

**Title:** *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

**Author:** Erika L. Sánchez

**Genre:** Young Adult - Race & Ethnicity

**Respondent's Name and Grade:** Zahra V., 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

**Date Responded To:** August 6, 2022

**Questions:**

1. *What is the main plot of this book?*

The main plot of this book follows a soon to be 15 year old Mexican girl named Julia, who is the opposite of her parents' favorite child Olga, who sadly passed away. To try to win her parents' love, Julia agrees to have a quinceañera, which Ama begged her to have, since she felt guilty for Olga not having one. Julia also finds shocking information about Olga's life, while later finding a sweet and wealthy boy named Conner to escape from her troubles and share happiness.

2. *Which character did you most identify with and why?*

I mostly identified with Julia because I understand how terrible she must feel that her parents are against her and why she is taking the blame for her own sister's death. I connected to her, and realized the struggles many Mexican-Americans have to face as they are often pushed aside and cannot speak out about their experiences.

3. *What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

I believe the main message of this book is that even in dark times, you will always be able to find happiness and light. To elaborate, even when Julia was at her lowest points, she persevered through it, and was eventually able to find an escape from her dark home life. In the end, she was able to move to Chicago for college and finally became happy with her new boyfriend Conner.

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

I think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story. I believe this because throughout the entire novel, we are following the hard and strugglesome life of Julia, and are able to see in different chapters how the main message comes into play. While the messages may not have been clear in the beginning, as the story progressed it became clear, especially in the end.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

The two perspectives in this book were that Julia could either not be invasive and look at Olga's past and life, or she could have seen what her sister was going through and what she was really like. I agree with the second, and the reason is because Julia would not have had closure if she didn't dig deeper into her sister's life before she died. She was able to find out sad truths such as that Olga was pregnant when she passed. Along with great things Olga had in her life, for example her relationships with her best friend and boyfriend.

6. *In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

My belief that most immigrants' lives are easy because they have a fresh start was changed when I read this book. I was able to see that even though people like Julia's

family moved to a new home, their past lives still haunted them and they were treated differently when they came to America. Julia's parents wanted her to have new opportunities unlike the experiences they had, and they wanted her to live peacefully. This is similar to many immigrants because while they may have struggled in their home country, they want a new and changed future in their new homes.

7. *What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

I think that a missing perspective from this book is Olga's point of view when she was still alive. I think this because if Olga was still alive she would have been able to help her sister through rough times and prepare her more for when she was on her own. Also, I feel that it would have added a depth to the story, because Julia's sister was much different to the way she perceived her, and it would have been a bigger shock.

8. *Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

This book encourages me to do more research on Mexican-American immigrants, and see how their lives have changed since they have come to America. I think it would be eye opening to see how far some families have come and how their lives have changed since immigrating to America.

9. *What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would suggest this book to older teens or young adults because it comes across mature and sensitive topics such as suicide, abuse, and depression. I would also recommend this to readers who are interested in culture, since you are able to see the background of Mexican heritage and culture.

10. *What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

Another book I have read that would make a good addition to this category is the novel *You Sound Like a White Girl* by Julissa Arce. I believe this because, like *I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, it follows a high school Mexican-American girl named Julissa. Throughout the book, she tries to break stereotypes and prove racist Americans wrong. She also tries to show her true ethnicity and race, without being too "out of the ordinary".

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Jason B., 11th Grade**

**Date Reviewed: March 15, 2023**

1. *What is the main plot of the book?*

The main plot of this book revolves around Julia, a Mexican-American woman, who is criticized a lot by her parents for not following the traditional role of Mexican women in their culture. Her sister Olga was the perfect definition of what a woman should be in their culture, as she never went away to college and stayed with the family. Julia did go away to college and therefore didn't serve this role. However, Olga dies one day after getting hit by a truck after she got off the bus, leaving Julia as the only daughter in the family. Her parents are even more critical of her after Olga dies, and expect her to become more like Olga to in a way replace her, but get mad when she doesn't. Julia discovers that Olga wasn't so perfect after all, and goes on to discover Olga was secretly in a relationship with an already married man, and even got pregnant with his child.

