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In *ChicaNerds in Chicana Young Adult Literature: Brown and Nerdy* (2020), Cristina Herrera focuses on the previously overlooked intersection of racial, gender, and intellectual identity in contemporary Chicana young adult (YA) literature. By coining the term "ChicaNerd" to refer to Chicana adolescence "tinged with nerdiness" (3), Herrera challenges the stereotypical depiction of Chicana teenagers as "at risk" of various undesirable social issues and disrupts the dominant association of nerdiness as inherently tied to white male identity. In doing so, she positions the ChicaNerd as a powerful form of resistance against these mainstream representations. For ChicaNerds, academic achievement becomes not only a personal goal but a political act rooted "around the qualities of feminism, community support, and agency" (6), one that defies the constraints placed on them by their families, communities, and society at large. Through analyzing six contemporary young adult novels, Herrera demonstrates how Chicana protagonists embrace intellectual curiosity and cultural pride, presenting a revitalized and empowering image of Chicana adolescence.

The book presents an organized and efficient structure, providing a consistent analytical framework that enhances understanding. A well-defined introduction sets the context and methodology, and the first chapter tackles the prevailing stereotypes concerning Chicanas and nerdiness. In the six following chapters, each focusing on a distinct protagonist, Herrera effectively examines the intersections of race, gender, and class, highlighting how the protagonists' nerdy traits challenge traditional patriarchal and racist structures while affirming their Chicana identities. Her study focuses on five Chicana young adult novels: Jo Ann Yolanda Hernández's *White Bread Competition* (1997), Patricia Santana's *Ghosts of El Grullo* (2008), Guadalupe García McCall's *Under the Mesquite* (2011), Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* (2014), and Erika Sánchez's *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2017). Additionally, Herrera incorporates an analysis of *What Can(t) Wait* (2011) by Anglo author Ashley Hope Pérez, which features a Chicana protagonist and provides a detailed explanation

for this inclusion. The chapters maintain a consistent structure, with an in-depth examination of the protagonist's "nerdy" identity, the mother-daughter dynamic, and the systemic barriers they encounter. Each chapter carefully illustrates the various paths through which ChicaNerds transform intellectual pursuits into tools of resistance and self-determination.

At the heart of Herrera's analysis is the framing of intellectual curiosity and academic achievements of the protagonists, presented as "curious, smart, ambitious, bookish Chicanas who liked to study, who wanted to learn more, beyond their high school surroundings, and who relished in that studiousness" (2) as acts of resistance to the dominant narratives about Chicana women. In a society that often depicts Chicanas as uninterested in education or caught in cycles of poverty and familial obligations, the ChicaNerd rejects this stereotype by seeking knowledge and educational success. Herrera demonstrates that "normalizing Chicana intellectual curiosity and love of learning" (2) shifts the focus from deficit-based models of Chicana identity to one of agency and self-determination, illustrating how these young women defy systemic barriers to achieving academic success. Herrera argues that nerdiness, often linked to white male culture, can be embraced by Chicana teens as a source of empowerment, transforming the narrative from marginalization to self-affirmation.

These ChicaNerds narratives distinguish, Herrera reminds us, from the traditional "schoolgirl" identity—typically passive, obedient, and associated with white girlhood, which prevents the exploration of young Chicana identity. In contrast, the ChicaNerd represents an intellectual agency that transcends these limitations. The academic pursuits of these young women represent a rejection of the often racialized and gendered stereotypes that marginalize them. In this context, their academic achievements go beyond individual accomplishment; they act as a form of resistance against the patriarchal and racist structures that undermine Chicana identities. Herrera presents Chicana young adult literature as an empowering counter-narrative, where intellectual curiosity is not an anomaly but a central aspect of the protagonists' identities.

A particular strength of Herrera's analysis is her exploration of Chicana feminism and its intersection with intellectual curiosity through her attention to the complex mother-daughter relationships in these texts, especially between Mexican immigrant mothers and their first-generation Chicana daughters. Herrera argues that these bonds play a critical role in shaping the protagonists' academic identities and aspirations. The mother-daughter dynamic is framed not only as a source of tension—given the patriarchal expectations of the "good daughter" placed on young women striving for educational and personal agency (10)—but also as a vital system in the protagonists' pursuit of education. She thoughtfully explores how these relationships influence the protagonists' academic achievements and identity formation and demonstrates that maternal influence, though sometimes fraught, emerges as critical to the protagonists' success.

Herrera's perspective is enriched by her own experience during her adolescence as a "shy, quiet Chicana nerd bookworm" (139). However, she carefully maintains scholarly distance by emphasizing that her work is literary analysis rather than autobiography or non-fiction (140). Herrera does not suggest that Chicana girls' interest in reading, writing, or math is not inherently exceptional. Instead, she argues that this ChicaNerd identity offers Chicana teenagers an "empowered subjectivity" that subverts the dominant stereotype of the "fumbling, rejected (white male) nerd in popular culture (7). Herrera emphasizes the crucial role that educators play in supporting academic aspirations and building self-

confidence to show how community and mentorship are vital in counteracting systemic racism and sexism (145). This personal connection enhances understanding of the social and cultural dynamics in the analyzed texts.

The book critically responds to the invisibility of Chicana young adult texts in broader literary scholarship. Herrera points out that most studies of nerd culture predominantly focus on the white male figure of the nerd, and she redirects the conversation to include the voices of Chicana authors and their Chicana protagonists. Drawing on feminist theory, cultural studies, and Chicanx studies, Herrera addresses a significant gap in YA scholarship, focusing on Chicana intellectualism and demonstrating how Chicana young adult literature subverts persistent cultural stereotypes. Additionally, the anecdotes from Herrera's own adolescence create a connection between academic discourse and lived experience.

Despite its many strengths, the study raises questions regarding its historical and cultural scope. For instance, Herrera primarily examines novels from the late 1990s onward, which leaves out earlier Chicana YA literature. While authors such as Sandra Cisneros, Denise Chávez, or Ana Castillo created protagonists who could be considered ChicaNerds, Herrera does not explore this potential continuity. She explains the omission of novels featuring queer Chicano nerd characters, such as those found in the works of Benjamin Alire Sáenz and Rigoberto Gonzáles. Additionally, she briefly notes the absence of Afro-Latinx representation, admitting "much work to be done" in this area (18), but does not address it in depth.

Herrera's study contributes to multiple fields, including Chicanx studies, young adult literary criticism, and education. By examining how these novels "legitimize agency, identity, and social consciousness as brown and nerdy subjects" (139), she demonstrates the importance of expanding our understanding of both Chicana identity and nerd culture. The book successfully argues for the significance of these representations in challenging stereotypes and creating more nuanced portrayals of young Chicana experiences. Herrera's work opens the door for further studies on intersectional nerd identities, including Afro-Latina and queer Chicanx protagonists. It also invites exploration of earlier Chicana literature to trace the evolution of the nerd archetype over time.

Herrera's *ChicaNerds in Chicana Young Adult Literature* is an essential and timely contribution to young adult literary criticism, Chicanx studies, and feminist scholarship. By reclaiming nerd culture for Chicana teens, Herrera demonstrates the power of intellectual pursuits to challenge dominant narratives of race, gender, and education. Her work calls for further exploration of how these systemic barriers shape marginalized experiences in literature. The book offers a thoughtful analysis, blending strong scholarly rigour with genuine personal insight and paves the way for future studies on intersectional identities in young adult fiction.