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Reading Latinx and LGBTQ+ Perspectives: Maya Christina Gonzalez and Equity Minded Models at Play

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ABSTRACT: Through an equity-minded model, this essay addresses the work of Maya Christina Gonzalez and the new visions of gender she offers in children's literature with *My Colors, My World* (2007). This essay frames the presence of Chicana/Latina feminist non-conforming perspectives on gender as *chillante* aesthetics and analyzes Gonzalez's advancement of Latinx and LGBTQ+ standpoints in the following texts *Call Me Tree/Llámale árbol* (2014), *I Am Free to Be Me: Gender Now Activity Book* (2011) and *Claiming Face: Self-empowerment Through Self-Portraiture: An Educator's Guide to Building the Powerful Link between Creativity and a Sense of Self* (2010).

Key Words: *Chillante* aesthetics, Latinx children's literature, feminism, queer, Chicana/Latina, gender non-conforming

The struggle "to make verbal" the experiences of Latinx LGBTQ+ perspectives is an emerging movement defining the multiethnic literatures of the United States. Scholarship that recovers the voices of the heritage of Latin@s in the United States is bringing a new light to written works through queer lenses. Queer subjects and subjectivity are gaining awareness due to analytical methods that allow for a new interpretation of lost or forgotten tales and identities. One clear example is Jesse Alemán's essay, "Crossing the Mason-Dixon Line in Drag: The Narrative of Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Cuban Woman and Confederate Soldier."

In 2013, the same year Alemán's essay was published, *Rebel: Loreta Velazquez, Secret Soldier of the American Civil War* debuted. *Rebel* educates a general audience on the life of Loreta Janeta Velazquez, and with that a revised analysis of her 1876 publication, *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez*. Her memoir offers a personal narrative about the context of war that offsets the patriarchal, black-white paradigm of society through which the United States envisions itself. As one of hundreds of women who fought during the civil war, the history of women, the history of U.S. Latina women, and the history of educated U.S. Latina women is oft absent from the popular imagination and image of history that shapes the annals of the nineteenth century.

In contexts of war torn America, her personal chronicle ruptures misrepresentation of ethnically diverse subjects and the reconstructions to notions of gender, sex, and sexuality that took place before the civil rights movements in the twentieth century. Her memoir is a powerful illustration of the incessant struggle of gender nonconforming representations by women writers. By not dismissing the context of war and violence, if we read Velazquez's critique of gender as an ideological, philosophical, and value based war on the negation to the freedom of identity, we

begin to realize, as Lorna Dee Cervantes's canonical poem affirms, "I do not believe in the war between races but in this country there is war" (*Emplumada*, np). Velazquez writes,

There are times I forget who I'm supposed to be. I'm compelled to sync my sex entirely. The least inadvertence could be my ruin. I must learn to act, to talk, to almost think like a man. I am known as Harry T. Buford, confederate soldier. But I am not who I appear. If my identity is revealed, I could be tried for treason," wrote Velazquez. (*Rebel*, np)

The scholar, Catherine Clinton, explains the historical significance of her words in the film by elaborating, "Growing up for young women in Cuba, her parents wanted her to be educated to the dictates of ladyhood. That would be to learn the fine art of sewing, music, and dance. She would be someone who would be expected to be the lady to entertain" (*Rebel*, np).

Another quote from Velazquez follows the women and civil war scholar's contextual comment. "Even as a child, I have been disposed to rail against the Creator for making me a woman in a role that favors men. Joan of Arc the maid of Orleans was my heroin. An example of what a woman may do if she only dares; and dares to do greatly" (*Rebel*, np). As an immigrant to the United States, Velazquez arrived to 19th century social value systems that negatively racialized people of color to justify colonial domination under white imperialist interests. Velazquez's experiences with discrimination along notions of gender, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality and race as a Latina, reflects a repackaged hatred toward people of Hispanic ancestry in North America known as the Black Legend. In addition, the rise of anti-Mexican sentiments and continual racism against Native Americans ensued from already layered negative stereotypes because of the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-1848) that led to the characterization of brown people of color under typecasts of backward, lazy, and stupid. Unfortunately, today we are still engaged with the presence of this past in very real contexts.

