HISTORIAS DE LA FRONTERA:

USING CRITICAL LATINX BORDER CULTURAL STUDIES THEORY TO EXPLORE THE LATINX IDENTITY OF THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER IN COMIC BOOKS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, Mexican immigration is constantly a hot topic in the news and within politics, and it is also found in various forms of media and popular culture. Within this research project, I focus on one of those forms of popular culture, comics and graphic novels. I use a new theoretical approach called Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory, which intersects Critical Race Theory, Latino/a Critical Race Theory, Latina/o Critical Communication Theory, and Border Studies into a theoretical approach. Using Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory I analyze fifteen comic books and graphic novels, (*Holyoke One Shot-U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5* [1944]; *The Border Patrol* [1951]; *Guía Del Migrante Mexicano* [2004]; *Migra Mouse: Political Cartoons on Immigration* [2004]; *I.C.E. Immigration and Customs Enforcement* [2013]; *The Punisher: Border Crossing* [2015]; *Rendez-vous in Phoenix* [2016]; *El Peso Hero: Border Stories* [2016]; *Barrier* [2018]; *Border Town* [2018]; *El Peso Hero: Border Land* [2019]; *The Scar: Graphic Reportage from the U.S.-Mexico Border* [2019]; *Red Border* [2020]; *The Other Side of the Border* [2020]; *Home* [2021]) that focus on centrally on immigration, Mexican immigration into the U.S. through an analysis of the visuals, storylines, characters, and language, I discuss a variety of themes of Latinx identity, representation, and border immigration found within these comic books using textual analysis, visual rhetoric, and narratology as my methodological approaches. The themes found within this project revolve around Border Narratives, Latinx Representation and Characters of the Border, Use of Language, Cultural Signifiers, Gender Roles of the Border, White Saviors and Militants, Violence and Brutality, and finally, the Reinforced Negative Stereotypes. By doing this research, I want to bring awareness to the lack of representation of Latinx identity in both comic books and academia, and issues such as border immigration within comic book storytelling.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. Grandpa and Grandma, thank you both for looking down on me and providing guidance from above. You both are seriously my angels. To my mother, without you I would not be here. Thank you for supporting me and helping me in every step of this process. I do not think I could ever properly write enough to truly show how thankful, grateful, and appreciative I am for all you have done for me. Vivian and Alice, thank you for all your love and support! I cannot thank you all enough for all you have done for my mom and I. I love you all so much and hope I made you all proud.

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This dissertation es para mi raza, para mi cultura, para mi gente. I am proud to be a Mexican American and proud to be from the border. I hope that I represented and continue to represent my culture and people with respect, pride, and love.

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Contributors

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All other work conducted for the dissertation was completed by the student independently.

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INTRODUCTION

> Growing up between border towns, one is surrounded by things that connect and divide. For all the recent talk of building a structure to further divide the United States-Mexico border, a rust-colored, 18-foot-high fence has separated El Paso and Juárez for close to a decade. Before that, shorter chain linked fences separated the two cities while sandwiching the Rio Bravo—also known, depending on perspective, as the Rio Grande. Both terms have become ironic nomenclature for a concrete riverbed that, in the middle of the desert, is waterless for most of the year. International bridges connect that artificial divide; it's artificial only because border towns, though in different countries, are more alike to one another than they are different (Franco, 2017).

The In-Between of the Border

Being from a border town is a whole different experience; it is a culture and lifestyle on its own. I am always reminded of the quote from Edward James Olmos in the film *Selena* (1997), "Being Mexican American is tough… We've gotta be twice as perfect as everybody else…We gotta be more Mexican than the Mexicans and more American than the Americans, both at the same time. It's exhausting!" Author and editor Sergio Tronosco (2021) describes this feeling as *nepantla*, which is the Nahuatl word for the middle or the concept of in-betweenness. *Nepantla* identity in the U.S.-Mexico border area is represented within various media, including comic books.

When audiences think of comic books, many think of the magazine as a medium filled with colorful illustrations and stories featuring super powered characters. In most cases, audiences are correct as most mainstream comic books are of the superhero genre. Similar to other mediums of popular culture, comic books have multiple genres and stories outside the typical superhero character. Authors like Tony Sandoval, Brian K. Vaughan and Marcos Martin, and Jason Starr decided to step out of conventional comic book storytelling and decided to focus

on narratives around the U.S.-Mexico border. Of course, there are authors like Hector Rodriguez III and Julio Anta, who did use the superhero motif, but these authors decided to make their character Latinx and immigrants, who use their superpowers to help other Latinx immigrants. I will get into more detail with each of the titles I am describing later in my introduction and throughout my dissertation. With that being said, these are the types of comic books and graphic novel stories I focused on within my dissertation. For this project, I want to investigate the representation of the U.S.-Mexico border and Latinx identity found within comic books and graphic novels that are set in this area. Before I discuss U.S.-Mexico border comic books further, it is necessary to share some personal insight and relevant data about the U.S.-Mexico border.

Defining Borders and Borderlands

According to Oscar J. Martinez (1998), a ***border*** is a line that separates one nation from another. He defines a borderland as a region that lies adjacent to the border. Johnson (2012) defines a border as "material spaces and symbolic constructions that regulate and reflect cultural citizenship and belonging" (p. 33). A third definition of the border is from Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), who defines the border as "a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge." Anzaldúa also describes a borderland as, "a vague and underdetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (p. 3-4). Furthermore, Anzaldúa creates a theoretical framework of the borderlands as a site of resistance in order to decolonize one's inner self, and the formation of identity as identity is constantly shifting and reshaping itself on the border (Naples, 2010; Nasser, 2021). Within Anzaldúa's work, she discusses and analyzes terms such as the "new mestiza" (the new mixed race), "mestiza consciousness" (mixed race consciousness), and "nepantla" (the in-between space), and borders not only as physical spaces, but also as systems of exclusion and difference. For this dissertation,

I will be using all three of these definitions of borders. The creators of the comics that I analyze discuss borders in a variety of ways, including geographically and metaphorically.

There are four types of borderlands: (1) alienated borderlands, (2) coexistent borderlands, (3) interdependent borderlands, and (4) integrated borderlands (O. J. Martinez, 1998). Alienated borderlands are borders that are mainly closed and cross-border interaction is almost absent. Coexistent borderlands have borders that are slightly open, which allows for limited binational interactions. Interdependent borderlands consist of friendly and cooperative relationships between the two regions that generally tend to help each other economically and socially. Finally, integrated borderlands are where neighboring nations eliminate major political differences to coexist peacefully and mutually through economic trade and social interactions.

The U.S.-Mexico border can be imagined as an interdependent borderland, considering that both countries have a long and established history of shared social relationships, cultures, and an economic trade. Gonlin et al. (2020) defines the U.S.-Mexico border as a key site of international and national disputes. The border has a long history of established Latinx communities and is an area where immigration and border policing are highly common. There are four states from the United States that make up the U.S.-Mexico border: California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas (O. J. Martinez, 1998; National Museum of American History & U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2021). Anzaldúa (1987) describes the U.S.-Mexico border as, “una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country — a border culture” (p. 25).

Border culture is another term that is important to highlight as it signifies the traits, influence, and distinctiveness from the border that make up the lives of those who live on the

border (O. J. Martinez, 1998). They share a unique culture, traditions (holidays, values, customs), cross-borrowing language, religion, foods, clothing, architecture, and more. According to Martinez (1998), the U.S.-Mexico border consists of a variety of ***border people*** who self-identify in multiple ways, including as Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Anglo-Americans. These are variations in the extent to which border people exude border culture through their lived realities. With the growing number of migrants from Central America, it is important to include them also in the definition of the border people. While Central American migrants might not technically be from the U.S.-Mexico border area, they play a central and key part in present day border dynamics due to their increasing presence on the U.S.-Mexico border.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2020), there are 60.6 million Latinos in the United States. Additionally, that same study noted that 18.5% of the nation's population is Latinx. The southern border of the United States is a persistent topic in the news media and within politics. Media representations focus on issues such as immigration, migrants, drug smuggling, and human trafficking. Mexicans are the largest foreign-born group in the United States, with 10,932,000 immigrants in 2020, which is 24% of the 45 million foreign-born residents in the U.S. (Israel & Batalova, 2020). Between 2016 and 2017, the Mexican immigrant population shrunk by about 300,000, from 11.6 million to 11.3 million as more Mexican immigrants returned to Mexico than migrated to the United States. In 2018, apprehensions of Mexicans at the U.S.-Mexico border were at a 40-year low (Lopez et al., 2018; Zong & Batalova, 2018). Moreover, Mexico is also no longer the top origin country among the most recent immigrants to the United States, as numbers of immigrants from Central American countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (also known as the Northern Triangle) continue to rise. Furthermore, newer immigrants from Mexico are more likely to be individuals

who are college graduates and have a stronger command of the English language in comparison to those who arrived in prior decades (Dinan, 2019; Zong & Batalova, 2018). These points are significant as they counter many of the stereotypes and preconceived notions that many have regarding immigrants from the Mexican border. Additionally, these facts showcase the change in cultural and demographic populations of the borderlands showing an increased number of Central American migrants compared to Mexican migrants. Yet, it is important to note that the United States is still encountering more migrants than they have in the past 20 years (Mayorkas, 2021).

In 2016, political tensions between the U.S. and Mexico heightened with then U.S. President Donald Trump constantly mocking Mexican immigrants with hateful rhetoric such as, "They're sending people that have lots of problems, and bringing those problems with us. and "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists." (Reilly, 2016). In addition to this, a significant point of Donald Trump's political campaign promise was to build a long physical border wall between the U.S. and Mexico to reduce the amount of people crossing the border. This type of rhetoric did not help with deeply problematic racial stereotypes about immigrants from the southwest as people who deplete the U.S. of its resources, "steal" jobs from White Americans, erode national U.S. culture, serve as drug dealers, and are criminals. Words such as "alien" and "illegal" are often used to describe them (Nadler & Voyles, 2020).

As the world changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so did the lives of those who are migrating from the southwest border. In March of 2021, more than 171,000 migrants were caught trying to cross into the U.S. from Mexico (Al Jazeera News, 2021). Families migrating were being apprehended and children were forcibly separated from their parents or had to migrate on their own without their families. According to the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services (2021), the highest number of child migrants in these care facilities was 20,339, which was in April 2021; that number has since gone down to 15,104 as of July 2021. In Texas alone, there are more than 40 facilities that house unaccompanied migrant children. Due to a declaration order made by Texas Governor Greg Abbott, these facilities have begun to operate without state licenses, which means that they are largely unregulated (García, 2021). Many of the facilities on the border became crowded. Due to lack of social distancing and other measures to protect themselves from the COVID-19 virus, many families had to be sent back across the U.S.-Mexico border, depending on the capacity at the holding facilities and shelters (Caldwell, 2021). In addition to being crowded, many of these federal facilities were found to have substandard conditions: they are cold, filthy, lacking cleaning materials, and often serve raw chicken as the only source of food for hungry child migrants (García, 2021). Furthermore, in September 2021, various members of the U.S. Border Patrol were caught wielding cords and using whips on Haitian migrants that were at an encampment site under a bridge on the U.S.-Mexico border around Del Rio, Texas and Ciudad Acuna, Mexico (Al Jazeera News, 2021). This sparked an outrage with many people over social media calling for the U.S. government to defund the border patrol after witnessing the mistreatment of these migrants.

Unfortunately, the situation within Mexican media is not too different as they also treat migrants unfairly and are exploitative within their media coverage as well. In a recent investigation made by Mexican television channel Telemundo's news reporter, Damià Bonmatí (2021) interviewed 30 male and female migrants who were kidnapped in Mexico from 2019 to 2021. Many of these migrants were returned to Mexico after trying to cross the border into the United States, only to be kidnapped and tortured by various criminal groups and cartels. According to Bonmatí, the cartel and Mexican criminal groups would make $600 to $20,000 per

capture and have taken over shelters in order to see who they could capture and exploit next. Bonmatí also states that since January 2022, about 6,356 migrants have been victims of kidnappings, abuse, rape, or some form of an attack. Unfortunately, these are the lived realities for many migrants who are treated horribly when all they are searching for is a better life for their families and themselves.

Popular Culture and Border Representation

One of the earliest forms of Latinx representation in film was D.W. Griffith's *The Greasers Gauntlet* (1908), which narrative revolves around a "greaser" getting lynched by mob of Anglo-Americans (Alonzo, 2009). Similar to D.W. Griffith's *Birth of the Nation* (1915), Griffith did not include people of color in his film, the Mexican or greaser character in the film is performed by a White male in brown face (Aldama & Gonzalez, 2019). In his book, *Badmen, Bandits, and Folk Heroes,* Juan Alonzo (2009) analyzes Mexican American identity in film and in one of his chapters he analyzes *The Greasers Gauntlet* along with the writings of Stephen Crane in order to break down the greaser stereotype. Alonzo states early forms of Latinx representation included terms like "coward" and "greaser" (2009, p. 25). The term greaser comes from the stereotype that Mexicans were greasy individuals and all aspects of their lives were filled with grease and filth. Within his chapter on *The Greaser Gauntlet* and Crane's writings, Alonzo discusses how the two forms of media challenge Mexican representation in early popular culture by transforming negative stereotypes within their work including making the greaser character perform heroic deeds. This was just the beginning of many instances where popular culture portrayals of Latinx individuals would be stereotyped negatively and underrepresented. The under-representation and stereotypically negative depictions of Latinx people lead those

who do not understand the culture or have direct contact with it to develop prejudicial beliefs (Aldama & Gonzalez, 2019).

Ramirez-Berg (2002) mentions that throughout the history of Latinx imagery in cinema that there are six basic stereotypes: el bandido, the harlot, the male buffoon, the female clown, the Latin lover, and the dark lady. Within my analysis, I focus on two of these stereotypes which are el bandido and the harlot. El bandido is commonly showcased in Western and adventure films as a Mexican bandit, whose roots are closely tied to the villainous greaser stereotype. Within the comics, the bandito is again a villainous character that harasses and steals from migrants. The second stereotype found within my analysis is the harlot. Similar to the bandido, the harlot is mainly seen in Western films as a secondary character, who is hot-tempered, flirty, and has lust-filled ambitions (Ramirez-Berg, 2002). In the comic books analyzed, the harlot is showcased in a modernized fashion and is represented as a sex worker, specifically a prostitute from Mexico. Occasionally, these stereotypes intersect or are altered in some capacity, but continue to remain demeaning. Throughout media history, representations of the U.S.-Mexico border has been characterized by stereotypical portrayals in films, television shows, songs, podcasts, and other forms of popular culture. Aldama & Gonzalez (2019) state, “Time and time again in TV and films, we’re seen crossing from somewhere south of the U.S.-Mexico border.”

Television shows like *Modern Family* (2009), *Cristela* (2014), *Jane the Virgin* (2014), and *The Bridge* (2013) all focus on the subject matter of immigration or a person who has migrated across the border. Additionally, films that focus on the border are *Under the Same Moon* (2007), *El Norte* (1983), *Sleep Dealer* (2008), *Desierto* (2015), *Sin Nombre* (2009), *Real Women Have Curves* (2002), *A Better Life* (2011), among others. In her chapter of *Border Rhetorics,* Demo (2012) mentions and analyzes how immigrants are represented through

documentaries and how they are used for advocacy efforts. She lists around 24 documentaries focusing on immigration and the U.S.-Mexico border. While there are a substantial amount of media relating to the U.S-Mexico, there are only a limited number of comic books that tackle this subject matter.

Aldama and Gonzalez (2019) go on to mention how the border-crossing narrative is often portrayed in a dramatic and politically timely type of storyline. They argue that it is a common trope found in Latinx media because it is a profitable one for many studios. Many of the stigmas and stereotypes against immigrants from the southwest U.S.-Mexico border still lingers throughout these examples of U.S. media and popular culture including within comic books.