*2. What character do you most identify with and why?*

I don't really identify with any of the characters in this book. This is because I am not Mexican-American, and therefore do not have any similarities in my culture. I also am not a woman, so the roles the main character had to live up to in the novel are different from my own.

*3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

I believe the main message of this book is you shouldn't try to be something you are not, and that even the people who seem the most perfect have their shortcomings too. This is because Julia's parents constantly shame her for not being like Olga, but Julia later discovers that Olga wasn't so perfect after all.

*4. Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too preachy?*

I believe the main message of this book was effectively integrated into this story. This is because it was tied in perfectly with the plot, in a way that made it more interesting and feel more relevant to the story. This means that it wasn't like some extra thing thrown in that felt forced, like in some other novels. The main plot of this book revolves around Julia and her friend trying to discover what Olga was hiding, something that fits in with the main message of no one is truly perfect. Julia's character is also built on the message of not trying to be something you aren't, since she is characterized as not fitting the traditional role of a Mexican woman, and thus being shamed by her parents. This theme is literally in the title. That is why I believe the message was effectively integrated into the story.

*5. If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

Two perspectives that were present in this novel were that of Julia and that of her parents. Julia, the protagonist, is not a traditional woman in Mexican culture, as she is more independent and breaks a lot of cultural norms. Her parents, who are very traditional, constantly shame and criticize her for this. I agree more with Julia's perspective, as she is correct in wanting to be her own person, and even though I understand her parents are not at fault for their views, as it is just part of their culture, I think they should be more supportive of her in the way she chooses to live her life.

*6. In what ways(if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

My beliefs on cultural norms changed after reading this book. This is because I always thought that if someone's culture followed a certain belief, then they are justified in having that belief, even if it is something condemned by society. This book showed me how the younger generations can have a hard time following the cultural norms that the older generations expect of them, illustrating how people don't always have a choice in following their culture's rules. I think society should be more critical about cultural norms, in a constructive way that isn't offending the culture.

*7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

I think Olga's perspective would have been interesting to hear more about in this book. However, she is dead from the beginning of the book so the reader never gets to learn about her perspective on why she chooses to conform to the role her culture forces on her.

*8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

This book didn't encourage me to further pursue any topics. This is because I already understand this topic, and it is not something I feel is relevant to my life to further explore.

*9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc) would you suggest this book to?*

I would suggest this book to two types of readers. One is older generation traditional parents, like that of Julia's. This is because I think they would learn a lot about letting their kids become their own people, and would be persuaded away from forcing traditional cultural norms on them. I also would recommend it to people in Julia's situation, as a way to show them that they are right in living the way they want to, and that they should ignore any criticisms about not following their culture's norms.

*10. What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

The closest book I have read that in some way resembles the theme of this book is *Jitterbug Perfume* by Tom Robinson. This resemblance is only present in a small portion of the book by Tom Robbins, in which a king flees from his kingdom in order to escape a cultural tradition, which is once a king has one gray hair, he is killed. This resembles how Julia refuses to follow her culture's norms, by being independent and overall different from what is seen as a woman's role in Mexican cult

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Kylee K., 11th Grade**

**Date Reviewed: 5/24/2023**

*1. What is the main plot of this book?*

The main plot of "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" follows Julia Reyes, a first-generation Mexican-American teenager, as she grapples with the complexities of her cultural identity, family expectations, and the aftermath of her sister's unexpected death. Throughout the narrative, Julia embarks on a quest to uncover the truth about her sister's life while navigating the challenges of adolescence and the pressures of her immigrant family's traditional values. This journey of self-discovery leads Julia to confront difficult truths about herself and her family, ultimately reshaping her understanding of her place in the world.