As history informs, the identity of ethnic minorities in the United States is a variation of relations and forces in constant development which mirror present moments of individuality and group identification. The backlash to social progress is the focus of "L.G.B.T. People Are More Likely to Be Targets of Hate Crimes Than Any Other Minority Group," a *New York Times* article published in June of 2016. Summarizing a report by the Human Rights Campaign, Haeyoun Park and Iaryna Mykolyshyn write, "more transgender people were killed in 2015 than during any other year on record" (np) The article continues observing that,

At a time when transgender people are gaining visibility, 'transgender women of color are facing an epidemic of violence that occurs at the intersections of racism, sexism and transphobia – issues that advocates can no longer afford to address separately,' Chad Griffin, the president of the Human Rights Campaign, said in the report. (np)

Anti-gay violence professor, Gregory M. Herek offers a compelling and scrutinous observation that ends the article, "Unfortunately, we just have to accept the fact that stigma based on sexual orientation is still widespread. Overcoming those prejudices is a lot of work" (np).

Creative and academic writing on Latinx and LGBTQ+ issues has gained momentum in the recent decades due to the dedication by individuals and collectives to do the work to combat prejudices. The Orlando attacks remind America of the ways intersections of identity ensue hate crimes in the present moment; that hate crimes and their targets are constantly shifting. With the increase of Anti-Hispanic sentiment as demographic shifts take place on a national level, the Orlando attacks are an inscription that links the world of Velazquez to the terrors of today; there is a complex race struggle in America and for Latinx LGBTQ+ subjects, the belief of war is real.

Despite obstacles, creative and academic writers are undeterred from activism and calls for social justice.

This essay focuses on the quest for equity-minded models related to gender non-conformity by queer Chicana/Latina feminist writers. Equity-minded model is a term used in higher education to refer to frameworks or systems for improving student success through a social justice lens. Equity-mindedness, “involves institutional leaders and staff demonstrating an awareness and a willingness to address equity issues” states Estela Mara Bensimon (np). This essay extends Bensimon’s concept into the literary world to demonstrate the practice of equity mindfulness by contemporary writers in rethinking gender for the wellness of society. If we consider writers as practitioners of equity-minded models, authors are then capable of envisioning storylines that address gender non-conformity. Such tales bring further awareness to readers and paves further understanding of the ways queer Chicana/Latina feminist writers are instilling transformational change.

In other words, queer Chicana/Latina feminist writers continue the revolution of breaking stereotypes by writing about identity through new visions of gender non-conformity. The first section of this essay addresses the writings by Maya Christina Gonzalez and the new visions to gender she offers in children’s literature. The next section of this essay examines the presence of queer Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives of gender non-conformity in Gonzalez’s self-authored, self-illustrated work *My Colors, My World* (2007). The following section of this essay positions an examination of the queer expression that induce non-conforming perspectives on gender through *chillante* aesthetics and analyzes recent developments as movements toward the advancement of Latinx and LGBTQ+ standpoints in *Call Me Tree/Llámale árbol* (2014), *I Am Free to Be Me: Gender Now Activity Book* (2011) and *Claiming Face: Self-empowerment Through Self-Portraiture: An Educator's Guide to Building the Powerful Link between Creativity and a Sense of Self* (2010).

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, gender, sex, and sexuality has defined feminist and queer struggles. A challenge facing feminist and queer scholarship is the lack of cultural competence towards the politics of people of color experiences, which foster a different kind of identity politics. To invest in the positive outcome of the entire populace, as an ethic issue facing the education of America’s children, speaks to the core principles of the struggle for self-determination, self-affirmation and cultural pride that defines the Chican@ literary renaissance. As such, a recent development within Chican@/Latin@ writers is the establishment of a theory of poetics that inscribes equity-minded models within the written form. In the expression of literary forms, discourses, and techniques, a growing body of creative production is contributing to bridging chasms of intolerance about the intersections of Latinx studies and LGBTQ+ studies. While critical academic studies support the success of today’s postsecondary students, there is a lack of attention to the advancements of Latinx LGBTQ+ representations in literature across the sum of what is the span of lived experience.