Comics Studies

Comic studies is one of the fastest growing areas of scholarship within academia as it focuses on various academic disciplines, and at times, the intersections of multiple disciplines (Beaty & Hatfield, 2021). While it is a growing discipline, there continue to be debates among critics, scholars, and fans whether the medium can be considered literature, art, and worthy of scholarly attention (Ndalianis, 2011; Labio, 2011; Mitchell, 2014; Beatty, 2012; Beaty & Hatfield, 2021).

In 1964, historian Richard Kyle created the term "graphic novel" as a way to distinguish the term "comic books," which is generally used for comic periodicals and trade paperbacks from longer anthologized work (Schelly, 2010). Graphic novels changed the landscape of how audiences and academics viewed the genre of comic books. While many still consider comic books to be for children or just to be "funny books," comic creators like Art Spiegelman, Alan Moore and Chris Ware have challenged this stereotype and the validity of comics as literature with their critically acclaimed works. Spiegelman, who wrote the critically acclaimed graphic

novel, *Maus* (1991) won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992, a- prestigious award that is typically given to those in newspaper and online journalism, or literature in the United States ("Art Spiegelman," 2014). In 1986, Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons created *Watchmen* which has since been named one of *TIME* magazine's 100 greatest all time novels, becoming the only graphic novel or comic related book on the list (Grossman, 2010). Despite the achievements these authors have made within changing the perspective of comic books, negative attitudes towards the medium still exist.

Comic books are a medium that are older than most popular forms of media such as film, television, social media, and video games. Yet, there is still hesitation towards the medium as to whether it should be considered a serious form of art or literature or even as a worthy area of scholarly research. During the early years of comics, many people had a negative attitude towards the medium and believed that comics were the lowest form of popular culture only meant for children (Ndalianis, 2011). In 1954, psychiatrist Fredric Werthram published a highly influential and controversial book called *Seduction of the Innocent*. Werthram claimed that comics featured violence and questionable sexual exploits, which encouraged youth to imitate such behavior (Werthram, 2004; Heer & Worcester, 2009). The author went on to mention how children would be corrupted by imagery featuring flesh-eating zombies, by the bondage illustrations that filled the pages of *Wonder Woman* comic books, and the homosexual references in DC Comics' *Batman and Robin*. By today's standards, many see and critique Werthram's arguments as paranoid and even manipulative (Tilley, 2012).

The University Press of Mississippi was the first to publish scholarly books about comic books in the 1990s. This led other universities and commercial presses to follow suit and publish academic work on comics (Ndalianis, 2011). A book that is considered one of the most

influential books about the study of comics is Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) is considered to be a significant book for comic book scholars, as it dives into the inner workings of the comic book medium, examining both the textual and visual forms of communication within comic books. McCloud has written two other books that are also about comic books, *Reinventing Comics* (2000) and *Making Comics* (2006). *Reinventing Comics* explains how technology has changed the comic book format in terms of creating, distributing, and reading comics. *Making Comics* discusses the writing and illustrative processes that McCloud feels will make the reader or comic creator a better storyteller.

Another influential comic writer is Will Eisner, who is most famously known for creating the comic character The Spirit, also wrote about analyzing comic books in a much richer and deeper way. Eisner wrote two books, *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (1996) which both dive into the depths of examining the narrative and fundamentals of comic book storytelling similar to how McCloud does with his work. Eisner also helped bring the term "graphic novel" to prominence with his 1978 book, *A Contract With God and Other Tenement Stories.* Eisner and McCloud are two authors who are constantly mentioned within comic related literature due to their early influence on comic studies (Ndalianis, 2011; Howes, 2010; Meskin, 2007; Carleton, 2014).

Comic studies continues to grow with journals now dedicated to this field of research such as: *Comics Journal* (1977)*, The International Journal of Comic Art* (1999)*, ImageText* (2004)*, Image & Narrative* (2000)*, European Comic Art* (2008), the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* (2010)*,* and *The Comics Grid* (2011)*.* Additionally, comic studies is branching out to broader subjects with other journals such as *The Journal of Popular Culture* (1968)*, Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* (2014)*,* and the *Chiricu*

Journal: Latina/o Literatures, Arts, and Cultures (2016) just to name a few. Furthermore, universities like Bowling Green University, Portland State University, and Michigan State University are just a few programs that offer degrees related to comic studies or the comic arts. This goes to show how comic studies continue to grow out into various disciplines within academia.

Along with academic journals and writings, comic studies conferences around the United States have also become more common. One of the annual conferences, Comics Arts Conference (CAC) is held either during *San Diego Comic Con* or *WonderCon* in Anaheim, California. CAC is held for three days and is filled with academic panels that discuss the research being done within the comic book medium. Smith describes comic studies as "...a very loose field defined more by the object of study than by the strategies and theories used to analyze that object" and "...because comic studies is a field that is still defining itself, it attracts scholars from a wide range of disciplines..." (2010, p. 91). These conferences and groups are important to mention as they promote and encourage comic book related scholarship, and to demonstrate the growing significance of comic books in popular culture. While comic studies is growing quickly within academia, there are still a limited number of comic books that tackle the U.S.-Mexico border and scholarship relating to it.

The Importance of Comic Books

Comic books have stood the test of time from their first modern serialized publications in 1933 to widespread distribution in the twenty-first century (Kantor & Maslon, 2013). Additionally, comic books have expanded into graphic novels, which have many definitions including a collection of periodical comics and book-length comic stories where the content is targeted towards a more mature (teenage or adult) demographic due to the stories having

complex and often lengthy storylines (Short & Reeves, 2009). For many decades, comic books have continued to be published and most recently in digital formats. Through digital formats, readers can collect their comic books through applications like Amazon's Comixology, Marvel Unlimited, and DC Universe. These applications have current and past comic books, graphic novels, and other comic books that are now hard to find in print due to how old they are. Comic books have not only become digital but with time have taken over popular culture and various facets of media. Comic book related media has become a billion-dollar industry in various aspects, including comic-related television shows, movies, podcasts, clothing, action figures/collectibles, conventions, and so much more (Burke, 2015; Jackson & Staff, 2019; Salkowitz, 2019).

Mainstream comic book conventions like San Diego Comic Con, New York Comic Con, and Emerald City Comic Con have massive amounts of attendees from around the world. In 2019, San Diego Comic Con, the largest comic and popular culture convention in the world, attracted 130,000 attendees from over 30 countries, while New York Comic Con recorded even more attendees in 2018 with 250,000 (Hersko et al., 2021; Reid, 2018). This comic book convention attracts the biggest film, television show, and popular culture related events and announces news or showcases footage of the media. While Latinx comic conventions are much smaller in scale, they showcase various artists, writers, and creators who are Latinx and creating comic books and media related to Latinx stories. Examples of Latinx comic conventions are Mexamericon in Austin, Texas, Texas Latino Comic Con in Dallas, Texas, and the Latino Comics Expo and Chicano Con in California.

In 2019, *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) became the highest-grossing film of all time, as the film earned $2.789 billion globally (Jackson & Staff, 2019). The highest grossing film, which is

a comic book film, had little to no representation of Latinx characters. Latinx actress Zoe Saldana does appear in *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*, but she is the alien character "Gamora." Calafell (2015) and Lechuga et al. (2018) describe how Latinx individuals, especially immigrants are being compared and symbolized through monsters and aliens in various popular culture media. It is important to state the underrepresentation of Latinx folks found within this comic book film, because racial and cultural representation matter. Comic book films like *Black Panther* (2018) and *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* were not only fresh of breath air, well reviewed films, but they also made a lasting statement as they focused on people and characters of color throughout the film, including the lead characters. People of color could resonate with various characters found in these two films. Unfortunately for Latinx folks, we do not have that character yet. Based on the USC Annenberg Inclusion Institute, there were 4.9% Latinx characters included in 1,300 popular films from 2007-2019 (S. L. Smith et al., 2020). This number went down 0.4% when this study was done last in 2019 (S. L. Smith et al., 2019). Besides representation being incredibly important, as of 2019, Latinx consumers spend $1.7 trillion and account for 25% of movie tickets sold, yet are still underrepresented on screen (Cordero & Cordero, 2021).

On a positive note, DC Comics films plans to expand and diversify their films even further by including Latinx actors in various roles such as Xolo Maridueña, who is of Mexican, Cuban, and Ecuadorian heritage, in the *Blue Beetle* film (2023); Colombian actress Sasha Calle in *The Flash* (2022) as Supergirl, and Dominican-American actress Leslie Grace as Batgirl in the *Batgirl* solo film (2022) (D'Alessandro, 2021; H. Gonzalez, 2021; U. Gonzalez, 2021). With that being said, both Marvel and DC Comics films are slowly trying to include diverse representation on all fronts including race, but this scarcity and underrepresentation that is found within popular

culture also appears within comic books. It is rare to see a Latinx character lead their own mainstream comic book series, as most of them are side characters and villains.

Latinx comic book creator Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez states, “Combined, there are possibly close to 30,000 characters, heroes and villains, at both Marvel and DC. Of that, there probably are about 3% that are Latinx” (La Jeuneese, 2019). Miranda-Rodriguez was not far off with his estimate as Latinx creators are underrepresented within mainstream comic books, with less than 10% of creators being Latinx in all three major comic book companies DC, Marvel, and Image (Shannon, 2015). Another reason why Latinx characters are scarce is due to cancellations of their comic series. An example is *America* (2017); it was a critically acclaimed comic book series from Marvel Comics that featured a queer Latina, America Chavez. Unfortunately, the series was short-lived due to low sales (Dennis, 2018).

The first mainstream Latinx comic book superhero is Puerto Rican character, Hector Ayala aka the “White Tiger” who was first introduced in December 1975 and was created by Bill Mantlo and George Perez (Aldama, 2017; Beard, 2019). While the character had a historic run with Marvel comics, he was wrongly convicted of murder and later killed off. Hector Ayala might have had a tragic ending, but there are plenty of Latinx characters that have since appeared in comic books. In 2011, Brian Michael Bendis introduced the world to a new Spider-Man that is a bi-racial (African American and Latinx) character by the name of Miles Morales (Whitbrook, 2015). A positive example of Latinx representation in comics and comic book films, the newest Spider-Man represents how a young minority character can receive mainstream representation within comic book related media.

Miles Morales was created to racially diversify the comic book landscape and to represent multiple demographics of comic book readers (Hackett, 2017). With a scarcity in

minority representation in comic books and comic book media, there should be more racially diverse characters that truly represent the racial background and culture with which they identify. Awareness of the Afro-Latino character grew even more as he was the lead character of the award-winning 2018 film, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse.* The film went on to win a Golden Globe and Academy award for best animated film, as it was highly acclaimed by critics praising the film's use of representation, animation style and writing (*2019 Golden Globes Winners List – Variety*, 2019; *What Latino Critics Are Saying About 'Spider-Man*, 2018; *Winners*, 2019). Both Morales and the film were important as they highlighted diversity in comic book media. Miles Morales is one of the few success stories regarding Latinx representation in comic books and comic films. Other Latinx characters do not have that kind of success.

Independent comic book publishers and fans are creating their own diverse characters, including Latinx characters. A great example of a creator owned series is Javier Hernandez's *El Muerto: The Aztec Zombie* on his own independent label, Los Comex (Aldama, 2009) El Muerto (2008) is an independent title from Hernandez that is about a young man who dies on his birthday, the Day of the Dead, and becomes the Aztec god of death, Mictlantecuhtli (Hernandez, n.d.). In 2007, an independent film inspired by the comic book was released and starred Wilmer Valderrama as the title character (El Muerto - Echo Bridge Entertainment, 2012). A second example of an independent Latinx comic book creator is the Los Bros Hernandez (Mario, Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez), who created the 1980s cult classic comic series, *Love and Rockets* (Aldama, 2009; Aldama, 2017). *Love and Rockets* is a series that steps away from the superhero genre and looks at Latinx culture, masculinity, LGBTQ representation, and punk rock (Garcia, 2017). It is also a positive thing to see that more minority groups are making their own independent comic books and popular culture conventions.

With all this being said, literature regarding Latinx representations in comic book media is scarce but essential nonetheless, as it showcases the importance of representation, diversity, and inclusion. Comic books have long been a medium tackling the issue of immigration as many writers and scholars consider characters like Superman, Wonder Woman, Storm, and Wolverine to be undocumented immigrants as they are not from the United States (Glass, 2017; Gordon et al., 2001; Panginda & Yang, 2016; Raphael, 2017). Yet, the U.S.-Mexico border is still a topic that has not been truly in the forefront of comic book story arcs. The next section will discuss and briefly summarize the comic books that will be analyzed in this academic research.

The Comic Books Examined in the Present Study

Through a dense and deep dive into research, I was able to find eleven comic books and four graphic novels that focus on Latinx identity and/or border representation in the U.S.-Mexico region. This section will summarize each of these comic books and graphic novels and will be structured in chronological order. The first comic book to be discussed was published in 1944 by Holyoke Comics released a single-issue comic (also known as a "one-shot") called *U.S. Border Patrol Comics No. 5*. This comic book features various short stories, but the main story I will be focusing on is the U.S. Border Patrol story as the other short stories do not focus on that subject matter. Finally, I was able to find Border *Patrol* (1951) which was a Canadian comic book of short stories with different characters inspired by the western frontier but set on the U.S.-Mexico border including regions from Arizona.

Both *U.S. Border Patrol Comics No. 5* (1944) and *The Border Patrol* (1951) comic books were incredibly difficult to find as they are the two oldest comic books from the group of comics I am analyzing for this project, and they are out of print. Very few digital issues of these comic books are online and I was able to read them using a comic book database, ComicBookPlus.com.

When researching and stumbling upon this comic book series, I thought it would be fascinating to analyze this comic book and compare it to most of the other comic books which are modern/present-day interpretations of the U.S.-Mexico border in order to see if there are any common threads between all the comic books in how this region is represented.

The *Guía del Migrante Mexicano* (The Guide of the Mexican Migrant) was created in 2004 by the Mexican Department of Foreign Affairs as a way for Mexican emigrants to be informed on how to cross the northern border illegally. The book seems to be a weird combination of satirical, informational, and propaganda-like guide that is meant to encourage emigrants to enter the United States the safe way by obtaining your passport from the Mexican foreign ministry, and a visa from the embassy or consulate of the country to which you wish to travel. This was another comic book I was shocked to learn about as I would never have expected the Mexican government to create such a document. On a much different note, *Migra Mouse: Political Cartoons on Immigration* (2004) is a collection of humorous and emotional stories and comic strips based on the childhood of author Lalo Alcaraz and his experience living on the United States/Mexico border with his Mexican family.

The next comic book series analyzed was by independent publisher 12 Gauge comics, *I.C.E.: Immigration and Customs Enforcement* (2013) by Doug Wagner. The series is a four-issue story that focuses on Cole Matai, who is the leader of an I.C.E. agent group, and his battle with Luis Morales who is a Mexican drug cartel kingpin. When I first stumbled upon this comic, I was in complete shock that a comic like this existed, but I felt that it was necessary for it to be included as it brings a different perspective of border representation and Latinx identity in comic books. At the end of each of the *I.C.E.* comic books, the comic had an advertisement stating, "The sold-out controversial series collected for the first time!" (Wagner, 2013). This statement

fascinated me as it even advertised itself as "controversial." The subject matter of the *I.C.E.* comic is controversial as it focuses on a group on which many, especially within the Latinx community are divided . On top of that, the amount of violence, gore, and brutality found in this comic book is extreme. This will be discussed further in the analysis portion of this project.