*2. Which character did you most identify with and why?*

I most identified with Julia's character due to her inner conflict between her desire for independence and her sense of duty to her family. As a first-generation immigrant myself, I empathized with Julia's struggle to balance her individual aspirations with the expectations placed upon her by her parents and cultural heritage. Additionally, Julia's curiosity and determination to uncover the truth resonated with me, as I too have grappled with questions of identity and belonging. When Julia expresses her frustration with societal expectations, stating,

"Sometimes I feel like I'm not Mexican enough for my family, not American enough for myself," I found her sentiments deeply relatable, reflecting the internal conflict many immigrant youth face.

3. *What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

The main message of "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" revolves around the importance of embracing one's authentic self, despite societal pressures and familial expectations. Throughout the novel, Julia learns to navigate the complexities of her cultural identity and assert her individuality in a world that often seeks to confine her within predetermined roles. By challenging stereotypes and societal norms, the book emphasizes the significance of self-discovery and self-acceptance. This is evident when Julia reflects on her journey, stating, "I'm not your perfect Mexican daughter. I'm not perfect. But I'm trying my best. All I'm asking for is a little support."

4. *Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

I believe the main message of the book was effectively integrated into the story, as it emerges naturally through the characters' experiences and interactions, rather than feeling forced or preachy. Julia's journey of self-discovery and her struggle to assert her identity are portrayed with nuance and depth, allowing readers to empathize with her internal conflict. Through authentic dialogue and poignant moments of reflection, the book subtly conveys its message of self-acceptance and cultural pride without resorting to didacticism or moralizing. For instance, when Julia confronts her mother about her expectations, she asserts, "I need to figure things out on my own. I need to make my own mistakes, Ma." This dialogue illustrates Julia's quest for autonomy and self-determination, reinforcing the book's central theme without feeling overly preachy.

5. *If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

One of the key perspectives explored in the book is the tension between traditional familial expectations and individual autonomy, particularly within immigrant households. While Julia's parents adhere to traditional Mexican values and expectations, Julia herself grapples with the desire for independence and self-expression. I found myself agreeing with Julia's perspective, as I empathized with her struggle to assert her individuality and pursue her own dreams, despite the cultural barriers and familial pressures she faces. This resonated with my own experiences as a first-generation immigrant navigating between the expectations of my heritage and the desire for personal fulfillment.

6. *In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

Reading "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" reaffirmed my belief in the importance of cultural identity and self-acceptance. Through Julia's journey, I gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by immigrant youth and the significance of embracing one's heritage while forging a path towards personal fulfillment. The book's exploration of cultural identity and

family dynamics challenged me to reflect on my own experiences and reaffirmed my commitment to authenticity and self-discovery.

*7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

While "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" offers a compelling exploration of cultural identity and family dynamics, I believe the perspective of second-generation immigrants could have been further explored. While Julia represents the experiences of first-generation immigrants navigating between two cultures, the perspectives of second-generation immigrants, who often straddle multiple identities and cultural influences, could have provided additional depth and complexity to the narrative. By incorporating a diverse range of immigrant experiences, the book could have offered a more comprehensive exploration of the immigrant experience in America.

*8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

This book inspired me to delve deeper into the themes of cultural identity and immigration, prompting further reading and research on the experiences of immigrant youth in America. I sought out additional literature and resources to better understand the challenges faced by first-generation immigrants and the complexities of navigating between multiple cultural identities. Additionally, the book motivated me to engage in discussions and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting cultural acceptance and inclusivity within diverse communities.

*9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would recommend "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" to readers of all ages who are interested in exploring themes of cultural identity, family dynamics, and personal growth. Adolescents and young adults, in particular, may resonate with Julia's journey of self-discovery and her struggles to assert her individuality within the context of familial expectations and societal pressures. Additionally, readers with an interest in immigrant literature and multicultural perspectives will find this book to be a poignant and thought-provoking read.

*10. What other book(s) you have read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

Another book that would complement "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" in the Perspectives Bibliography is "The Book of Unknown Americans" by Cristina Henríquez. Like "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter," Henríquez's novel explores themes of immigration, cultural identity, and the pursuit of the American dream through the experiences of Latinx immigrants. By delving into the lives of various immigrant families living in an apartment complex in Delaware, "The Book of Unknown Americans" offers a diverse array of perspectives on the immigrant experience, enriching the dialogue on cultural identity and belonging in America.