Paying Close Attention: Reading Children’s Books through Queer Lenses

Maya Christina Gonzalez is a practitioner of what equity-mindedness means from a queer Chicana/Latina feminist perspective. She is nationally recognized for her work in fine art and also as a children’s book illustrator. She gained a reputation by illustrating Gloria Anzaldúa’s children’s book, *Prietita and the Ghost Woman* (1995). Gonzalez understands the challenges children and adolescents face when they are made to feel like they do not belong. Learning about

Chicana politics and theory as an undergrad, awakened Gonzalez toward a new consciousness about her own identity. Although she is more commonly known for her fine art works, Maya has created a space for herself and queer Chicana feminist visions within the realm of children's literature.

The different ways Gonzalez uses visual and written language reverses the absence of storylines in children's literature that celebrate the diversity of subjectivity among Chican@/Latin@ communities as well as additional ethnic and historically oppressed communities. While the breadth of her work is unquestionable, this essay explores the advancement of Chican@ children's literature written in bilingual and multilingual contexts in which Gonzalez advances perspectives of gender non-conformity. In some examples, she inserts perspectives given her role as an illustrator and in other examples, as the author and illustrator, she creates a holistic vision that allows children to celebrate who they are by showing them, through literature, that their realities are represented through depictions that emulate aspects of their lived experiences.

She makes several inroads to nonconforming visions of identity. First, she challenges the lack of presence in the representations of racially, culturally, and ethnically diverse female protagonists. Along with Anzaldúa and Pat Mora, Gonzalez is one of the leading Chicanas 'claiming face' for a more equitable representation of children's literature in schools, libraries and other public venues (Anzaldúa 1990). In her first self-authored and self-illustrated book, *My Colors, My World*, the main protagonist is a girl. The girl is a representation of the author, and thus, similar to Velazquez's publication, a personal narrative. Because she is chronicling and recounting stories from her past, she is offering her testimony, a *testimonio*. The text, thus, is exemplum of Chicana feminist memoirs, the incorporation of this literary genre that is popular in Chican@/Latin@ literature to children's picture books. A contemporary Chicana feminist approach in the use of *testimonio* is a form of revolutionary praxis for women of color, whose stories have been seen as unimportant (Acevedo et al, Rebolledo; and Delgado et al).

In *My colors, My World*, the author shows the political act of telling her story and the power of writing the self. She incorporates feminist epistemologies by explaining to readers the motive for producing the book, "The little girl in this book is me. I also modeled her after a doll I had as a kid—a big, round-headed doll my aunt made for me. I dragged that doll around for years because she so reminded me of me, with her big round face (24). Self representation in word-image by Gonzalez expresses a form of theory of self and culture that compliments the philosophical and ground-breaking writings of queer Chicana feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Norma Alarcón, and Karla Trujillo.

By writing herself into fictional reality, she articulates a perspective informed by queer theory that allows her to visualize and articulate from that queer positionality. And that queer feminist oppositional stance brings a new awareness of herself where she is able to reframe her gender as something positive and empowering. She models the protagonist after a doll her aunt made her. Again, we see a coded form of gender non-conformity at work.

Her aunt provided a different model of gender and body politics that shaped Gonzalez's world view. In other words, the doll represents the departure from gender normative identity. The doll had a round-shaped face, that stands in radical opposition to the Barbie and other faces of contemporary dolls who often project unrealistic images of women's bodies and expectations of beauty. The doll is an alternative blueprint that mirrors the transmission of Chicana feminist beliefs. The doll is a representation of the love the aunt shows to her niece and reflects intergenerational transmission of a rich legacy among women of color sets of knowledge. This

wisdom is meant to teach women to love their alter(native) bodies. Whether she made the doll out of necessity, socio-economic constraints or otherwise, the doll is a symbol of love and cultural legacy that made Gonzalez proud of her family and herself. The doll allowed her to feel a sense of belonging.