The next comic series I focused on are two independent titles from Rio Bravo Comics called *El Peso Hero: Border Stories* (2015) and *El Peso Hero: Border Land* (2019) both comics are written by Hector Rodriguez III. *El Peso Hero* are "one-shot" single stories that tell the story of a Mexican superhero, who Rodriguez III calls a Norterño (a native of northern Mexico) superhero. El Peso Hero helps Mexican immigrants and undocumented children who are facing various challenges such as crossing the border, being held in detention facilities, and dealing with the border patrol or customs agents. One of the few mainstream comic books I found was Marvel's *The Punisher: Border Crossing* (2015) [1]. Written by Nathan Edmondson and Kevin Maurer, it focuses on Frank Castle who is captured by a South American drug lord, placed in a Mexican prison, and later crosses the U.S.-Mexico border. *Rendez-vous in Phoenix* (2016) is an autobiographical graphic novel written and illustrated by Tony Sandoval, as it tells the story of his migration from Mexico to Phoenix to be with his girlfriend from the United States.

Barrier (2018) is a science fiction five issue comic series written by Brian K. Vaughan and Marcos Martin under their independent label, Panel Syndicate. *Barrier* was later released through comic book publisher Image Comics both as single comics and a collected series or graphic novel. This comic series focuses on a rancher from the U.S. and a Honduran man trying to get into the United States. The two characters are kidnapped by aliens and must learn to work

[1] A mainstream comic book is a comic that is published and features characters from either Marvel comics or DC Comics, the two major publishers in comic books. An indie comic book is a comic book that is independently made by a smaller publishing company.

together despite their various obstacles including a language barrier in order to try and escape. *Border Town* (2018) was an on-going comic book series from DC Comics imprint Vertigo Comics by Eric Esquivel. The first issue was released on September 5, 2018 and quickly gained popularity along with positive reviews. *Border Town*'s first print run sold out and quickly went into print again to meet the demand of comic book fans (Kelly, 2018). Unfortunately, amid allegations of sexual assault on its author, DC canceled the series after four issues (Patches, 2018).

In *The Scar: Graphic Reportage from the US-Mexico Border* (2019), cartoonist Andrea Ferraris and author Renato Chiocca travel to southern Arizona to analyze the U.S.-Mexico border and the impact of the border wall in an ethnographic story. *Red Border* (2020) is an independent title written by Jason Starr and is a story about a Mexican couple who escapes the Juarez Cartel by migrating to Texas. While in the United States, they meet a family who takes the couple in. While with the family, the couple find out that the family is hiding some dark and horrific secrets of their own.

The twelfth comic book that I am analyzing is *The Other Side* (2020) by French writer Jean-Luc Fromental. It is set in Arizona in 1948, and centers around a novelist, his family, and mistress. While being in the border town, a murder occurs, thus spawning a mystery to find the killer. *Home* (2021) is a comic book from Julio Anta and focuses on a young boy and his mother seeking asylum at the U.S. border. The young boy is separated from his mother and escapes the custody of the border patrol, upon discovering he has superhuman abilities, which he uses to try to reunite with his mother. Moreover, I do want to note that there are other comics that are focused on the U.S.-Mexico border. Unfortunately, they are not available in physical or digital

formats due to them being old and out of print or not available. Therefore, I was not able to read or analyze these comic books.

Within this dissertation, I have introduced my topic and provided an overview of the U.S.-Mexico Border and Latinx representation in comic books. The second chapter of this project will focus on scholarly literature about the U.S.-Mexico border, Latinx representation in comic books, and the theoretical approach I am using for this project, Latina/o Critical Communication Theory. My methodology section will focus on textual analysis research, visual rhetoric, and narratology. Additionally, I discuss how I am using these methods in order to collect data for this study. The fourth chapter will focus on the various themes and categories I have found while interpreting the data I collected from analyzing the comic books selected for this study. Finally, I will end my dissertation with a summary, future implications for further research on this subject matter, and concluding statements.

My overall goal with this dissertation is to examine and inform scholars about the Latinx and border representation found within comic books focused on the U.S.-Mexico border, and showcase the need for Latinx and border representation within the comic book medium. There have been scholars who have focused on various aspects of immigration within the U.S.-Mexico border and popular culture, but they mainly focus on film, television, and music, but there has not been research focus on the U.S.-Mexico Border identity and representation found in comic books (Maciel & Herrera-Sobek, 1998; Saldívar, 1997). I want to use this dissertation as a way to fill the gap within the literature and academia as whole on Latinx and border representation, and comic book studies.

• RQ1: How is the U.S.-Mexico border represented in comic books?

• RQ2: How are Latinx immigrants represented within comic books about the U.S.-Mexico border?

• RQ3: Do these comics books about the U.S.-Mexico border reinforce or challenge Latinx immigrant stereotypes?

With this dissertation, I hope to contribute to the academy in a variety of ways including expanding on research in Latinx communication studies, border studies, media studies, race and cultural studies, and comic studies. A study like this is significant in its contributions towards academia, comic studies and communication research as there is a large population of Latinx people in the U.S. yet there is a lack of representation of Latinx community in comic books. Furthermore, there is an absence of research on comic book media as comic studies are a growing field in communication scholarship and academia. Finally, there is a major gap of literature on immigration and border studies in comic book scholarship.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Introduction to Border Studies

One of the central topics of this study is the U.S.-Mexico border and the use of border studies within my dissertation analysis. Border studies is a broad subject as many scholars focus on borders from all over the world and subject matters regarding the border including immigrants, border patrol and policies (Bruno & Bruno, 2016; Dyrness & Sepulveda III, 2020; Heuman & Gonzalez, 2018; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Osorio, 2018). In addition, border studies is an interdisciplinary topic that has been discussed in a variety of ways. Within this literature review, I will focus on how scholars have discussed the border in politics and history, Gloria Anzaldúa's work, border centric research, language, visual representation, immigrants and the media, border studies and popular culture, and more.

Border Politics and History

Politics within the border is a topic that is highly analyzed as scholars focus on the disputes of political leaders regarding the U.S.-Mexico border, border relations and public diplomacy, policy and activism, and conflict resolution to help separated children get back to their families (Barron, 2021; Berman, 2020; M. Chavez & Hoewe, 2010; Richmond, 2011). Other subjects of scholarship include an intersection of gender studies and border studies with topics such as: sexual abuse on the U.S.-Mexico border, the treatment of women in maquiladoras, women facing homelessness on the border, indigenous women seeking asylum at the border, and an exploration of travelers' experiences of gender-based misconduct on the U.S.-Mexico border (Perez et al., 2021; Riva, 2021; Rogers et al., 2012; Silberg & Guendelman, 1993; Updegrove et al., 2021).

Historians also tackle the borderlands of the U.S. and Mexico as they discuss: historical fieldwork of the border discussing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), an analysis on *colonias* (colonies near the U.S.-Mexico border that have received official designation by federal and state agencies for grant money), and a discussion of the border during the Mexican American War (Bustamante, 1992; Esparaza & Donelson, 2011; R. King, 2000). This is a small sample of research done regarding the US-Mexico border from a variety of disciplines. Again, these are all important to highlight in order to showcase how scholars can discuss and examine the borderlands depending on their discipline and area of research. With all that being said, there is a gap of literature regarding the U.S.-Mexico border and Latinx representation in comic books.

Gloria Anzaldúa's Border Work

When discussing the border or border related literature it is an absolute must to include Gloria Anzaldúa and her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Anzaldúa's book uses academic writing, poems, and song lyrics to discuss identities including Latinx, sexual orientation, gender, spirituality, and the intersectionality of those traits. An argument that relates to this dissertation that Anzaldúa makes is that physical and non-physical borders are created and play a major role within these intersectional identities and to the representation of characters such as *El Peso Hero* or the characters of *Border Town*. Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa discusses various concepts such as the seven tongues that *fronteros* (people from the border) use, one of which is Chicano Spanish, which is a border tongue showcased in the Southwest region of the United States, and it is seen in many of the comic books and graphic novels analyzed within this dissertation. I understand that not all *fronteros* identify or are Chicano (people of Mexican descent born in the United States), but within the context of this

project, Chicano Spanish felt the most relevant for this dissertation. Additionally, Anzaldúa presents various terms and concepts related to border identity and representation such as being mestizo/a (mixed identity), nepantla (in-betweenness), and the idea of juggling cultures and dealing with dualistic identities, all of which are concepts I use and discuss within this dissertation. When discussing border studies, many scholars believe this to be the seminal piece of work that lays down the foundation for many border studies scholars, especially for those who live in Texas, as Anzaldúa describes being a Chicana from Texas or a Tejana in detail. Gloria Anzaldúa's work has become so influential within academic spaces that there have been conferences and societal spaces dedicated to her life and work held at Trinity University and the University of Texas at San Antonio in San Antonio, Texas, and at the University of Texas at Austin (*Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa*, n.d.).

"Scholars from various disciplines have used Anzaldúa's work in order to discuss border identity, living on the border, and intersectional identities. In a broad sense, scholars explore her work through critical cultural, feminist, and queer lenses. Such conversations are seen within *The Bridge We Call Communication: Anzaldúan Approaches to Theory, Method, and Praxis* by Hinojosa Hernandez & Gutierrez-Perez (2019). This collection includes a variety of communication research studies methods in which Anzaldúa's approaches, perspectives and theories are analyzed and critiqued through performative writing, poetry, Latinx studies, gender studies, and feminist lenses. The book explores concepts of feminism, identity, healing and pain, lived realities both in and outside of academia, all while using different approaches and methods inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa's work.

While Anzaldúa predominantly focuses on Texas borderlands, other scholars, such as Anthropologist Vélez-Ibáñez who provides a larger geographical scope of the US-Mexico

border. In his work, Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) provides a historical breakdown of how Indigenous people, Spaniards, and Mexicans decided to migrate north and from there discusses the cultural clashes Mexicans have faced as they both resist and welcome the dominant culture while living on the border. In addition, he discusses the various forms of representation and stereotypes that the media has portrayed about the U.S.-Mexico border including crime, war, and poverty. Vélez-Ibáñez provides a well-rounded historical look into life and experiences on the border. This is helpful as it provides historical context for those interested in historical and lived realities of life on the border.

Border Centric Research

Similar to Anzaldúa's work, many border scholars have cited the work of Oscar J. Martinez (1998) and his book, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands.* Martinez examines what life is like on the U.S.-Mexico border and the borderlands, and analyzes in great detail the various people that live on the border and how they exude border culture. The book is divided into three sections, The Border Phenomenon, Border Types, and The Border Experience. Martinez creates a groundwork for understanding the key locations, areas, people, values, and experiences of life on the border, all of which is relevant to this research project. . Martinez's work plays a crucial role in this research project as it provides plenty of detailed experiences of the U.S.-Mexico border and those who live on the border. For example, the book provides further supporting evidence and information that relates to my research project as it includes various examples of types of borders and the experiences of people who live on the border including the culture and lifestyles, and elements and forms of representation that are important for this dissertation.

A different perspective of border studies comes from Jose David Saldívar (1997) and his book, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*, where he examines theoretical approaches into various border centric experiences and forms of popular culture. At the time that this book was released, it provided a new perspective on how scholars can analyze and critique the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically border centric representation within popular culture. Saldívar has both influenced and challenged scholars who study the U.S.-Mexico border and popular culture as it showcases how academics can intersect the two and create powerful pieces of research. This book does not explore comic books and graphic novels, this became a common issue, limitation and literature gap I found throughout my research on literature regarding the U.S.-Mexico border. Comic books and border studies are two topics that have not been discussed yet within border studies scholarship or comic studies. One might assume that many scholars do not see the correlation between the two subjects and might not even realize that there are comic books discussing the U.S.-Mexico border. This project aims to fill and challenge that literature gap.

Both Martinez and Saldívar discuss the lived experiences of those who live on the border, and this conversation continues with Davidson (2002), who uses her journalist background to conduct an ethnographic study that examines the border conditions of Nogales, Arizona and Sonora, Mexico. This study examines various personal stories, the impact of maquiladoras and the economy of the border towns, and migrating across the border for both a better life and drug smuggling purposes. The author's work influences this project as it discusses the border experience and lived reality of people living on the border.

Continuing to build on the foundation from the previous scholars work on borderland experiences, Gonlin et al. (2020) discuss race as a multidimensional social construct and

examines how Latinx experiences along the U.S.-Mexico border. Race and culture are two big characteristics and features found within the U.S.-Mexico border. The authors also question the divisions that members of the Latinx community face both proximity wise and identity wise, which means that members of the Latinx community who live closer to the border feel a sense of division within their community and believe that strangers see them as a monolith due to their geographical proximity.This article proves foundational to understanding the geographical proximity of the US-Mexico border and the identity/representation found within borderland comic books and graphic novels.

While the previous scholars add foundational work to border studies and the experiences of *fronteros*, within communication studies, the U.S.-Mexico border has been discussed in a plethora of ways as communication scholars approach the borderlands from different angles. For example, scholars within communication studies focus on rhetoric found within the border including: the border being a separator both physically and symbolically, discussions and understandings of citizenship and identities, and cultural representations (DeChaine et al., 2012). In the collected volume *Latina/o/x Communication Studies*, Hinojosa Hernandez, Bowen, De Los Santos Upton, et al. (2019) present a variety of essays based on research conducted by Latinx communication scholars. Section two of this collection is dedicated to Latinx border studies and includes work that discusses border identity, border representations through Mexican political cartoons, and activism. Furthermore, this collection features a chapter by Aleman, Evans-Zepeda, and Castaneda (2019), which presents the theoretical approach I am using for this study, Latina/o Critical Communication Theory. I will present more on this theoretical approach later in the literature review. A limitation within this book is the lack of media and popular culture related research within this collection. As mentioned before, there are two chapters that discuss

and analyze Latinx media representation, but that is still a small amount of work that is being showcased. While Saldivar (1997), O.J. Martinez (1998), Gonlin et al. (2020) all discuss border centric experiences and life on the borderlands, and DeChaine et al. (2012) and Hinojosa Hernandez, et al. (2019) center their focus on border rhetoric and begin to focus on popular culture.

Visual Representations of the Border

As I began to analyze the comic books and graphic novels for this dissertation, it became apparent that visual representations are a key factor within my data collection. Upon doing research for this dissertation, I found significant studies that would lay out various forms of visual representations of the border. Dorsey & Diaz-Barriga (2010) analyze the visual representations of the U.S.-Mexico border presented in various forms of media including *Time Magazine* and *National Geographic*. These media representations are usually shown to be lifeless, desolate, and militaristic instead of vibrant cultural communities. Through their argument, the authors anthropologically approach the project with their own photos to better represent the U.S.-Mexico border. Vila (2013) conducts his study using the "photo-interviewing" method to interview people and see how they construct lived realities and identities of the U.S.-Mexico border. As the interviewer, Vila would show the group he is interviewing various photographs in order to initiate a discussion about life and identity on the border. The author learned this process was more difficult than originally expected. Participants shared their understanding of reality when viewing the photographs and they were different interpretations all based on their own cultural construction; thus leading to different identity constructions of the border.

Moreover, infrastructures are used as symbolic communicative tropes for social belonging and citizenship on the U.S.-Mexico border (Erdener, 2021). The author examines infrastructures as tools for managing populations of migrants and refugees. The author discussed the legal and technical infrastructural systems that led to separation and mistreatment of families and children on the U.S.-Mexico border. Similar to Erdener, Morrissey (2021) explores meaning making through semiotics on the border, but this time around, the artifacts are two art installations on the California and Mexico border. According to the author, borders are "vital assemblages" on how we should act on and in the world. Additionally, one of the ways borders are theorized and defined as being "in a constant state of being made and remade through the emerging, ongoing, and dynamic relationships between people, language, and physical space."

