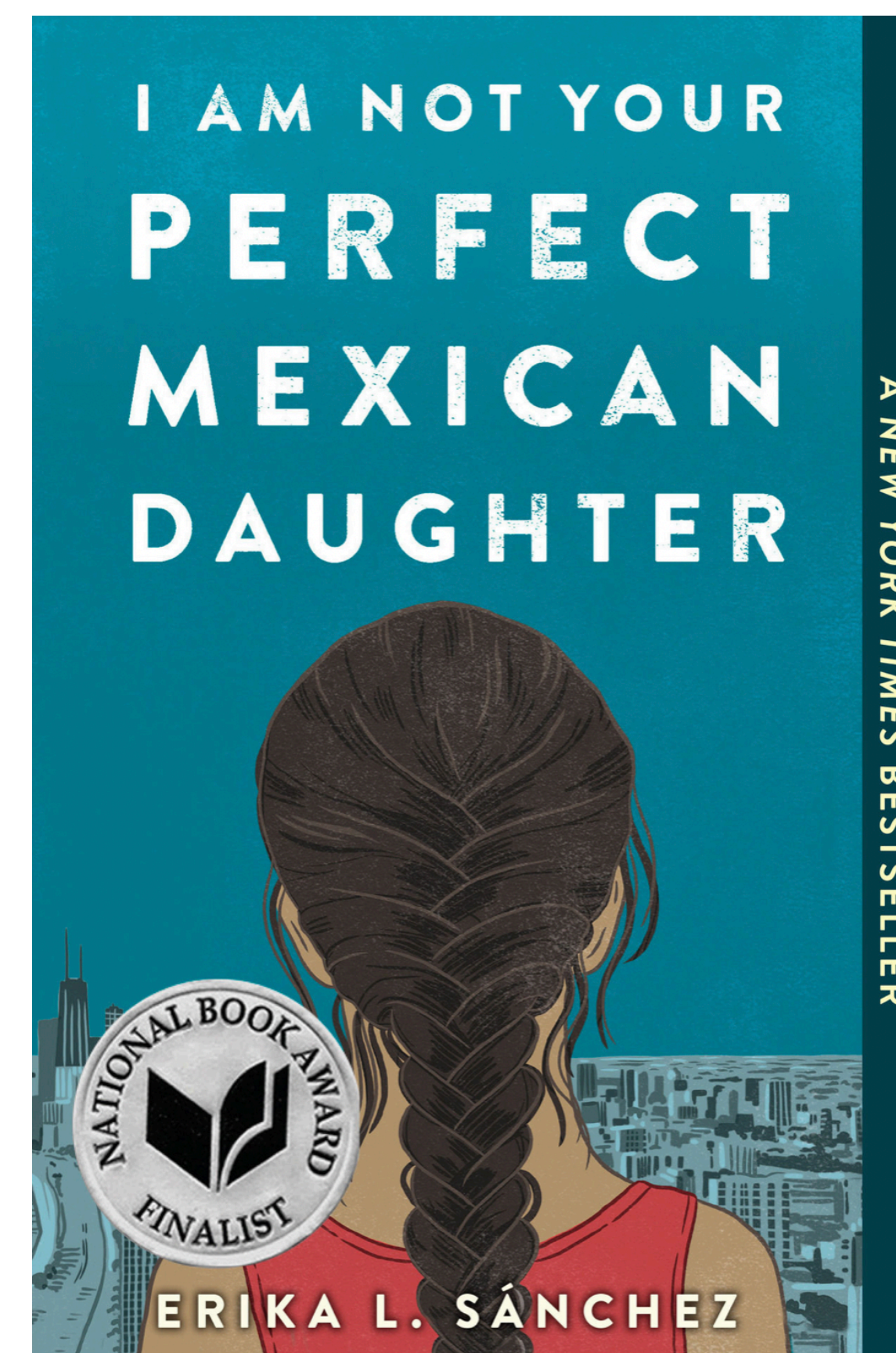
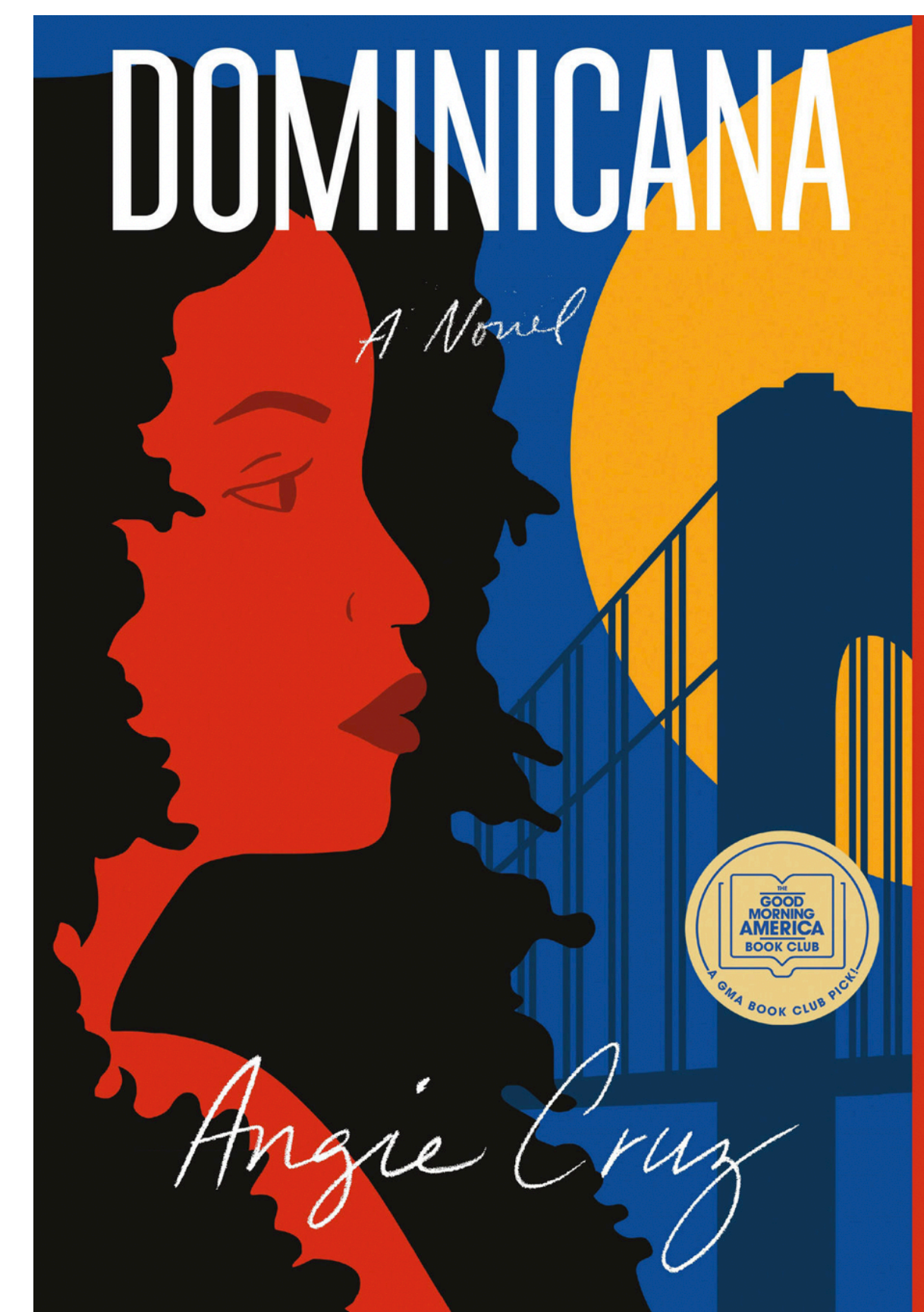