Gonzalez honors the memory of the doll and its social significance as a tool for the practice of oppositional politics. The doll that serves as a blueprint for the fictional character gains further meaning when the author states,

I faced a number of challenges as a very young person. I turn to my environment to search out my reflection and a sense of belonging. The amazing desert sunset taught me that there was beauty in the world, and that beauty made a difference. I believe this help lead me to be an artist, and in particular an artist who also paints for children. No matter where we look, inside or out, there is beauty to greet us. Keep a lookout! (24)

Hidden-transcripts bring visibility to Latinx and LGBTQ+ identity in this book. The rainbow letters of the word, “colors/colores,” scheme an imaginary that inserts the rainbow flag into the text without notice. However, in encouraging the reader to ‘keep a look out,’ the author hints to the inscription of non-conforming gender roles or queer sensibilities. In the book, the character sees her world as a prism of colors like the rainbow. “Maya Gonzalez identifies herself as a queer-focused, lesbian Chicana with a nature-based spirituality,” wrote Mira Reisberg (52). Through a queer-focus narrative reflective of equity-mindedness, a tale about non-conforming gender roles comes to life.

In fact, I propose a reading of *My colors, My World*, as a celebration of Gonzalez’s non-conforming spirit that demonstrates new gender politics in line with recent developments in Latinx and LGBTQ+ cultural production. The book inscribes what Chela Sandoval calls a differential consciousness. In *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (2002) Paula M. Moya notes that differential consciousness:

implies a new kind of subjectivity developed under conditions of multiple oppression. This new subjectivity, kinetic and self-consciously mobile, manifests itself in the political practices of U.S. third world feminists. Because nonwhite women have long been multiply oppressed, as part of their political coming-to-consciousness they have had to learn to highlight (or obscure) different aspects of themselves to be able to work effectively within political organizations (79).

In Gonzalez’s case, a differential consciousness within the context of children’s books is developing women of color and children of diverse backgrounds to maintain subjectivity and presence in society. Likewise, the book sends the message to young round-faced brown women to maintain their non-conforming spirit instead of socializing into fixed binary gender expectations.

In 2008, Mira Reisberg wrote an article titled, “Maya Gonzalez: Portrait of the Artist as a Radical Children’s Book Illustrator,” in which she writes,

Although CBP [Children’s Book Press] has published some books about children with gay parents, none of Maya’s children’s books directly address her queer identity, or, until recently in *My Colors, My World* (Gonzalez, 2007), her ethnic hybridity. While a deep reading might uncover clues, her personal art and other texts make this identification explicit. I believe part of an art educator’s job is to expose children to other ways of being, seeing, and understanding beyond mainstream culture’s privileging of an Anglo-European, heteronormative, male

perspective. Thus, I advocate for providing information about the lives, books, and personal art of critical picture book artists on the same level of attention that most fine artists are afforded in the contemporary art education curriculum (60).

Contrary to Reisberg's view, I argue that Gonzalez has always approached children's literature from an oppositional stance that filters equity-minded models of inclusivity into visible but coded forms to both 'highlight and obscure' queer identity. To reference Sandra K. Soto, *My Colors, My World* "emphasize[s] the unpredictable, polymorphous, and often contradictory representations of the mutual constitution of racialization and sexuality (171). Reisberg uses intersectional lenses to read the expression of "ethnic hybridity" in the book, however, her lens of interpretation inhibits the coded ways that Chicana feminist lenses are able to locate the hybridity of culture and self in the book. The protagonist is an independent, self-assured figure of a young woman of color that engages with play in public, who cares for the well being of all life in nature, who sees herself as part of nature and not above or below it, and who loves herself as a woman. The confidence to think and act different is a woman-to-woman phenomena that has been largely informed by queer pedagogies within Chican@/Latin@ perspectives and which fit well with emerging Latinx directions.