The use of semiotics on the U.S.-Mexico border continues as Leza (2018) explores the representation of Indigenous culture on the border, specifically Arizona and Mexico. The article analyzes how indigenous border activists advocate for public policies to protect the Native rights of indigenous communities on the border. In addition, these activists explore how to create indigenized spaces for the community to share their political beliefs and experiences. While these uses of semiotics stray away from the topic of this paper, I do believe these are important subjects to cover as these are all different forms of representation of the U.S.-Mexico border that people might not be aware of. Costley (2020) examines virtual semiotics through online vigilantes who are part of an anti-immigrant group called the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps in the Arizona-Mexico borderlands. Within the article, a former member of the anti-immigrant group stated that their purpose is to assist the government with border security when it is weak. An interesting point made within the piece is that these "vigilantes" will likely continue to increase in visibility due to new media related technology as they are able to create and control

their own self-constructed image worlds. Furthermore, while I might not use the term semiotics in my analysis, imagery and symbolism is found throughout the comics and graphic novels within this study. As these scholars discuss broader concepts of the border, they do not discuss issues such as language.

Language

Throughout the various comic books I analyzed for this dissertation, language was an important cultural signifier of Latinx and border representation. Many of these scholars do not cover the use of language within comic books or graphic novels, but they do cover the use of language on the border, which I felt tied into my research. Morales (2021) analyzes how segregation is created using linguistics in various occupations around the U.S.-Mexico border. The author focuses on monolingual speakers and bilingual speakers, specifically those bilingual speakers who know Spanish and English. Morales concludes that the widest gap in occupational segregation is between monolingual-Spanish and Spanish–English bilingual speakers within the El Paso, McAllen, and Houston areas of Texas. In other areas such as Laredo and Brownsville, the widest dissimilarity gap was between monolingual-Spanish and monolingual-English speakers. Further findings of this study conclude that segregation was most found in top-tier occupations as monolingual-Spanish speakers were non-existent, in comparison to these speakers being found much more in lower status occupations. While this study does not directly correlate with my research, it was important to include sources that discussed language. Language remains a major cultural signifier of Latino representation.

A similar conversation about language and borders both physically and digitally, Pihlaja (2020) analyzes the use of digital tools of communication such as emails and texting applications (WhatsApp). These digital communication tools showcase how intercultural asynchronous forms

of communication created complex "silences" and digital distance between the two participants conversing, thus creating a digital border. Additionally, the author explains how the businesses that use these means of communication are miles apart from one another and there is also a cultural divide/difference. With this being said, the author suggests that academics use case studies such as these to promote better intercultural competence. Also, scholars should focus on the complexities of formal language use and value each of the differences between the cultures involved.

Immigrants and Media

The U.S.-Mexico border has also been the focus of many scholars work as they analyze various aspects of border policies and immigration regarding how it is being discussed within politics and other forms of news media (Soderlund, 2007; Chavez, Whiteford, & Hoewe, 2010; Brown, 2013). Something I have found while researching literature on this particular aspect of the U.S.-Mexico border is the lack of Latinx writers analyzing this type of research. There are many scholars who focus on immigration and use framing as a theoretical approach as they discuss various news articles, news stories and media coverage discussing the subject matter (Chavez, Whiteford, & Hoewe, 2010; Brown, 2013; Soderlund, 2007; Patler and Gonzales, 2015).

Terminology is always an important issue when discussing race, and Plascencia (2009) contributes to this conversation as he analyzes the genealogy, academic uses, shared premises, and limitations of the labels "illegal" and "undocumented" regarding Mexican migrants. These terms and labels have plenty of political signifiers attached to them. Plascencia uses his research as a means of investigating the genealogy of the terms and how "illegality" has led to many of these terms. From what I have discovered and have researched thus far, this line of research is

limited and important as these terms have significant weight towards Latinx immigrant representation.

Building upon this line of research focused on Latinx immigrant representation on the border, Heuman and Gonzalez (2018) contributes to this literature by focusing on Donald Trump's tweets, speeches, and the rhetoric he uses to describe Mexican immigrants, refugees, U.S. dreamers and undocumented people who are crossing the border. In addition, the authors focus on the dangers that dreamers and undocumented people are facing with this form of rhetoric. Their analysis helps to explain how many, including government officials perceive immigrants coming from Mexico in a negative stereotypical manner. Another article that focuses on the framing of immigrants and refugees in relation to Donald Trump's rhetoric in the 2016 United States presidential election is done by Ogan, et al. (2018). They analyzed how 12 news outlets reported how immigration reform was a hot topic within the presidential election and how both presidential nominees, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump would have dealt with the issue. This piece reinforces Heuman and Gonzalez's article as many of the perceptions of immigrants discussed within their article are also discussed in Ogan, et al.'s piece. These articles are relevant to my research as they discuss the representation of immigrants from Mexico and how many who live outside of the border perceive people from the border.

Sarabia (2020) continues to contribute to Latinx immigrant representation in the media, by focusing on how various forms of media and governmental reports collected on the U.S.-Mexico border frames violence, citizen rights, and solidarity found within the borderlands. The main people that are of focus are migrants, activists, and state actors and their treatment on the border. Each of these actors have a role to play in their involvement. Immigrants are framed by enacting a notion of citizenship by not questioning their rights. If they are undocumented, they

become vulnerable and face severe punishments. Moreover, border activists and advocates aim to create a better way of understanding citizenships and the rights migrants have, but their solidarity work is limited. Mexican representatives have a state-centric mindset where nationalism is the main focus. All of the frames seem to be complicated and have no real middle ground, therefore leading to further constraints and issues amongst the parties involved. Additionally, Branton & Dunaway (2009) conducted similar work as they investigated how geographic proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border influences representation in newspapers of immigration related issues. The authors argue that the variability in coverage regarding Latinx immigration issues is higher due to the proximity to the border. One of the incentives and main reasons this is common is because of economic and financial benefits to media organizations, thus leading these outlets to cover these issues in a negative way. This continues the idea and stereotype of the immigrant threat narrative.

Furthering this discussion of Latinx immigrant representation in the media, in 2017, a lumber company called 84 Lumber released a 90-second commercial during the Super Bowl about a mother and daughter who are migrating from the U.S.-Mexico border (Galarza & Stoltzfus-Brown, 2021). The commercial garnered a lot of attention and "broke the Internet" causing a lot of audience members to tweet about the commercial. Galarza and Stoltzfus-Brown conduct an audience analysis on the tweets focusing on the hashtags #84lumber and #SuperBowl. An argument the two authors had was that the commercial's messages lead to a larger discussion and greater discourses about immigration. Further, critiques on the advertisement describe it being a mixed message narrative as it endorses illegal immigration, sometimes portrays itself as Pro-Trump, other times anti-Trump; and represents itself un-American and American. It is all based on the interpretation one wants to have with the

commercial. The authors also explain how the commercial uses the Latino Threat Narrative, which showcases images of citizenship excess and turns the lives of the Latinx individuals in the ad into "virtual lives" as they become objectified and dehumanized. This objectification and dehumanization is something seen even in the comic books analyzed within this study as many of the Latinx immigrants are represented as "aliens," both metaphorically and literally, and objectified for being "exotic," attractive, or because of their skin tone.

Additionally, Straile-Costa (2020) analyzes the way immigrants of the U.S-Mexico borders are portrayed within the film *Sleep Dealer* (2008). The film approaches the border using anti-globalization, and digitally mediated activism approaches that use technology to create unification between various social, political, and geographical spaces. Additionally, the film provides a modern representation of the undocumented immigrant and the lived reality they face, all while incorporating technological/science fiction landscapes. Straile-Costa's article is a perfect transition to the next section of the literature review that focuses on border studies and popular culture.

Border Studies and Popular Culture

Throughout academia, there is plenty of research focusing on immigration and immigrants. I tried to narrow my focus to communication scholarship and media reception. In relation to immigrant scholarship, Mastro's work focuses the media effects on various demographics including immigrants and Latinx representation within the news and media (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016; D. Mastro, 2015, 2019; D. E. Mastro et al., 2008; D. E. Mastro & Stern, 2003). Mastro's work is highly influential as it is used within intercultural studies and media studies as she showcases mixed methods related data on how media affects various audiences. The specific work discussed here from Mastro focuses on various media effects

including ethnic/racial stereotypes, intergroups and outgroups, emotions caused by the media, and depictions of body type. Within her work, she uses various theoretical approaches, but the one that stands out the most to me is cultivation theory. Mastro uses cultivation theory to analyze the impact of media (particularly television), on heavy and light media consumers in order to find perceptions, attitudes, themes, and patterns regarding media use (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016). Scholars like Aldama & Gonzalez (2019) and Kidd (2016) have used Mastro's work in order to discuss the influence Latinx audiences have had on the media economy and how they are underrepresented within popular culture. Similar to Mastro, Soderlund (2007) explores the role the news media has regarding public perception of Mexican immigration and the policies involved with it. Moreover, Rendon & Johnson (2015) examines scholarship about coverage of Mexico in the United States media produced from 1984 to 2014. Through this research they examine trends, research gaps, and how there is a lack of research within digital studies regarding the subject matter. This is relevant towards my research as it examines media from a specific geographical region. These scholars lay fundamental work for those who are conducting work on media on the border.

Border Media Usage

Within the academy, many researchers have added to border studies literature by discussing how media is being used along the U.S.-Mexico border. Barroso et al. (2020) contribute to this conversation by examining the way first generation Latinx parents, who are primarily Spanish speakers and live in *colonias* on the U.S.-Mexico border, use screen time (watch TV, using computers, use mobile devices/tablets) in their homes. An interesting result within this study found that families grew stronger cultural values of *familismo* and *respeto* towards one another due to parents knowing how much time their children can spend using

screen related media. Familismo is a collectivistic trait or cultural value that Latinx people have as the Latinx population tends to be group-oriented people with strong connections to their families, friends and other close networks (Carter et al., 2008). Chen et al. (2021) defines *respeto* (respect) as a deference to authority, while Kiyama et al. (2016) defines the cultural value as being courteous, maintaining harmony, and at times obedience while in a sociocultural situation. Both of these cultural values intersect with one another as they are life long values that begin from a child and last throughout one's life.

Further research on border media usage continues to be explored as Gonzlaez et al. (2021) focus on a woman who goes by the social media handle, "La Gordiloca" from the border town Laredo, Texas and considers herself a "Facebook journalist." Through this research project, the authors explore "La Gordiloca's" form of news in comparison to the various new outlets from actual journalists. One of the arguments made was that "La Gordiloca's" social media journalism is more of an attempt to create engagement for self-branding and commercializing herself to sell products and services. Additionally, the authors state, "La Gordiloca's identity as a journalist is characterized by the desire to both address the news needs of her community and maintain/build her local celebrity status." Not only is media usage on the border being analyzed and explored, but scholars are also conducting research on media focused on the U.S.-Mexico border, such as examining media representations found in film and television.

Films and Television of the Border

Various research on Latinx and border representation in the media has been conducted within the last two decades; for example, Antozek (2018) discusses the FX television show *The Bridge* (2013), which is a United States remake of a Swedish/Danish TV series *Bron/Broen* (2011), and focuses on the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically between El Paso, Texas and Ciudad

Juarez, Mexico. In this investigation, the author mainly focuses on the second season for the analysis of this study as the first season of the show was similar to its Swedish/Danish counterpart. The series was canceled after its second season because it could not carry an audience. Latinx led series cancellations have become more common as shows like Starz's "Vida," Netflix's "One Day at a Time," "Gentefied," and "Mr. Iglesias," and Disney+'s "Diary of a Future President" were all canceled by their respective networks due to low ratings and viewership (Alfonseca, 2022).

Further conversations of media and border representation continues as Antozek discusses various aspects of border representation such as Mexican and American authorities, corruption of those authorities, border crossers, drug cartels, Juarez murders, and violence in the El Paso, Texas/Cuidad Juarez, Chihuahua area. Continuing with visual media, Beckham II (2005) examines three films centered around the U.S. Mexico border: *Touch of Evil* (1958), *The Border* (1982), *Traffic* (2001). The author breaks down each film individually and focuses on the use of U.S. policy changes in relation to the U.S.-Mexico border, on top of analyzing the way the three films depict the border as well. Both Beckham II and Antozek's pieces provide a vivid look at the representation of the border and showcases how researchers can analyze the U.S.-Mexico border using popular culture.

Researchers have also analyzed films from a geopolitical lens, as Dell'agnese (2005) examines 30 American films that focus on the U.S.-Mexico Border through a geopolitical lens. There are various frames throughout the essay including going south of the border, from south to north, trafficking (from south to north), in-betweenness, and geographies of the border. Throughout the article, the author dissects each film and discusses an array of representations and themes found within each film including early films, the use of sex and travel, illegal

immigration/drug trafficking, and how the border is represented in a variety of ways (physically and symbolically).

In continuation with research that focuses on border representation in the media, Avant-Mier (2021) begins to focus on other forms of media including music. Avant-Mier presents a tribute to late scholar Robert DeChaine, as he examines the use of popular music within the film *Amores Perros* (2000) from Alejandro Gonzáles Iñárritu. The essay also examines how the sound and music used within the film construct sonic stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexicaness in contemporary media, and how sound and music are extensions of borders or aural borders to the U.S.-Mexico border as a field of sound. Avant-Mier's piece yet again showcases how the border can be analyzed using popular culture, thus setting a foundation for research on representation of the U.S.-Mexico border within popular culture.

Gendered Violence

On the U.S.-Mexico border, gendered violence is a horrible issue that discussed within the news and media constantly, and various scholars tackle this subject matter within the book *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response* as they analyze and examine various forms of media that discuss the issue (Domínguez et al., 2010). Further research on the intersection of gender and the U.S.-Mexico border is examined by Ruiz-Alfaro (2014) who argues that film *Bandidas* (2006) with Salma Hayek and Penélope Cruz, projects various representations of identity and citizenship showcased through Othered female bodies, all while focusing on issues such as immigration and the U.S.-Mexican border.

Corridos and Narcocorridos: Folk Songs of the Border

Within this conversation of media and the U.S.-Mexico border, Edberg (2004) contributes to the literature by discussing a very distinct form of media related to the U.S.-

Mexico border popular culture, and that is *narcocorridos*, which are ballads and folk songs about drug dealing/drug dealers of the border. Through his work, Edberg analyzes the use of *corridos* (Mexican folk songs) and *narcocorridos* and how they create a cultural representation of the U.S.-Mexico border, drug trafficking, and poverty in the area. In his book, *Shot in America: Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema*, Noriega (2000) showcases the importance of public television programming as an entry point for Chicano media. Within his book, Noriega briefly highlights and mentions the impact of *corridos*, as they became a symbolic force and border tongue to express oppositional cultural identity along the border.

Performance Art

In their book, *Culture Across Borders: Mexican Immigration & Popular Culture*, Maciel & Herrera-Sobek (1998), continue discussing music, film, narratives, and comedy revolving around the U.S.-Mexico border and immigration. The authors of this book, really lay the foundational seeds for a project like mine as they truly focus on the impact of the border within popular culture. In addition, it is also worth noting that this dissertation helps fill a literature gap that Maciel and Herrera-Sobek do not focus on, and that is analyzing comic books that focus on the U.S.-Mexico border. Velasco (2002) analyzes the work of performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and how he is able to discuss cross-culture identities and the complexities of the U.S.-Mexico border. The author specifically focuses on the performance pieces *Two Undiscovered Americans Visit* (1992), *The Couple in the Cage* (1993), *Border Brujo* (1988 and 1990), and *Dangerous Border Crossers* (2000). Velasco critiques each piece and mentions how Gómez-Peña has reappropriated the stories in order to increase cultural hybridity and not make his work so Eurocentric.

Literature of (Illegal) Aliens and Monsters of the Borderland

Throughout media and popular culture, aliens and monsters have been used as metaphors, and stereotypes to describe and at times, villainize migrants. Additionally, it has become a common narrative trope, especially within the science fiction genre. This concept is called the Latino Threat Narrative and it was first brought up by L. Chavez (2013). Chavez describes that immigration from the U.S.-Mexico border and that members of Mexican and other Latin American descent have been designated a negative narrative composing immigrants from this community as a threat to the United States. Additionally, he explains how many critics have stated that members of the Latinx community, especially Mexicans, are unlike other past immigrant groups due to the fact that they have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture and have formed their own political and linguistic spaces, while rejecting Anglo-Protestant values that "built the American dream" (p. 24). Furthermore, Chavez explains that this narrative emerged from various forms of representation and practices of discourse as society has formulated ideas, images, myths, and knowledge production that created this negative stereotype of the "illegal alien" as a criminal.