Mother-Daughter Relationships in Latin American Immigrant Households

How do gender expectations and trauma shape the relationship between mother and daughter?

Abstract

The life of an immigrant is challenging and characterized by trauma, experienced from the political, economic, and/or violent turmoil that compelled them to leave their homelands and the discrimination, cultural shock, and other physical or emotional obstacles that they experience in their new home. Many Latin American authors utilize their writing to share their personal experiences as immigrants of first or second generation in the United States, as well as express the trauma that is shared between them and their families. As the multi-generational dynamic of gender roles and trauma in the immigrant family is analyzed, a recurring theme of generational gaps between mother and daughter is manifest. This research analyzes the generational gap that exists in mother-daughter relationships within the Latin American immigrant family as expressed in Latin American literary works such as *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L. Sánchez, and *Real Women Have Curves* by Josefina López. Furthermore, this research explores how differences in gender expectations and traumatic experiences drive that gap, as well as how acceptance and recognition of one another's traumas helps to repair these relationships.



“What am I supposed to do? Say I’m sorry? I’m sorry I can’t be normal? I’m sorry I’m such a bad daughter? I’m sorry I hate the life that I have to live?”

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, pg. 213

Examples from Literature

“Mama’s hopes have turned. It’s now us and only us. And together we brace ourselves... Finally she understands everything I have sacrificed, everything I have survived for her and for the family.” -*Dominicana* pg. 317

“I’d rather live in the streets than be a submissive Mexican wife who spends all day cooking and cleaning.” -*I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* pg. 13

“I love you, that’s why I make you miserable.” -*Real Women Have Curves*

“Marianismo... refers to a woman’s position in the family and at home. She is expected to be as perfect as the Virgin Mary. Women earn the respect of family and friends for their dedication to their children and husbands. Marianismo is not openly acknowledged outside the home if the husband is present; a woman's domain is the house and her children... it must be noted that the process of acculturation shapes gender relationships and roles as Latinas become more independent and enjoy more freedom in the United States.”

Chong, Nilda. “Cultural Values of the Latino Patient.” *The Latino Patient: Cultural Competence for Health Professionals*, Nicholas Brealey, London, UK, 2002, pp. 21–44.

Conclusion

As the key experiences and values that shape the identity and attitude of each generation of women in the immigrant family are analyzed, the multi-generational gap that exists between mother and daughter is better understood. Each woman— the mother of the immigrant, the immigrant herself, and the daughter of the immigrant— has distinct gender expectations and different traumas that define and influence her behavior and perspective. As she accepts herself and recognizes the traumas and experiences of the other, mother and daughter may start to close these gaps that impede their relationship. By doing so, she can achieve a better understanding and a deeper empathy both for herself and her family members.