The protagonist also communicates gender non-conformity through the use of the color pink. "I wear pink in the morning, I wear it in the afternoon, I wear it all the time." Albeit pink is dominantly known as a 'girl color,' Gonzalez use of pink transgresses heteronormative associations between pink and girl. In the book, pink is a color of empowerment and love. The protagonist sees pink as a color of nature and her environment. She loves the color because she is attracted to the color and not to concede to the social pressure that pink is for girls. The book ends with the protagonist saying, "I love all of the colors in my world. Every day I watch the hot pink sky turn into dark blue night (22)." The hot pink sky invites the protagonist to dream and play as seen on page twenty-two; showing an array of images where little girls are active, inquisitive and self-expressive. She is depicted outside, riding a bike.

All the examples mentioned above demonstrate the way the creative writer and artist crafts a narrative that builds new modes of thought for young audiences on the importance of non-conforming gender identity. In the case of this little girl, she loves to be outside, debunking the myth that a woman's place is inside a home. Thus, she claims all spaces as women spaces by amplifying where women can and cannot go. By doing so, she changes the rules of engagement for what is socially acceptable behavior for young women of color. The use of color transforms into an act of reclamation of the female subject and the dismantling of fixed gender binaries that color our world into blue-pink extremes. Through a reformulation of pink, she transgresses the dictates of what a lady in pink is able to do.

She also uses pink to decolonize customs, traditions, and religious beliefs that show the force between visual and historical memory. Pink gains a new meaning in her book that channels a radical politics that decolonizes the history of using the color to colonize, oppress and discriminate individuals because of difference. She works with the visual, figurative, and literal language of color to speak to young readers who respond with open eyes to the symbolic form and structure of her technicolored drawings. The creation of pink-scapes respond to multiple oppressions historically specific to the author's subjectivity. Gonzales is a queer Chicana with Mexican and German genealogies. I read Gonzalez use of pink as a way of combating homophobia across her personal, cultural, and familial histories. During the World War II era, Adolf Hitler, like the Spanish, created a caste system designed to categorize prisoners. The pink

triangle was the color and shape assigned to homosexuals, a framework which was actually devised as Hitler ascended to power.

Gonzalez's use of pink is a radical transgression that decolonizes imperialist and colonialist perspectives of queer identity; she also continues the adaptation of the pink triangle as a symbol of LGBTQ+ activism since the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Her equity minded goal enables her to create a pink politics that align with emerging Latinx and LGBTQ+ standpoints. Through the celebration of pink, she curbs bias towards the association of pink to negative stereotypes linked to the gender of the female sex and LGBTQ+ communities for current and future readers. If we think about Alain Berliner's 1997 film, *Ma vie en rose* (*My Life in Pink*), color and childhood gender nonconformity is given meaning through the color pink. *Ma vie en rose* is a Belgian drama film that gained global attention by bringing attention to transgender identity, childhood and innocence.

Pink in the film and in Gonzalez's work is the color of love and self-identification, especially in the context of dismantling the patriarchal vision of gender that adulterates the innocent imaginations of children. I also consider *My Colors, My World* an early example of shifting the gender terrains within the children's literature genre because of the ways the use of color is tied to cultural sensibilities. By challenging cultural norms about early female visions, she reframes female activism into a form of empowerment. This too reflects a pedagogy that dialogues with new developments on gender socialization and education for Chican@/Latin@ children in visual contexts.

A Queer Look into Gender with *Chillante* Aesthetics

Similar to *My Colors, My World*, the book *Call Me Tree/Llámame árbol* (2014), brings multiethnic stories to life with vibrant and colorful illustrations that celebrate Chican@ visual practices of *chillante* aesthetics from a queer gaze. *Chillante* aesthetics is a practice and politics of expressive culture that is uniquely Chican@. Tomás Ybarra Fausto and Amalia Mesa-Bains's scholarship on Chican@ *rasquachismo* position us to understand the power of color and the operational use of color as a form of renegotiation and creativity in Chican@ expression. While their critical writings have paved inroads to understanding the roots and evolution of Chican@ aesthetic practices, few studies have traced the influence and impact of this tradition on the development of children's literature in relation to queer identity in children. For example, as stated above, the use of pink, a color known in Spanish as Mexican pink, or *rosa mexicano*, is a form of honoring her cultural heritage and the indigenous respect for nature.