This negative stereotype of the illegal alien is common trope throughout media as Steinberg (2004) continues to examine how undocumented immigrants for the borderlands are portrayed within news print media. The author analyzes three newspapers from the southwest and how immigrants are portrayed prior to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Out of twenty articles analyzed, two of the newspaper articles had positive and empowering forms of representation of Latinx immigrants. One of the articles focused on how Mexican immigrants sell and market towards one another; for example, *taquerias* (taco shops), *carnicerias* (meat markets), and *panaderias* (bakeries). The other eighteen articles focused on negative representations of Latinx immigrants. Most of the articles discussed illegal immigration and the

Border Patrol, referring to immigrants as “illegal immigrants” or “illegal aliens”, and one article used the term OTM which stood for “other than Mexican.” Other articles discussed how immigrants are associated with crime, how they are labeled as “highway accidents”, and domestic issues. These negative media depictions are common stereotypes and portrayals of immigrants from the U.S.-Mexico border, and some of which are common within the comics/graphic novels being discussed within this study.

A series of scholars have intersected science fiction and the U.S.-Mexico border to discuss immigration such as using aliens (extra-terrestrials) as symbols for aliens (immigrants). One of the first examples of this line of research comes from Ramirez-Berg (2002) as he dissects science fiction films from the 1980s and discusses how aliens from these films are “a figure for the tide of alien immigrants who have been entering the country in increasing numbers for the past several decades,” specifically Latinx aliens, as they are the majority population when referring to immigrants. Furthermore, Ramirez-Berg discusses that these aliens from the science fiction films must learn how to “adapt, assimilate, and finally become native” to survive on their new planet or landscape. Kearney (2003) discusses how alien monsters are also symbolic imagery of alien immigrants as they are liminal creatures that defy borders. Moreover, Lechuga et al. (2018) continue this exploration of science fiction films and the borderlands as they examine *Children of Men* (2006), *Elysium* (2013), and *Sleep Dealer* (2008). The authors state that the three films flip the script of the alien monster narrative and make the alien-migrant character the protagonist while facing the authoritarian state system.

Border Comic Studies

While many scholars have covered various aspects of border popular culture including television, film, and music, researchers have started to include comic books and graphic novels

within the discussion of border studies. Similar to the work of scholars who have worked on migrants that have been categorized as aliens and monsters, many scholars who focus on the border also discuss how migrants have become "othered" within comic book related media. For example, Walker et al. (2021) intersect border studies and comic book films with their analysis on migrants within the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The authors rhetorically examine the films *Captain Marvel* (2019) and *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), and discuss how aliens (migrants) face "otherness," dehumanization, and difference within the films including extermination. Additionally, the authors use fantasy theme analysis to analyze the texts and use symbolic convergence theory to investigate the fandoms/communities surrounding the films, leading to a further discussion about anti-immigrant narratives. Finally, Gârdan (2020) states that both major comic book publishers, Marvel and DC Comics, have translated the alien "other" into their blockbuster films with complex stories about humans, mutants, gods, demigods, inhumans (superpowered aliens from Marvel), and metahumans (DC Comics version of superpowered beings). While on the subject of comic book related media, the next section will provide a brief history of comic books and then transition into comic book related literature.

History of Comic Books

The history of comic books has been discussed by a variety of authors and scholars including the various eras throughout the timeline (Austin & Hamilton, 2019; Hatfield & Beaty, 2021; Micheal Kantor & Maslon, 2013; G. Morrison, 2012). The most popular and common eras known in comic books are the Golden Age of Comics (1938-1950), Silver Age of Comics (1956-1970), Bronze Age of Comics (1970-1985), Dark Age of Comics (late 1980s through the early 1990s), Renaissance (late 1990s-2011), and finally the Modern/Digital Era of comics (2011-present). Austin & Hamilton (2019) use a different set of eras as they focus on a history of comic

books but from a racial perspective. This informative and historical section is important to note for those who may not know the history of comic books and to showcase the significance of each time period.

Published in the nineteenth century, a Swiss comic titled *Les Aventures de Monsieur Vieux-Bois* represents the introduction of comic books into popular culture (Gabilliet, 2010). On September 14, 1842, the comic was translated into English and titled *The Adventures of Mr. Obadiah Oldbuck*. While comic books have a strong history in Europe, comic books' popularity in the United States began in the 1930s with pulp magazines, which were periodical magazines featuring stories of adventure, horror, and science fiction. Early comic strips like *Flash Gordon* (1934), *Dick Tracy* (1931), and *Famous Funnies* (1934) were the inspiration and beginnings of the comic book industry as comic creators would later transition into slightly longer storytelling formats. Detective Comics, later known as DC Comics, hired writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster to create a new character for Action Comics #1 which sold for only 10 cents in June 1938. This character, who they called "Superman" would later become the foundational character design for superheroes moving forward, thus marking the beginning of the Golden Age of Comics. After 1939, a new industry was created as comic book publishers created about 50 superhero-based comic characters and stories (Kantor, 2013). Furthermore, in 1954, Dr. Fredrick Wertham accused comic books of being corruptors of the minds of American youth (T. G. Morrison et al., 2002; Wertham, 1999).

In the Silver Age of Comics or the Marvel Age of Comics (1956-1970), characters like Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk, and the Fantastic Four are introduced as these characters developed more humanistic personalities and became involved with issues happening in society and the real world (Rubin, 2012). Additionally, this era introduced reading material for not only

children, but for members of the military (G. Morrison et al., 2002). The Bronze Age of Comics in the 1970s brought out more serious themes and topics within comic books, as the characters would deal with various social and political issues such as civil rights, the deaths of loved ones, partners addicted to drugs, or AIDS (Kantor & Maslon, 2013). With edgier storylines, comic books continued to push the envelope of storytelling into the 80s and 90s with stories like *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), *Watchmen* (1986) and *Spawn* (1992). Around this time, many independent comic book companies like Mirage Studios, IDW Publishing, Dark Horse Comics, and Image Comics were being created. Image Comics includes notable comic books like Todd McFarlane's *Spawn* (1992), Robert Kirkman's *Invincible* (2003) and *The Walking Dead* (2003), and most recently the critically acclaimed *Saga* (2012) from Brian K. Vaughan.

Presently, comic books are in a digital age where they can be accessed and read on laptops, tablets, and mobile devices. Both DC Comics and Marvel Comics have their own digital subscription services where readers can pay a monthly fee to access a large library of comic books. In addition, websites like Comixology allow for major and independent publishers to distribute their comic books digitally. Additionally, comic books have gone the transmedia route telling their stories throughout various forms of popular culture including film, video games, mobile applications, and more. Comic book fans connect with their favorite comic book characters on a variety of levels based on their fandom and even consume comic related content including attending comic book conventions around the United States and internationally as well (Ramirez, 2015).

Comic Book Studies/Popular Culture

Comic studies is a fairly new and growing field within academia and communication studies. In order to properly understand comic studies and comic related research, a proper

definition of comics needs to be given. One of the most famous definitions of comic books is from Scott McCloud, writer of *Understanding Comics* (1994), and he defines comic books as "juxtaposed pictorial images and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer." Comic book studies are a growing trend not only in the communication field, but also overall in cultural studies, literary studies, popular culture and social sciences. The majority of social science research on comic books is found in sociology, psychology, philosophy, but is understudied within communication research. Comic scholars have conducted a variety of research including historical analysis, textual analysis, critical/cultural studies, fandom, and work on comic book related media (Aldama, 2018; Bahl et al., 2020; Bongco, 2000; Degnan, 2017; Gabilliet, 2010; Gordon et al., 2001; Jenkins, 2020; Ramirez, 2015; M. J. Smith & Duncan, 2017).

A great example of comic studies in academia is *Comics and Ideology,* as it is a series of essays that analyze comic books using various theoretical perspectives such as critical/cultural theory, feminist criticism and queer studies, just to name a few (McAllister et al., 2001). One of the chapters that is written by Matthew P. McAllister, focuses on the political economy perspective of the comic book industry, specifically the ownership of characters and conglomeration. Another chapter from *Comics and Ideology*, discusses portrayals of nationality and international conflict in comics. Wonder Woman is the central character of the chapter, and the author discusses how she is an Amazonian figure attempting to live in the United States, yet she has been symbolized as an immigrant in Western society since her first appearance. Trushell (2004) analyzes a variety of characters of the "X-Men" comic book series, as he compares their desire to become a part of society to historical movements, such as the Black civil rights movement. Further literature on comic books includes, *Superheroes and Philosophy,*

which is an edited volume that features writers in academia and writers of comic books as well (Morris & Morris, 2005). The book focuses on various philosophical themes and analyzes those themes in various ways, whether it is through a story arc, character(s) or ethical morals around that comic character or series.

Genter (2007) provides a historical look into the "Silver Age of Comics" with the birth of Marvel Comics during the Cold War era. The author explains how Marvel wanted to create a series of characters that felt real and relatable through their faults and relationships, in comparison to their superhero counterparts from other publishers. Additionally, because the characters were created during the Cold War era, they became icons and symbols of youth, the pains of growing up, and rebellion towards the cultural and political war. Many of these conversations continue within a collection from Heer & Worcester (2009), various scholars conducting work on comic studies examine topics on the history of comic books, how comic books are crafted and seen as art. Meanwhile, Ben Saunders (2011) explores the religious and spiritual symbolism found within comic books. Many believe that Superman's religious symbolism is compared to Jesus Christ, but Saunders dismisses this idea, as he compares Superman to the religious figure of Moses. "…Superman is not Jesus at all, but Moses---a savior figure who escapes deadly peril as a baby in a floating capsule, to grow up gifted with great powers and burdened with great responsibilities" (p. 16).

Crutcher (2011) dissects five of the most popular and seminal Batman stories analyzing the complexity of the writing and artwork. Through his analysis, Crutcher argues that through the complexity of the comic book medium that the character of Batman has been able to sustain a longevity he might have had in other mediums such as film or television. Additionally, the author states that due to the complexity of the narratives found in comic books that it sometimes

does not translate into other mediums, mainly referring to film. Finally, Crutcher argues that because of the complexity that comic books and graphic novels provide that scholars and critics need to pay more attention to the medium and give it serious validation for scholarship. Rubin, (2012) explores how superheroes, psychotherapy and psychotherapists coexist, comparing and contrasting how they are alike and different through the use of comic book characters and comic book history. The author explains how many of the stories within comic books are similar to the exploration of psychological issues, such as separating reality from fantasy or dealing with various traumatic issues such as childhood abandonment, abuse, divorce or death. Rubin argues that in the process of examining superheroes, we are examining ourselves and on a larger scale, we are examining societal vulnerability as we all long for hope. Furthermore, there have been scholars whose scholarship analyzes how comics can discuss culture, narrative, and identity. Smith and Duncan (2017) provide an in-depth overview of comic studies as a whole including teaching with and about comic books, analyzing comic books using narrative theory, formalist theory, semiotics, and linguistics, just to name a few. The book also provides a guide for scholars of various conferences and journals related to comic studies.

In terms of comic studies literature, there has been a rise in academic work analyzing comic book films due their popularity with general audiences. Tuzi (2005) uses cultural theory to analyze the characters of the Marvel Comics Universe and the Marvel Cinematic Universe psychologically, and how their characteristics and motives present an ambivalent and ambiguous view on heroism and the nature of contemporary social reality. Another example of comic book film studies is "Superhero fan service: Audience strategies in the contemporary interlinked Hollywood blockbuster" that explores how Marvel Studios constructs audience strategies for members of the in and out group of consumers of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (Beaty, 2016).

The author analyzes the use of post credit scenes that serve as advertisements and teasers for the next film installment, “Easter eggs,” or semi-hidden on screen elements intended to be noticed by readers of comic books or consumers with a greater knowledge of comic books, and/or the use of characters from one film or television franchise within the universe. This lends to the continuity aspect of the interconnected storylines of the film franchises.

A third example of literature of comic book films is found in the second half of a comic studies collection, *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe* that focuses on academic work of Marvel Comics (Yockey, 2017). Two of the chapters focus on the transmedia storytelling: Felix Brinker’s, “Transmedia Storytelling in the ‘Marvel Cinematic Universe’ and the Logics of Convergence-Era Popular Seriality,” discusses the use of transmedia narratives in the Marvel Cinematic universe and the logics of convergence in popular serial storytelling, while Michael Graves’, “The Marvel one-shots and transmedia storytelling” focuses on Marvel’s use of “one-shots,” or short self-contained stories of a character within film universe. Melanie Bourdaa (2018) also discusses how comic books use transmedia to create richer and more in-depth storylines ranging from comic books to television shows. She also goes into depth about tie-in extensions of comic books that help strengthen the stories in order to deepen the narratives of main characters or supporting characters, and also discusses the use of “Easter eggs” within the DC Comics universe as a reward for fan investment in the narrative universe.

Recent examples of comic studies work includes Aldama (2018) presents a collected volume called *Comic Studies Here and Now* which is another comic studies reader that presents work from various scholars within the comic studies field. One chapter in particular is from Enrique Garcia who focuses on the intersectional identity of Latina and queer character America

Chavez and compares and relates the character to non-Latinx characters like Wonder Woman and other Latinx characters found within *Love and Rockets* (1982). These chapters and scholars provide a brief overview of how scholars have analyzed intersectional identities within comic books including Latinx representation/identity.

Moreover, various comic scholars tackle a variety of subject matters in articles published in academic journals or scholarly books. Another example of a collected edition of academic literature is from Howard & Hoeness-Krupsaw (2019), who present work on graphic narratives including comic books that discuss performativity and cultural construction. One chapter in particular from this collected edition is a major contribution to my research as it focuses on Latinx representation of Marvel Comics character, America Chavez. America Chavez is an interesting character as she fills an intersectional form of representation not usually seen in comic books a Latina who is also queer. The author argues that this characterization and the cultural references do not really bring a valid representation of a Latina, but the fact that the character represents an intersectional identity gives the title some depth and cultural impact that is lacking within the comic book medium. Another general scope reader of comic studies comes from Henry Jenkins, who wrote *Comics and Stuff* (2020). Jenkins really uses this as an opportunity to take a deep dive into how one can examine comic books and how the medium has changed within public perception and within consumer culture. In addition, Jenkins examines how comic books when used as research artifacts can be a reflection of identity, fandom, and a much deeper meaning than just "stuff" as the author puts it.

Finally, a recent addition to the general scope of literature discussing comic studies is *Comic Studies: A Guidebook* which is edited by Charles Hatfield and Bart Beaty (2021). The authors provide a collection of generalized approaches on the histories of the various genres of

comic books, the cultures involved in comic book communities, the forms and formatting of comic books, and the genres of comic books. The aforementioned books are foundational pieces of literature as they lay out a lot of the groundwork of what comic studies are and the future of the discipline within academia.

The majority of social science research on comic books is found in sociology, psychology, philosophy, but understudied within communication research. Other academic scholars have examined topics such as representations of the U.S. South in comic books, comic fandom, and identities of superheroes (Costello & Whitted, 2012; Gabilliet, 2010; Pustz, 1999). However, these topics have not been studied within the context of Latinx representations. There have been scholars who do focus on racial and cultural identity within comic books. Nama (2011) focuses on Black identity found within comic books and their importance within the medium, while Singer (2002) examined various African American superheroes and discusses various themes such as race, identity, and stereotypical tropes used within comic books. Tabachnick (2014) discusses various themes found and associated with Jewish identity, including religion, the Holocaust, and immigration in graphic novels. Costello & Whitted (2012) examine various comic books that focus on topics such as race and regionality representations found within the south in the United States.

