's without experiencing the "traditional" college life. Instead, we are both commuter students who cannot separate from our personal lives to focus on school. So much of me was reflected through *Jane the Virgin*, and it is no wonder that I felt like I was leaving a part of myself behind the moment the show ended.

Conclusion

Summary

Jane the Virgin introduces a variety of Latinx characters and actors into American media, which is why it is a vital show to analyze. Representation of Latinxs in media is often stereotyped and the directors of this series used the opportunity to create multi-dimensional Latinx characters to provide more diversity towards the Latinx community. The purpose of this research study was to examine how *Jane the Virgin* relates to or influences my own experiences of Latinidad. This show impacted my identity because it allowed me to reclaim my culture and bridge both my Mexican identity with my U.S.-American identity, which I used to think were two separate entities. It further examined how the show represents the first-generation college experience and how that relates to my own experience as a first-generation student. In this chapter, I will summarize my study, discuss the interpretations of my findings, review the limitations, and mention suggestions for future research.

This thesis used autohistoria-teoría coined by Gloria Anzaldúa and content analysis of a television series aiming to bring personal experiences into research. Anzaldúa (2007) argues that this methodology helps us piece together history and personal experience toward the goal of understanding culture through an intersectional critical lens and create new understandings of the self. While watching the series I used my iPad to write notes on scenes that I felt related to. I organized my data by transferring the notes to a word document, printing them out, and adding a one-word summary that could encompass what the note was about. The following themes emerged from those summaries: Mexican American Culture, School, First-Generation, Father, and Mother's Illness. Based on a qualitative analysis of the importance of representation it can be

concluded that the media we are exposed to certainly has an importance and an effect on the viewer.

Interpretation

When I first watched *Jane the Virgin (JTV)*, I remember feeling comforted. This show casted many Latinx actors that I grew up watching in telenovelas. It had been years since I had seen many of those faces and as they appeared on the show, I felt like I was running into an old friend. Additionally, through Jane's experiences I was able to watch my own trauma personified. For instance, when Jane's mom was struggling with cancer, I would recall the moments I felt scared, sad, and angry as I was witnessing my own mother suffer from Scleroderma. I was about 18 years old when I first watched this, and I had no idea what it meant to see accurate representations of Latinxs in media. However, rewatching this show at twenty-five, I can appreciate the variety of characters this series incorporated. In the United States, there has been an issue of misrepresentation and underrepresentation of minorities. Specifically, Latinx folk are represented through stereotypical characters to fit the trope of tropicalism (Validivia & Guzman, 2014). This does not allow for characters to be multidimensional, which affects the attitudes that non-Latinx people have towards Latinxs. As I learned about this phenomenon, I began questioning if there was indeed an effect on my own identity and Latinidad as I watched a series based on Latinx culture. I found that being able to relate through a character that I was constantly being exposed to made me feel validated in a way that I did not know I needed. Moreover, I was curious to see how *JTV* represented the first-generation college student experience and if that had an impact on me since I am also a first-generation college student. I found myself crying about how much I struggled through school as I saw Jane going through a similar situation. Dealing with impostor syndrome is rough, adding to it the insecurities that manifested from questioning

my own intelligence because I was struggling made it more difficult. I felt comforted knowing it was not an experience unique to me. Something I did not realize would happen is how this show helped me navigate my grief surrounding my parents. I was able to enjoy the relationship between a mother and a daughter that I missed out on through Jane and Xiomara and see how a father and a daughter created a bond after twenty years of not knowing each other.

I was able to relate to this television series due to being a Chicana, first-generation college student, who grew up with a terminally ill mother and an absent father. Many of the aspects that made this show comforting for me may only be specific to me. I focused on the way first-generation college students are represented in this show and there was not any research I could use as reference to how I approached this theme. I decided to go from experience and found it helpful to discuss how it helped me. The lack of research proved difficult because I had no framework to work around. It was not my first time watching it, but I felt there was enough time in between the first watching and the second. In future research, there is a need to expand the number of television shows to watch as well as the number of people being observed to capture different experiences.