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Kate G., 10th Grade**

**Date Reviewed: March 18, 2024**

*1. What is the main plot of this book?*

In the book *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, Julia Reyes is a Mexican teenage girl living in Chicago. She has recently lost her older sister, Olga, who died in a tragic accident and her family is struggling with the loss. Olga seemed to be the perfect daughter; she obeyed her family and followed the traditional expectations. Julia, on the other hand, is rebellious and wants her freedom. After Olga's death, Julia begins to learn some things about her older sister that change her perception of who she really was. Julia also struggles with her parents expectations of her, generational differences, her mental health, and her identity.

*2. Which character did you most identify with and why?*

The character that I identify with the most is Lorena, Julia's best friend. Lorena is a really good friend and provides laughter with her funny sense of humor and also emotional support for Julia as she navigates through difficult times. I identify most with Lorena, because I also consider myself a good friend, especially when my friends are going through hard times. Also, I find myself relying on comedy to lighten the mood when things are challenging.

*3. What do you believe is the main message of this book?*

I think one of the main messages of this book is how the idea of being "perfect" can create unattainable standards and ultimately damage someone's mental health. Julia is constantly being compared to her older sister, Olga, even after her death when Julia is expected to now fill her shoes, even though it turns out who her sister was was not the truth.

*4. Do you think the main message of this book was effectively integrated into the story, or did it come across as too "preachy"?*

I didn't think the main message of this book was preachy, however, Julia's mother was. Julia's mother, Ama, has a hard time understanding her daughter. Ama holds traditional values and struggles to understand Julia's desire for independence and pursuit of her own identity. Meanwhile, Julia's father, Apa, is more understanding of Julia's desire for independence and to pursue her own ambitions.

*5. If two or more perspectives on an important topic were explored/presented in this book, which one did you agree with and why?*

In *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, characters respond differently to the traditional gender roles based on their own experiences, beliefs, and personalities. I agree with Julia's response because she rebels against the traditional expectations placed upon her by her family and her community. Instead, she pursues her own interests, such as writing and attending college, despite the disapproval of her parents and her relatives.

*6. In what ways (if any) were your beliefs about a topic changed or reaffirmed through reading this book?*

One belief that I had that was reaffirmed through reading this book is that you can never really know a person. Olga was considered the perfect daughter, according to her parents Mexican cultural standards. Yet, Olga had an entirely different life away from her family that they knew nothing about. She became skilled at preserving her reputation in front of her family for the sake of her parents expectations, however, behind closed doors and away from home, Olga was a

completely different person with a life they knew nothing about and making choices that they certainly wouldn't have approved of.

*7. What perspective, if any, do you think was missing from this book?*

Since Olga died, we obviously don't have her perspective. It would be interesting to hear why she was compelled to hide her true self from her family and how she got away with it for so long. Also, I'd be curious to know why she felt it was so necessary to uphold her parents' generational and cultural expectations even though she secretly made choices that conflicted with that.

*8. Did this book encourage you to pursue any topics further through more reading, research, action, etc., and if so, how?*

This book actually encouraged me to read *Apple in the Middle*, which was also on the Perspectives Bibliography under Race & Ethnicity. I really enjoyed that both books were about young teenage girls struggling to family expectations and finding their own identity.

*9. What type of reader (based on age, interests, perspectives, etc.) would you suggest this book to?*

I would suggest that any young adult who is interested in realistic fiction as well as some elements of mystery would enjoy this book as Julia works simultaneously to uncover the secrets that her sister was hiding and who she truly is.

*10. What other book(s) have you read that you think would make a good addition to this category of the Perspectives Bibliography, and why?*

Another book that would make a good addition to the Race & Ethnicity category of the Perspectives Bibliography is "The Book of Unknown Americans" by Cristina Henríquez. It is the story of several Latino immigrant families who settle in Delaware and struggle with the challenges of assimilation, discrimination, and missing their homes.