Chavarria (2009) analyzes Indigenous representation and storytelling in comic books as he critiques the scarcity of representation while dissecting how Indigenous storytellers articulate cultural stories of identity and politics. Letizia (2020) explains a pedagogical style that intersects comic studies with social studies relating to citizenship. Exploring this particular literature, I had believed the book would be exploring citizenship relating to the status of being a citizen of a

particular country, but the author focused on the idea of being a better person or outstanding citizen and how we can apply it to the classroom.

Most of these examples of comic studies focus on the larger scope of analyzing comic books and even scholars such Nama (2011), Singer (2002), Tabachnick (2014), and Chavarria (2009) start to focus on race, culture, and identity within comic books. While the broad work of comic studies is foundational for my research, comic studies regarding race, culture, and identity is where my research can truly thrive. Similarly to Nama, Singer, Tabachnick, Chavarria, and so many others, I want to contribute to the larger discussion of race, culture, identity, and representation found within comic books and graphic novels, specifically Latinx representations. With that being said, many scholars have begun analyzing Latinx representation within comic books and set the foundation for this dissertation.

Latinx Representations in Comic Book Studies

Latinx research within academia is underrepresented but is slowly increasing throughout various fields, including communication; therefore, the voices of scholars of color are greatly needed within academia (Avant-Mier, 2008; Calafell, 2007; Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004; Hinojosa Hernandez, Bowen, De Los Santos Upton, et al., 2019; Valdivia, 2008). González et al. state that Latinx scholarship within communication research is scarce. Scholars have explored how media has constructed various aspects of Latinx identity including Latinidad and Otherness, but very few have tackled this subject matter within comic books, especially Latinx and border identity in comic books (Beltran, 2009; Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004; Leon-Boys & Valdivia, 2020; Molina-Guzmán, 2006, 2010, 2013; Shugart, 2007; S. K. Sowards & Pineda, 2011; S. k. Sowards & Pineda, 2013). I further this argument by stating Latinx scholarship within comic book studies are also limited but is a growing subfield within the communication discipline as well as social

sciences and popular culture studies (Aldama, 2018; Degnan, 2017; Garcia, 2018; Singer, 2019; M. J. Smith & Duncan, 2017). While there is important scholarship on racial identity and ethnicity within comic books, there is still an underrepresentation of Latinx literature within comic book studies.

Presently, comic books have taken over popular culture and various forms of media including film, television, and video games (Aldama, 2018; G. Morrison, 2012). Unfortunately, there has not been a lot of research done on Latinx representation and identity in comic books and comic books focused on the US-Mexico border. Aldama and González (2016) edited a collection called *Graphic Borders* that features various writers discussing Latinx representation in comic books. Within this edited collection, Kathryn M. Frank and Brian Montes examine the Afro-Latinx Spider-Man, Miles Morales. Miles Morales has gained even more popularity with the Academy award winning animated film, Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse (2018). Miles Morales is the central focus of two chapters as they discuss how the character was introduced into the Marvel Universe, and how he is not the only Latinx Spider-Man, as they also discuss Miguel O' Hara a.k.a "Spider-Man 2099" ("Everybody Wants to Rule the Multiverse: Latino Spider-Men in Marvel's Media Empire," 2016; "The Paradox of Miles Morales: Social Gatekeeping and the Browning of America's Spider-Man," 2016). Within the two articles, both discuss the impact Miles Morales has made on being the first Afro-Latino Spider-man, while Miguel O'Hara made an impact for being the first Latinx Spider-Man. Both Latinx Spider-Men were and still are incredibly influential and popular among fans. Additionally, both authors found that Marvel Comics as a publisher was willing to create characters and acknowledge characters' diverse identities in comparison to Hollywood's take on the characters which were mainly White males.

Moreover, the other chapter in *Graphic Borders* is by Isabel Millan (2016), who writes about female Spider-Girl, Anya Corazon a.k.a. "Araña." Millan analyzes the character's Latinx representation, multiple variations, and being a mestiza Latina (Mexican and Puerto Rican). The term mestiza is found throughout the foundational and landmark piece Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). Anzaldúa describes being mestiza as being of mixed identity or hybridity never fully identifying as Mexican or American. She also applies the concept of mestiza to race and sexual orientation Coincidentally, all of the Latinx Spider-men and woman are mestizo.

Another example of Latinx identity research in comic studies is by Karen McGrath, who also focuses on Araña, discusses here two Marvel Comics series, Araña and Amazing Fantasy (2007). McGrath analyzes the two comic books and uses examples within the story arcs to highlight intersectional issues of gendered and racial representation. Castillo Planas (2021) explores the Latinidad of two Latina superheroines, America Chavez and La Borinqueña. Here Castillo Planas analyzes the Latinx identities of the two characters who are both rooted in Puerto Rican culture and how being Latinx drives their stories. America Chavez is yet again discussed as Jiménez (2018), as the author focuses on intersectional identity of the character. Showcasing the importance of diverse characters within comic books. Again, America Chavez is a queer Latina, who is a superhero within the Marvel Comics Universe, which is Jiménez analyzes within her work. Jiménez argues that America Chavez is a person of color and a LGBTQ+ character is not traditional and is severely underrepresented within mainstream comic books, so for Marvel to step out of their own comfort zone and create an intersectional character was momentous. This is a topic that was covered by other scholars such as Grace Martin within Howard and Hoeness-Krupshaw's (2019) collection. Contrary to what Martin wrote, Jiménez felt

that America Chavez was represented in a revolutionary fashion as the character brought in a colorful representation of a Latinx voice that is underrepresented within comic books. Martin also discusses the complex character developments America Chavez has faced within the narratives including being generalized as a Latinx character and oversimplifying the characters Latinidad by not diving into the roots and cultural markers.

Enrique Garcia is another Latinx scholar who contributes to the conversation on Latinx representation within comic books (Howard & Hoeness-Krupsaw, 2019). Garcia contributed a chapter to the *Routledge Companion to Latina/o Popular Culture* (2019) and discusses various Latinx ethnicities that have appeared in comic books. Moreover, Garcia also examines the obstacles that Latinx comic book creators and characters have had to deal with in a profession dominated primarily by white males. Garcia critically analyzed the popular independent comic series *Love and Rockets* (1982), which was and still is written by Mexican American brothers, Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez, and features Latinx characters and subject matters.

Scholars like King and Page (2017) broaden the conversation a bit as they explore posthumanism in graphic novels from Latin America. They analyze various subject matters such as steampunk, cyberpunk, virtual reality, bionics, and other science fiction like tropes found within Latin American graphic novels. King and Page use these Latin American graphic novels as artifacts for critical analysis, thus proving comic books and graphic novels can be studied in a variety of ways including comic books/graphic novels from Latin America and those that focus on posthumanism. In 2009, a group of scholars explored the use of entertainment-education in relation to a comic used in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico to address the dangers of carbon monoxide intoxication (Pérez et al., 2009). The scholars described the process of making the comic book and the campaign itself in order to draw attention to the carbon dioxide issue. In continuation,

Kilanowski (2020) presents an analysis on how comic books and graphic novels have been used within health education, specifically creating a bilingual, culturally specific educational comic book for Latinx migrant families. Results of this project included many of the migrants being surprised that anyone would write a book for them. They found the educational efforts of the comic book to be helpful as many of the migrants found that the comic book handled the struggles both professionally and positively. This research in particular is one of the rare cases of literature that I found that focuses on Latinx migrants, but with that being said a limitation I found was that it was not set on the U.S.-Mexico border and was a different field and focus than what I am presenting within my investigation.

There are two chapters from *Immigrants and Comics Graphic Spaces of Remembrance, Transaction, and Mimesis* that both focus on the U.S.-Mexico border and are two of the only pieces of research that intersect comic books and this geographical region (Serrano, 2021). The first chapter is by Conway (2021) and he compares the representation of Mexican immigration on the U.S.-Mexico border as a site of sexual violence and trauma found within two comic book Westerns that are from Mexico: *El Libro Vaquero* and *Frontera Violenta.* Conway describes both books as dark and grim tales that tackle difficult subject matters that are found within the U.S.-Mexico border. The second chapter is from Espinoza (2021) as he focuses on *Migra Mouse* from Lalo Alcaraz and examines how Alcaraz engages with the discourse of decolonization as he both denounces marginalization faced by Latinos and immigrants, and challenges the idea of American culture being homogenous through Anglo culture.

It is great to see that there is research being done on Latinx representation and identity in comic books in academia, but there is still a need for it in communication studies. Just like in comic book media, Latinx representation in communication and comic studies research needs to

increase, and I feel that my research will further this movement in the right direction. While research on comic books is becoming more common, there is still a lack of Latinx scholarship within academia. With this dissertation project, my goal is to contribute to Latinx communication, border studies, and popular culture scholarship and to extend further knowledge and representation on these subject matters.

Critical Cultural Studies

On the critical side of communication studies, we have scholars from the Frankfurt School who helped set the foundational theoretical work for critical theory and critical studies. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno set the stage on one of the earliest critiques on the culture industry as it still resonates today within popular culture and media studies (Durham & Kellner, 2012). Even earlier, we have Marxism which inspired the Frankfurt school and led to critical theoretical approaches. According to Sholle (1988), critical studies are a group of theories that exhibit a unity based on their common problematic material. According to Hardt (1992), the boundaries of communication research are changing in order to create diverse spaces within communication studies, specifically research of culture and society. This leads to the use of cultural studies within communication.

Cultural Studies has been defined in multiple ways including, "a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge" or simply, the study of culture (Storey, 2018). Building upon the foundation that has been set within critical studies, cultural studies scholars can analyze culture, class, society, popular culture, and so much more. When looking at culture, Storey (2018) first provides three definitions of culture; the first definition being, "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development." Second, "a particular way of life" or lived practices, and third, "signifying practices." These last two definitions really connect to

answering what is popular culture? One can look at popular culture as a series of texts, artifacts, and practices that do not fit the standards for higher culture. Another way of defining popular culture can be culture that is widely liked by many people. Specifically, this definition focuses on mass-produced commercial and media culture like music, television, film, social media, and comic books. As mentioned, Comic books and graphic novels are a part of popular culture and have been mass produced commercially, are popular among large audiences, and have been considered artifacts that are not high culture.

Now, as we intersect both forms of study, we have critical cultural studies. Presently, there are scholars who use critical cultural studies who analyze race, culture, and media (Baugh-Harris & Wanzer-Serrano, 2018; Gray, 2013; S. K. Sowards, 2021). Sowards (2021) uses rhetoric as a critical cultural approach to analyze appearance as a visual marker within Latinx folks, especially those who appear as white passing. She argues that Latinidad gets further complicated as racial recognition and those who are Latinx who are lighter skinned individuals challenges preconceived stereotypes and understanding Latinx identity. This is relevant to this study because I will be discussing visual markers such as the appearance of Latinx people within the artifacts of this research project. Like Sowards, many of the present-day scholars that I found using critical cultural approaches use rhetorical methods when analyzing their work, especially when discussing race. Scholars such as Alvarado (2021), Cisneros (2021), Lechuga & De La Garza (2021), and Maldonado (2020) all analyze race using rhetorical methods in order to discuss various matters within Latinx spaces.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) has been used by many activists and scholars that are interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. Delgado

et al. (2012) describes CRT as a movement that is a "collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 3). Early CRT began in the 1970s and has been used a variety of movements, law, and in education in order to bring awareness of racism, racial equality, discrimination, stereotypes, and civil rights of minorities (Bowdre & C.B., 2007; Brown, 2014; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; A. Y. Martinez, 2014). Critical Race Theory draws from various theorists and philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and by civil rights leaders such as Sojourner Truth, Fredrick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Black and Chicano movements (Delgado et. al, 2012). It is also important to note that CRT is a foundational theoretical approach as it has splintered into various other theoretical approaches and subfields such as Asian Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Race Theory, Latina/o Critical Communication Theory, Disability Critical Race Theory, and Critical Philosophy of Race (Anguiano & Castaneda, 2014; Bernal, Dolores Delgado, 2002; Brown, 2014; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado et al., 2012a). One of the key concepts that comes from CRT is intersectionality, which discusses how inequality of identities are affected by interconnections of class, race, disability, and gender (Crenshaw, 1995).

Additionally, CRT has been used by many scholars in terms of narrative analysis. "Critical race theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a deeper understanding of how Americans see race" (Delgado et al., 2012). Additionally, Critical race theory is meant to work toward liberating minorities whose voices, identities and/or experiences are often ignored in society and media (Brown, 2014). Furthermore, CRT has been used to emphasize the essential importance of narratives and community knowledge among oppressed peoples, stressing that such narratives

are significant counternarratives and counter stances to mainstream society, media, and culture (A. Y. Martinez, 2014).

There are five major tenets or components of CRT: (1) the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (2) the idea of an interest convergence; (3) the social construction of race; (4) the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling; and (5) the notion that whites have actually been recipients of civil rights legislation (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado et al., 2012b; Martinez, 2014). The first tenet discusses how the notion that racism is ordinary and it is not a bizarre concept in society. In basic terms, this first tenet is discussing how racism is normalized within the world. The second tenet focuses on the idea of an interest of converging or material determinism, which means that civil rights and reducing racism is only too convenient to those facing it, while some white elites and working-class white people have no interest in changing and removing racism from communities. Third, the social construction of race is a product of social thoughts and categories that society invented in order to use when convenient and advances the interests of White people. Fourth, the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling as devices to share the experiences of those who have faced racial discrimination or prejudice. Counter-storytelling is used within the comic books and graphic novels analyzed as a way to break the stereotypes many have regarding migrants. One particular example is making the migrant a superhero as seen in *El Peso Hero* and *Home*. Finally, the fifth tenet is the notion that whites have been recipients of civil rights legislation and how the U.S. has color-blind laws that lead to racial discrimination.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

Latino Critical Race Theory is based on five tenets: the intercentricity of race and racism; the challenge of dominant Ideology; the commitment to social justice; the centrality of

experience knowledge; and the interdisciplinary perspective (Yosso, 2005). Two of the key professors within LatCrit are Dr. Tara J. Yosso from the University of California, Santa Barbara and Dr. Daniel Solorzano from the University of California, Los Angeles. Both professors mainly focus on the use of LatCrit and Critical Race Theory on educational subject matters within the Latinx community. This early study from Solórzano (1998) is one of his first articles where he uses CRT on Chicana/o scholars. Within the article, Solórzano focuses on three objectives: to extend and apply CRT to education; recognize, document, and analyze racial and gender microaggressions of Chicana/o scholars, and finally, hear the narratives of these scholars. Continuing the use of CRT, LatCrit, and counter-storytelling, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) examine different forms of racial and gendered discrimination experienced by Chicana/o graduate students through a series of interviews and focus groups. They use the five tenets and break down how each tenant is used within education related research.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) describe how Critical race theory can be applied to education research and goes into detail about the five elements or tenets. These tenets are: the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, the challenge to dominant ideology, the commitment to social justice, the centrality of experiential knowledge, and a transdisciplinary perspective. The authors also go on to mention how while these tenets are not new, they as a collective change how scholarship is done regarding race related research. Additionally, the authors discuss the use of storytelling and narratives of students of color. This application of storytelling/narratives can be applicable to most forms of popular culture, as most forms of popular culture already have a narrative. Furthermore, this would be even more applicable to comic book media because they are narratives. Comic books discuss race and there are authors who are people of color. Representation and identity of these characters can even be

dissected critically and racially as racism can be found through the use of stereotypes, lack of true representation of the Latinx community and other characters of color, and lack of diversity with the creators, writers, artists of these comic books.