The most interesting aspect of Mexican pink is its history. Mexican pink derives its color from a plant, *Silene laciniata*, and from the hue of traditional wardrobe of various indigenous groups in Mexico. In the mid 20th century, Ramón Valdiosera traveled and studied the diversity of indigenous attire. Upon returning to his studio, the man known as a journalist, painter, cartoonist and designer integrated his new liking for the color into contemporary fashion. As an artist, Gonzalez accomplishes the same as Valdiosera, but in the visual and literary world that have crossed the border. She incorporates *chillante* aesthetics in children's narratives that create a decolonial praxis for children to understand notions of inclusivity and diversity through colors, and how we ascribe emotions and experiences to colors and visual hues.

At the same time, *chillante* aesthetics advances the development of Chican@ visual and literary sensibilities and its appreciation to a new generation of readers and thinkers. The verb of *chillante*, is *chillar*, which means to shout, yell, or brawl. In this regard, we can frame the

artist's *chillante* aesthetics as a colorful cry for social justice that references *el grito* of the Chican@ movement. Her use of color is reflective in equity-mindedness; one color next to another will impact how you understand both. Thus, Gonzalez's use of colors are a visual shout and brawl working toward a new vision of storytelling in literature that queers traditional ideologies about how books can educate children and the curricular significance of the interaction between verbal and nonverbal perspectives.

Call Me Tree teaches children to continue to play and imagine futures outside the limits of binary gender relation, behaviors, and structures. The book teaches children that it is acceptable to be a gender non-conforming individual by circumventing the use of dominant gender pronouns in the English language. The application of queer Chicana feminist theory enables her to create disambiguation between language, gender, sex, and sexuality. She frames language in a way that mirrors recent developments on the use of the term Latinx and forms of gender identification for LGBTQ+ communities today. She further shifts gender paradigms through a decolonization of the language of gender. In the book, children are referred to as trees. "A tree I am/ A tree I stand," reads one of the lines in of the picture book (np). Their identity is framed in relation to and as a part of nature. "I dream/I am reaching/Dreaming and reaching/Reaching and dreaming" (np). A child is seen sprouting into life from a seed. Dreaming empowers the author to instill decolonial imaginaries that tap into the collective unconscious of children's "*sitios y lenguas*" (Pérez). Trees assist the author to talk about racial and ethnic differences, body politics, and the reality of genetic diversity within a single community. Children are metaphorically represented as trees. She uses colors to allure new audiences to not fear the different colors of trees. By speaking about the beauty of nature and of trees themselves, she teaches children to love diversity of all forms of life. In a more coded form, she teaches children to not fear the coloring of gender, sex and sexuality or of color in the array of bodies that are humans. *Call Me Tree* erases the gender lines. Through genderless acts, she illuminates the human spirit in the face of social injustice for children whose faces are often missing in mainstream picture books.

For insiders to Chican@ culture, she offers culturally coded images that promote bilingual storytelling and pride of *chillante* forms meant to awaken the imagination and symbolic language that lead one toward a path of hybridization of thought, what Gloria Anzaldúa terms "mestiza consciousness" (*Borderlands*). The literal definition of *chillante*, a word in the Spanish language, offers an adjectival dimension to the use of color. *Chillante* means a color that is lively, bright, what in Spanish is described as *muy vivo*. The use of *chillante* as a practice, a style and methodology honors the use of expressive color that marks the visual traditions of Chican@ visual practices and its connection to Latin American art. In fact, the image of the child sprouting to life intertextually references Diego Rivera's allegorical mural, *Natural Evolution: Blood of the Revolutionary Martyrs Fertilizing the Earth* (1926-27). The illustrator's practice of *chillante* aesthetics within U.S. multiethnic children's literature also credits the legacy of the Chican@ movement as an evolution that points to the emergence of Latinx and LGBTQ+ perspectives in the recent years.