Identity, Media, and the Coyolxauhqui Process

Understanding the role that *Jane the Virgin* played in allowing me to reclaim my culture, work through my trauma, and form my identity, I think back to Gloria Anzaldúa's (2015) model to study identity: nepantla. Nepantla means torn between ways, which Anzaldúa (2015) uses as the in-between space where border identities are questioned, broken down, and rebuilt. De Los Santos Upton (2019) adds, "Embracing nepantlisma is not a given for those in the Borderlands, and individuals who choose to engage in this identity work experience arreatamientos, or ruptures, which necessitate the Coyolxauhqui imperative, or the process of pulling ourselves

back together again” (De Los Santos Upton, 2019, p. 136). My arrebataamientos consist of moving across the border at age four, losing my communication and connection to my dad around six, and losing my mother at seventeen. I have faint memories of living on a street away from my grandparents, at the top of a hill, in a two-bedroom house. Our backyard was a cliff, and we could see our grandparent’s house from there. My older sister, Melissa, and I shared a lilac bedroom at the end of the hall. Our bathroom had a crack going from the ceiling to the floor and I remember being afraid of roaches. I have one small memory of my dad coming home and me running into his arms. I was a daddy’s girl, and I was excited every time he came home, but I don’t know if this is a memory or if it’s something I imagined from seeing a photo. It’s like I’m an outsider looking in. My next memories are in a two-bedroom apartment in El Paso, Texas. We lived in the Northeast part of town in an area called the Devil’s Triangle. The abrupt change from living in Juárez to living in El Paso is exactly how it feels in my memory. I remember hearing my parents argue one night and I snuck out of my bedroom because I hadn’t seen my dad in a while, and I found them in the dark sitting on chairs facing each other. I must’ve been about five years old. The next time I saw him we had moved further north close to Andress High School, and I was laying on the top bunk of my bunk beds waiting for him to hacerme cosquillitas en la espalda before he went to sleep on the bottom bunk. I was about eight years old, and I know this because I remember writing to Santa that Christmas to leave my mom money so she could afford bunk beds for my little sister and I and for her celulas madre treatment that I really thought would cure her. On October 31, 2014, my great aunt knocked on my door. In my groggy state, I was slightly annoyed at being woken up at 7 in the morning. “Your mom’s nurse wants to talk to you,” my aunt said. That’s when I remembered my mom was dying. The nurse said she died around 3 AM that morning, which we expected because she had four heartbeats per minute the

night before. I turned to look at my mom's bedroom, which consisted of two beds: her hospital bed and Denise's twin size bed on the opposite wall. My mom's body was still in her bed and Denise was sitting up crying. I walked towards Denise and hugged her without saying a word. The next few days were a blur. Some of my family members were staying at our house and everything felt quiet. I didn't cry during those days or at her funeral. On the night of the day that everyone left, I went into my room and laid in bed. I looked at the ceiling and noticed how cold the house felt. My mom was dead, and the house was cold. I fell asleep crying that night.

Jane the Virgin helped me begin the Coyolxauhqui process. Anzaldúa (2002) argues that "Coyolxauhqui personifies the wish to repair and heal, as well as rewrite the stories of loss and recovery, exile and homecoming, disinheritance and recuperation, stories that lead out of passivity and into agency, out of devalued into valued lives" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 563). My study shows the ways in which media can become part of the Coyolxauhqui process when representations move beyond the surface level stereotypes. Watching Jane and Xiomara's interactions while Xo was struggling with cancer created a space for me to think, "If my mom was here right now and I was able to talk to her about her illness and how it affected me, this is the comfort I would feel." These scenes gave me a glimpse of the life I could have had. Additionally, the relationship Jane was able to build with her father at age twenty-three gave me hope that maybe my father and I would be able to rebuild our connection as well. Furthermore, writing this thesis has been a cathartic process. I have lived a life where I understood that I lost parts of me and that there was a lingering emptiness, but they never felt related. Siempre sentí que no era ni de aquí ni de allá, and I knew my father's absence created abandonment issues that I struggled with daily, and losing my mom created a void that would never be filled but to me this was normal. I constantly downplayed my loss because I figured this was all part of the

reality of being human. However, being able to visualize my traumatic experiences as something that was snatched from my body, an *arreatamiento*, has helped me make sense of why I am in pain. As Gloria Anzaldúa (2000) explains, identity is a relational process that doesn't only depend on ourselves, which she calls *el arbol de la vida*. The directors of *JTV* borrow from *el cenote*, which Anzaldúa's (2000) says represents the collective memory of the [Latinx] race and culture and create a show that portrays many of our shared stories. Through writing this, I am piecing myself back together.

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