Within this article, Yosso (2002) uses critical race theory, critical literacy process of Paulo Friere in order to understand and challenge racism around Chicanas/os found within entertainment media. The article describes how Chicanas/os are portrayed in mainstream Hollywood, especially regarding their educational background. Yosso describes Chicanas/os as being characterized as failures in education as a society within mainstream media. She also goes on to mention how films blame socioacademic failure to Chicanx cultural/family values, language, cycle of poverty, and many more as the reason why the Latinx community struggles. While this article does focus on education still, it does also focus on imagery within media, which could relate to the research I am proposing. As Yosso states, "The ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the continual production of entertainment media images." Additionally, she says, "CRT as a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism influence entertainment media images of and educational discourse about People of Color." Therefore, I do believe that CRT and LatCrit could be applicable to race related issues within popular culture, including comic book media. Furthermore, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) discuss how the use of counter-narratives or counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform/diversity. This is something scholars like myself are definitely trying to do, as we seek further diversity and want to shatter complacency within popular culture and comic book media. Finally, Yosso (2005) applies LatCrit to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and how it

could apply to communities of color within the classroom, and their struggles with social issues and racism.

Alemán (2017) examines how pedagogy within journalism education can be used to provide better content in relation to coverage of stories of racial and ethnic communities linked to people of color. The author focuses on how Chicana/o students experience critical race counterstories through these spaces. Objectivity is taught to these students in order for them to understand how to write stories of racially and ethnically marginalized groups from their perspective. Within this article, Alemán uses CRT as the theoretical framework and uses counter storytelling as the methodological tool. According to Alemán, counter storytelling can be seen in two ways: as a group of presumptions or preconceived wisdoms or cultural understandings by the predominant race in their discussions of race, or as a parable, chronicle, or a fictional narrative that centers the experiences of minoritized communities and individuals in order to reduce the validity of assumptions and myths, especially ones held by the predominant race.

Alemán and Alemán Jr. (2016) discuss another extension of critical race theory in terms of critical media projects that focuses on a Chicana/o centered student newspaper and a documentary developed by scholars who are Chicana/o. Within the article, the scholars describe a critical media project as a concept that was originally proposed by Bell Hooks. They define a critical media project as a production by people of color that seeks to dismantle majoritarian ideologies within mainstream news and entertainment by centering the voices, bodies, histories, experiences, and resiliency of racially marginalized communities using a racial realist perspective (Alemán and Alemán Jr., 2016). This concept of critical media projects could be a concept within CRT and LatCrit that is also applicable to popular culture and comic related research. There are a small number of Latinx mainstream comic writers who write comics of the

Latinx characters, but I feel that this would apply even further to independent Latinx comic book writers writing about Latinx communities and narratives. Another example of CRT/LatCrit within education is from Bernal (2002) as she focuses on how CRT and LatCrit demonstrate race-gendered epistemologies and recognize students of colors as knowledgeable individuals. Throughout the article, Bernal uses counternarratives from students of colors in order to tell their stories and experiences of their education. Additionally, the author focuses on the critical raced-gendered epistemologies of these students.

Rodela and Fernandez (2019) both analyze what they call a 'critical race moment' that was experienced by Rodela. This analysis was done as a 23-month ethnographic study in order to examine various complexities that appeared within intragroup advocacy and solidarity in the Latinx community dealing with socioeconomic and educational oppression. They describe critical race moments as "a specific moment in time, often experienced by People of Color or White allies, in which institutional racism and other forms of oppression are witnessed and made visible." This article uses CRT, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminist Epistemology as the theoretical framework for this analysis as it focuses on education and socioeconomic experiences of a Pacific Northwest Latinx community.

Osorio (2018) examines how second grade Latina/o students understand personal narratives and experiences of fellow students who have families that are undocumented immigrants from Mexico or Central America. The author states that she uses CRT and LatCrit in order to analyze her students' personal narratives because she realized that while it was not a part of the curriculum this was important as they were able to discuss part of their lived experiences and identity. "CRT centers race at the forefront of issues that transpire in society. In addition, LatCrit uses the experiences of Latinos in the US, including immigration, language diversity, and

others, to understand the lived realities of Latinos. My students were sharing their border stories that connected with the current political climate in the US and the influx of unaccompanied minors."

Within this article, Osorio also outlines two foundational pieces of CRT and LatCrit. She mentions the four tenets of LatCrit presented by Valdes (1998): (1) the production of knowledge in which research is being done by voices that have been silenced in the past to share the stories that have often gone unheard; (2) the advancement of transformation, which is possible through sharing these stories and pushing against dominant ideologies; (3) the expansion and connection of struggles through research that continues to build up the knowledge gathered on these topic that has been ignored, and networks across the various struggles; and (4) the cultivation of community and coalition because the sharing of this research helps bring individuals together to form an alliance to push against majoritarian discourses.

LatCrit research outside of education includes scholarship within social work. A great example of this would be Daftary's (2018) piece "Intersectionality and the Disparate Experiences of Latinos Based on the Immigrant Status of Family Members." Daftary (2018) focuses on a much different subject matter in comparison to prior literature on LatCrit. Within her research, she focuses on immigrants and their family members who are also immigrants. She uses the tenets of LatCrit to help justify her research further as this piece discusses not just racism, but also oppression felt by Latinx immigrants. Additionally, the scholar uses grounded theory in order to analyze the interviews with immigrants within the research. Further scholarship within LatCrit research in social work includes Kiehne (2016), who focuses on how LatCrit can be applied to social work and social work related research on a mezzo and macro-level practice in social work, and how social workers could apply the LatCrit concepts to various civil

engagement campaigns. Another example of how CRT could apply outside of education is Teebagy's (2018) piece on the role race has in media storytelling of sexual assaults by college athletes. Within her piece, she discusses issues like White privilege, storytelling within the news and general race narratives and narratives of Black athletes. While this is not an example of Latino Critical Race Theory, I feel that this research is applicable as it discusses the use of racial narratives within the media.

Latina/o Critical Communication Theory (LatComm)

LatComm was first conceptualized by Anguiano and Castañeda (2014) as a theory that could be used in communication research to address "the material, verbal, visual, and discursive experiences of Latinos" (p. 108). The article is divided into two sections: the first section examines how the theoretical approach has been used within the communication field, and the second section brings connecting possibilities of CRT and LatCrit, offering a critical framework that interrogates Latina/o racialization that is situated in the communication discipline.

This theory was meant to bridge Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Latina/o Communication Studies together, all while centralizing the Latinx experience (Hinojosa Hernandez, Bowen, De Los Santos Upton, et al., 2019; Hinojosa Hernandez & Gutierrez-Perez, 2019; MichelleA. Holling & Marie Calafell, 2007). While CRT is a classic theory that focuses on major issues of race, it is primarily used within education and law scholarship and rarely within media studies (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado et al., 2012; Parker et al., 1999). Latina/o Critical Race Theory is a step forward for Latino/a/x/e research as scholars are able to explore scholarship within the Latinx community LatCrit is similar to CRT with a Latinx focus, but again it is primarily studied within law and education, but rarely within

communication and media studies (Bernal, Dolores Delgado, 2002; Fernandez, 2002; Jean Stefancic, 1997; Kiehne, 2016).

Additionally, this theory is "a point of analytical entry for communication scholars who want to examine Latinos in a more nuanced manner that includes critical analyses of race" (p. 113). This is something that a theory like LatCrit does as well, but with LatComm as a theoretical approach for this study, it provides a better structure for those communication scholars who want to analyze race within media and popular culture critically. The five tenets of LatComm are: 1) centralize the Chicana/o and Latina/o experience; 2) deploy decolonizing methodological approaches; 3) acknowledge and address the racism face by Latina/o communities; 4) resist literacy-colorblind language and rhetoric towards Latinas/os; and 5) promote a social justice dimension (Anguiano & Castaneda, 2014). Each of these tenets are inspired by CRT and LatCrit but allow for communication scholars to expand on the underrepresented scholarship that critically analyzes Latinx experiences, communities, and racial and social prejudice towards Latinx people within mass media. This approach allows for communication scholars to use communication related practices in relation to social, cultural, and political questions regarding the Latinx community. Anguiano and Castañeda also mention there have been additional projects using LatComm in communication to advance the reach and scope of research in regard to Latinx representation (or lack thereof) in the media, the problematics of the market/consumer relationship, Spanish-language media, and positionality in academia.

While searching for further literature regarding LatComm, a major limitation I found was that there is little work being done using this theoretical approach and that is because it is fairly new. One of the pieces I did find using LatComm has focused on how former President Donald

J. Trump uses his racist rhetoric to constantly degrade and insult Latinx people ("Latina/o Critical Communication Theory," 2018). Another approach of this theory was from communication scholar Diana Leon-Boys ("A Latina Captain: Decentering Latinidad through Audience Constructions in Dexter," 2019). Leon-Boys uses LatComm in order to examine the gendered Latinidad of Captain Maria LaGuerta from the television series *Dexter* (2006). I plan on using a similar qualitative and textual analysis approach that Leon-Boys used in her essay, and I will explore and textually analyze popular culture, specifically Latinx and U.S.-Mexico border representation in comic books by using Latina/o critical communication theory.

According to Suna (2018), the producers of entertainment formats must be considered as gatekeepers, since they decide which cultural references are to be adapted and reinterpreted for audiences (p. 32). This applies to Latinx comic book storytellers as well as they provide a representational point of view that audiences can view that are more complex in comparison to the stereotypical portrayals found within media (Aldama, 2017). Moreover, Latinx people are subjects of "controlling images" regarding images found within media, which they constantly challenge in order to create a definitive space for themselves (Vasquez, 2010). These "controlling images" are powerful as they can be both positive and negative in terms of creating and maintaining race, class, and gender oppression (Collins, 2008). As both a researcher and fan of comic books who is Latinx, I cannot stress enough the need for Latinx creators within comic book media that provide a diverse form of representation and more Latinx characters within comic books. Additionally, I would also like to see further representation of the U.S.-Mexico border in comic books as well as writers could explore plenty of topics around the area. To further the justification of this research, I will now discuss textual analysis and visual rhetoric as

methodological approaches, provide examples of these approaches within communication scholarship and comic studies, and discuss how both methods inform this research project.

Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory

For this project, I am proposing a new theoretical approach which I am calling Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory as my theoretical framework to address the representation of the Latinx characters and the use of the U.S.-Mexico border within the aforementioned comic books and graphic novels. With this proposed theoretical approach, I want to intersect the work Latinx scholars have done with Latina/o Critical Communication Theory, Narrative Theory, Visual Rhetoric, and Border Studies in order to further theorize popular culture surrounding Latinx spaces and communities. Originally, this model was meant for Latinx Popular Culture only and called Latinx Critical Popular Culture Theory, but as I began to get deeper into my analysis, I realized that border studies had a much larger impact than I originally believed. Figures 1-3 will showcase the evolution of Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory. With that in mind, I decided to update this theoretical approach to be called Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory. While I have laid out the foundation for Latina/o Critical Communication Theory, I will now go over other foundational theoretical approaches for Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory then provide the tenets or bridges that connect the theory together.

Another theoretical approach I am borrowing from is narrative theory. Narrative theory focuses on understanding the process of immersing into the story world, analyzing narration, the story itself, and the process of reading (Hatavara et al., 2015). Scholars from various disciplines have used this approach within literary studies, social sciences, language studies, and game studies to discuss and test the construction of world building within diverse media. Some of the

media that has been tackled includes literature, digital games, television shows and movies, just to name a few. Scholars like Aldama (2010) have used narrative theory in order to analyze the use of Latinx characters in comic book storytelling.

Additionally, another foundational theoretical approach used for Latinx critical popular culture theory is visual rhetoric. Brennan (2020) argues that visual criticism examines images, an assertion since applied to the study of advertisements, photographs, editorial cartoons furniture, sex manuals, street art, social media, and many others. Foss (2004a) provides two definitions for visual rhetoric. She states that visual rhetoric is a product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating. Second, it is a perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication. Various scholars and rhetoricians such as Kenneth Burke, David Zarefsky, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson all began to use visual images in rhetoric and analyzing images critically (Foss, 2004b).

Since laying the foundation and groundwork for this theory, the next step of this theoretical process is creating applicational tools, tenets, or what I will be calling bridges to develop further bodies of knowledge and work within Latinx Popular Culture scholarship. These bridges help serve as intellectual themes that address the goal of this theoretical approach. When creating these goals, I first examined and drew inspiration from the aforementioned foundational approaches to see what has been done before in relation to bridge building. Again, the focus of this approach is on members of the Latinx community within popular culture, so that became central to the creation of these tenets. First, centralizing the representation and reception of the Latina/o/x community within media and popular culture is the first bridge. Representation of the Latinx community within media and popular culture is crucial as it is the key focus within this theoretical framework. Representation could be analyzed in a multitude of ways, and could

discuss any form of Latinx representation found within media and popular culture including: culture, gender, LGBTQ+, border issues, political issues, and more. Second, scholars should acknowledge and address the racism faced by Latinx communities along the border within popular culture. Again, similar to the foundational theoretical approaches like CRT, LatCrit, and LatComm, it is important to acknowledge and address racism faced by Latinx communities along the border and within the media. While it is important to acknowledge all forms of racism faced by Latinx folks, this theoretical framework is centered around the U.S.-Mexico border and tackles issues discussed within the media and popular culture. Latinx representation in popular culture has been ridiculed with racialized stereotypes throughout the years, by using this theoretical approach, Latinx scholars can further address these issues and more as they analyze the border and popular culture.

Third, it is important to resist colorblind media towards Latinx folks to increase the representation and reception needed to properly showcase Latinx individuals within popular culture. In order to showcase various complex forms of Latinx identity within popular culture and the border, scholars must resist colorblind media in order to detract stereotypes and create narratives and counternarratives promoting positive forms of Latinx representation. Similar to CRT, producers of this media and scholars should promote the idea of using narratives and storytelling in order to showcase the experiences of Latinx individuals and communities. Comic books are a great example of where we can start as comic books are both visual and textual forms of storytelling.

Fourth, I have added decolonizing methodological approaches as a bridge/tenet to Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory. I want to approach decolonizing methodological approaches similar to Anguiano and Castaneda's (2014) approach that focuses on the

transnational multidimensional experience of Latinx folks all while encouraging critical methodologies that discuss intersectional identities, queer, feminist, borderland, postcolonial approaches as well. Finally, I want this theoretical approach to promote the inclusion of Latinas/os in popular culture and media. This is extremely important as scholars can push for further diverse inclusion and representation in Latinx popular culture. In addition, if scholars find an issue to be problematic, they can address it and provide a solution to include better Latinx and border representation with popular culture and media.