Queering the Gendered language in Children's Education: Toward Equity Minded Models

As a practitioner of equity-minded models in children's education, Gonzalez is making radical inroads to non-conforming gender curriculum. From her journey and experiences working as an illustrator and author of children's books across the state, region and the nation,

Gonzalez continues to challenge the status quo. Lampela (1998) describes the importance of including gays and lesbians in the art education curriculum, noting that “[a]rt teachers who want to provide their students with a culturally diverse curriculum [should] include . . . a focus on art created by lesbians and gay men” (qtd Reisberg 60).

In her recent publication endeavors, she has made coding queer Chicana feminist pedagogies into the lives of children more salient. A pivot toward creating children’s books for curricular purposes shows how she continues to challenge social norms for gender non-conforming individuals in K-12 education and the role that new curricular designs could have on creating a sense of belonging that is in constant dialogue with the most pressing issues defining the political and social fabric of America.

Bilingual storytelling advocates for equity-mindedness among hybrid thinkers and speakers. While tradition holds that reading and expression in English helps children during early age, Gonzalez visually transgresses the erasure of Chican@ linguistic sensibilities through the institutionalization of English-language dominance in children’s literature. Gonzalez debunks the rhetoric of English-only obsessions imposed upon dominant U.S. society by questioning colonialist tactics of monolingualism in American society.

Returning to the statement that tradition holds that reading and expression in English helps children during early age, it also produces the reverse, that reading only in English stymies multicultural learning. Her dedication to publishing bilingual children’s books illustrates how she practices radical and decolonial politics to reverse discrimination based on language. She works against the cultural and linguistic erasure of Chican@ lived experiences through her representation of a Chican@ subjectivity that speak otherwise. For children and adults alike, she subverts the English-only fallacy of American society by promoting literacy with new ways of seeing and knowing. She uses bilingual storytelling as a Chican@ remedy to the shame and guilt linguistically diverse children are made to feel when they enter educational institutions. For adults, she provides a path to return to the memories of their childhood and reclaim memory of themselves to create empowerment in the present. Through such methods she facilitates the translation of culture into contemporary context.

Gender Now and *Claiming Face* are two current examples where Gonzales is a pioneer in creating knowledge about non-conforming gender identity for Latinx youth. Working from a queer Chicana feminist politics and ideologies, *Gender Now* and *Claiming Face* aim to decolonize gender itself. *Gender Now* is an activity book that engages the reader with multiple expression of gender. The publication includes activities for children meant to educate young minds on the diversity of gender constructions as a fluidity of identities but still within a structured environment that is necessary for children. By seeing and creating a disambiguation between the binary representation of gender, Gonzalez exemplifies how we can decolonize gender. Moreover, it shows us how we can teach and reframe educational models towards a more equitable dialogue of sex, gender, and sexuality in elementary instruction.

A child-centered approach, the use of common and accessible language, and a true philosophy of the power of play as a means to learn are the core principles that structure her equity-centered curriculum. By comparison, *Claiming Face* presents lesson plans that encourage young children to express themselves by thinking about their own subjectivity in meaningful and positive contexts. Through the use of verbal and visual language, activities guide readers toward the expression of identity that is self-defined and intuitive.

In conclusion, the struggle for diversity, inclusion, and equity continues to motivate the work of Gonzalez. Recent attacks of people of color and in particular queer or undocumented

subjects – such as the 2016 shooting in Orlando targeting queer Latin@s – establishes the context for understanding the delicate state of diversity and equity as core values within mainstream American society. Investigating queer feminist cultural production is a major area of interest within the field of Literature, Ethnic Studies, American Studies Gender, Sex and Sexuality Studies. Gonzalez ensures the voices of queer Chicana feminists are not left out of mainstream American education. As she continues to take on new projects, who knows, she might just respond to Reisberg's observation and the lack of a Latinx LBGT+ perspective in the genre of children's books.

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