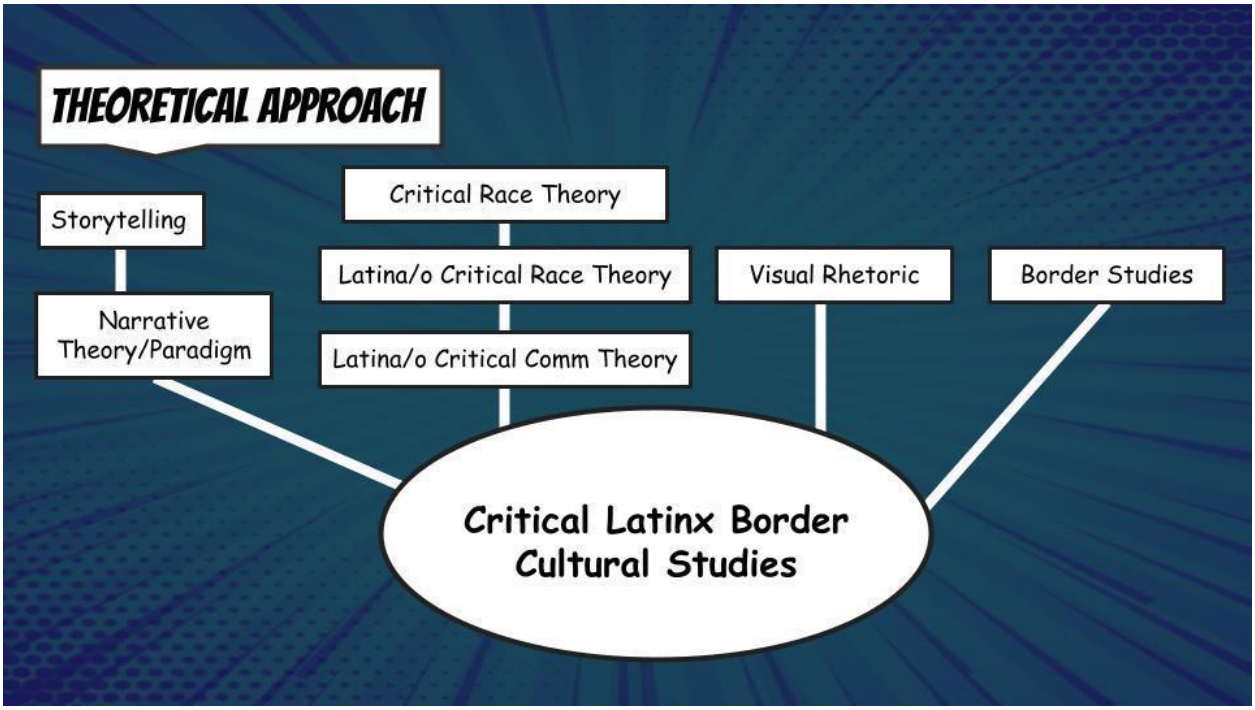


Figure 1

The Final Model for Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory. Ramirez. A.R. (2022)

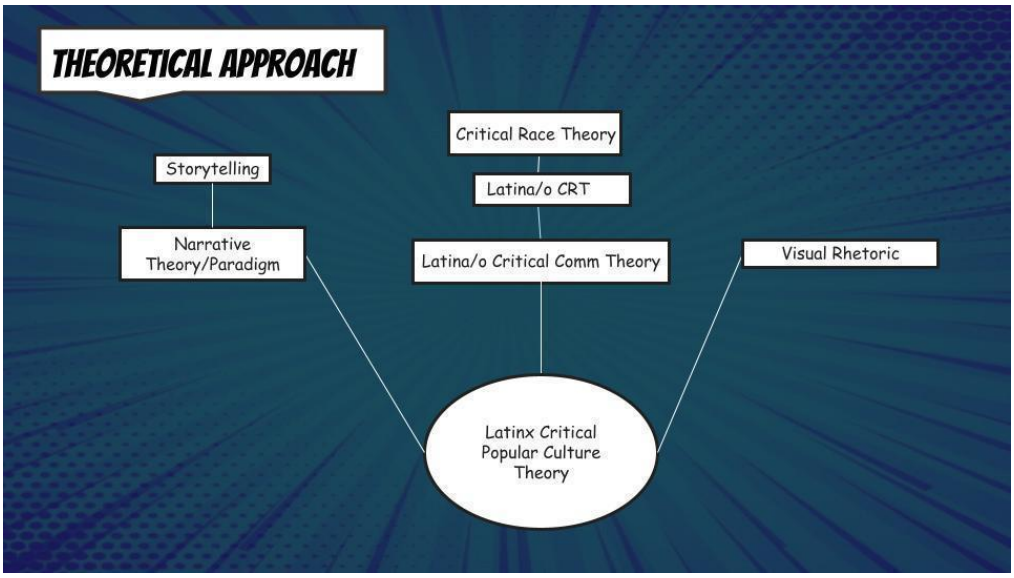


Figure 2

A simple take on Latinx Critical Popular Culture Theory Model Ramirez. A.R. (2021)

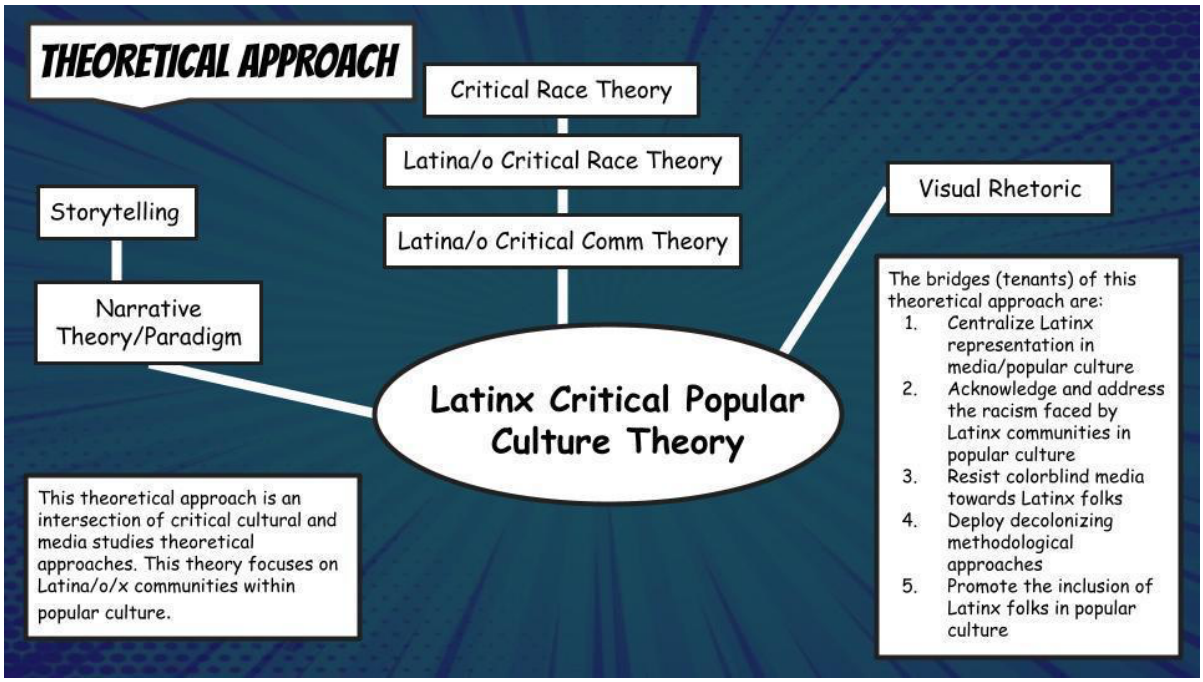


Figure 3
A Visualization of the formation of the Latinx Critical Popular Culture Theory Model
Ramirez. A.R. (2021)

Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory centralizes the media practices, border experiences, representation, and inclusion of Latinx folks within popular culture. The theory is broad enough that it provides an avenue for Latinx scholars of various disciplines including communication to theorize and analyze various popular culture and border artifacts within different media spaces.

It provides an opportunity for Latinx scholars to apply and theorize in spaces where there are academic gaps. Additionally, scholars can use this to further theorize Latinindad and cultural markers found within Latinx popular culture and border studies. The next chapter of this project will focus on the methodology and how I analyzed the comic books and graphic novels of this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces three methodological approaches for the current study on examining Latinx and border representation found within comic books focused on the U.S.-Mexico border. First, the study uses qualitative and rhetorical methodologies, textual analysis, visual rhetoric, and narratology in order to examine the comic books and graphic novels, gather data, and later create an analysis for this project. I have also created a chart that gathers the title, release date or year, authors, publisher, genre, age group, and the number of issues of each of the comic books and graphic novels that are analyzed within this study. By creating this chart, I want to begin creating a mini collection or archive with information regarding comic books that focus on the U.S.-Mexico border. I will discuss the rationale for choosing these methods and their collective benefits in the overview study as well as my outline for collecting data.

Textual Analysis

For this project, I plan to conduct a visual rhetoric textual analysis and use Latinx Critical Popular Culture Theory to discuss the identity and representation of members of Latinx community and of the U.S.-Mexico border found in comic books centered around the southern border. According to Alan McKee (2003), textual analysis is a methodological approach for researchers to use and gather information of various members of various cultures and subcultures and how they fit into the world. Textual analysis involves analyzing not just the content of the artifact, but the structure, design, and other elements within the larger context of the media involved. Communication scholars commonly use textual analysis as a means to understand their artifact, but it is rarely applied to comic book scholarship. Valdivia (2010) has a chapter focused on textual analysis on Latinx media portrayals and discusses how textual analysis is the area in

which there is the most research regarding Latinx folks in the media. She continues by stating that analyzing issues of ethnicity and Latinx folks is important due to the underrepresentation of Latinx people in media and popular culture. Additionally, Valdivia explains that studying content and representation around Latinx culture is important towards Latinx Media Studies as it "speaks to the fulfillment of the democratic potential of communication practices…and themes and messages that we and others use to make sense of the world" (p. 71). Few scholars have used textual analysis to analyze and critique comic books, with the notable exceptions of Aldama & González (2016), Gordon et al. (2001), and Jenkins (2020).

Content analysis seems to be more commonly used within comic studies (Özdemir, 2017; Pantaleo, 2019; Spiegelman et al., 1952; Weber & Rall, 2017). Content analysis is a method used to evaluate an artifact (document, speech, image, video) and later code or categorize elements to later interpret the text so that others can understand it and it can be repeated or replicated (Mayring, 2000).

Visual Rhetoric

The second method that I used for this study is visual rhetoric. Olson et al. (2008) present an edited collection called *Visual Rhetoric: A Reader in Communication and American Culture*. It is divided into five sections: Performing and Seeing, Remembering and Memorializing, Confronting and Resisting, Commodifying and Consuming, and finally, Governing and Authorizing. While there are various definitions of visual rhetoric, Olson et al. define it as "symbolic actions enacted primarily through visual means, made meaningful through culturally derived ways of looking and seeing and endeavoring to influence diverse publics" (Olson et al., 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, the authors mention that visual rhetoric also has been called "the rhetoric of symbolic action, rhetorical dimensions of media, rhetoric of non oratorical forms,

celluloid rhetoric, rhetorical iconography" (p. xv). They describe visual rhetoric as the rhetoric of a genre or medium like artwork, maps, documentaries and film, cartoons, comic books, advertisements, and textiles (p. xv). A limitation that I found within *Visual Rhetoric* is that it does not analyze comic books or graphic novels. With that being said, there is a chapter that does focus on editorial cartoons, which are similar to comic strips. Edwards & Winkler (2008) critically analyze the use of the infamous Iwo Jima image of five Marines and a Navy Corpsman raising the U.S. flag in editorial cartoons. The authors argue that the image's reoccurrence makes it a political ideograph that can extend outside of its iconic societal contexts. Again, I argue that while this is a useful start and example of how one can use visual rhetoric within cartoons and comic strips, it does not fully capture how this methodology can be used for comic books and graphic novels. While comic strips are similar to comic books, they are only one image, in comparison to the length of comic books and graphic novels which includes more information to analyze including pages worth of material with multiple panels with images and text.

There are various definitions of visual rhetoric. Brennan (2020), for example, describes it as a way to examine and critique images, an approach since applied to the study of advertisements, photographs, editorial cartoons, furniture, sex manuals, street art, social media, and many other visual mediums. According to Foss (2004) who provides two definitions for visual rhetoric, visual rhetoric is first created as a purpose of communicating. Second, it is an application tool that focuses on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication. I feel that this added methodological approach is needed due to the images associated with narratives in comic books and graphic novels. This method allows me to critically analyze the imagery, colors, art style, and symbols used within the content I have chosen. Kostelnick (1996) uses visual rhetoric to examine whole documents, specifically spura-

textual designs, which are global, top-down visual elements, including (?) textual, spatial, and graphic formats, that allow the reader to examine the document rhetorically. Amare & Manning (2007) use visual rhetoric to analyze document design, specifically how text and graphics work together within the document. This is similar to how comic books are produced, using text and imagery in order to tell a narrative. By using visual rhetorical approach, I can analyze both the text and imagery in a critical and in-depth way in order to provide the best technique for me to examine Latinx and border identity within these comics.

Visual rhetoric has also been used by various scholars as a means of critiquing and analyzing comic books. An example of the use of visual rhetoric with comic books is by Watkins & Lindsley (2020) who examine how user experience (UX) practice within comic books story sequences helps learners understand complicated processes through transferable sequential rhetoric. They explain that this user experience practice has the potential to move comic book story sequences from an accessible text toward less familiar texts (software and UX design). Other scholars have focused on how comics are multimodal (multiple semiotic modes combined as a means of communicating) and examine the use of multimodal rhetoric in newspaper comic strips all while examining the texts and imagery of the comic strips (Jacobs, 2007).

In his dissertation, Baker (2017) uses visual rhetoric to examine the power of costume iconography, especially from superhero characters impacted by tokenism and the implications of comic companies favoring merchandising over meaning, which can lead to racist, sexist, or otherwise negative products that support or maintain problematic representations of marginalized peoples. Duncan (2000) provides another example of visual rhetoric within comic books, as he frames comic books as a form of rhetoric and visual rhetoric. Duncan examines various comic

books and examines each of them panel-by-panel and dissects each of the issues' structure, illustrations, and writing. Watkins' (2014) dissertation explains how to teach sequential rhetoric through teaching comic books as visual rhetoric. Watkins incorporates progymnasmata, a set of exercises intended to prepare students of rhetoric for the creation and performance of complete practice discourse, in order to have students create and analyze comics in a step-by-step process to promote visual literacy.

Another key example that I want to highlight is from Figueiredo (2017), who presents the translated reflections of European cartoonist and educator Rodolphe Töphffer. Töphffer passed away in 1846 but thought about critically analyzing graphic storytelling including early comics including media rhetoric, emerging imaging technology, and the literature itself. According to Figueiredo, Töphffer was innovative not only in his comic work, but also his level of thinking about comic books. Moreover, Figueiredo considers Töphffer one of the fathers of rhetorically analyzing comic books both visually and textually. This work is significant and foundational to this study as it provides historical context of former academics and creators using visual rhetoric to critically analyze comic books.

Further academic research using visual rhetoric to examine comics or graphic novels is from Wiederhold (2013) as she analyzes *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation.* Throughout this piece, Wiederhold describes how the graphic adaptation provides an extra layer of meaning-making as the visuals provide cues that represent ambiguity, absences, and temporalities. She argues how graphic nonfiction produces two contradictory claims: "(1) the constraints of the medium contribute to dangerous oversimplification and glossing of nuanced complexity and (2) the interplay of visual and verbal cues enables sophisticated meaning-making through implication and perceptual gestalts" (Wiederhold, 2013, p. 434). The author argues that:

> …graphic adaptations draw special attention to the processes of selection and representation present in all nonfiction work, which are, after all, adaptations themselves. Nonfiction literature, film, theater, and graphic novels all strive to adapt lived experience of historical people, places, and events for a different medium—be it the page, stage, or screen" [p. 434].

With this being said, while a majority of the comic books and graphic novels I am analyzing for this investigation are fictional, there are nonfictional aspects involved that are lived realities and experiences many face living on the border.

Outside of academia, this mix of textual analysis and visual rhetoric has been used by comic artist and analyst Scott McCloud and comic artist and writer Will Eisner, who both created highly influential books that examine comic books with a deeper and more analytical perspective that had not been seen outside of academic scholarship or for general audiences. This work was influential both in and outside of comic studies as it provided another analytical lens for scholars and another outlet for general audiences to further enjoy reading comic books. While there is work that focuses on using this mix of textual analysis and visual rhetoric, there is still limited research that focuses on comic books from the U.S.-Mexico border and that analyzes Latinx representation. I hope to fill that gap with this dissertation project as I use textual analysis and visual rhetoric to examine comic books centered around the U.S.–Mexico border and that represent Latinx folks.

Narratology

My final method that I used for this dissertation is narratology or narrative theory. I felt that it was important to include narratology as a method for this study as comic books all tell

stories through their narrative. This is an important aspect of comic books and graphic novels that is worthy of analysis for this dissertation, as the narrative will help break down various forms of representation of Latinx identity and the U.S.-Mexico border. According to Bal (2017), "narratology is field of study that is an ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events of cultural artifacts that tell a story." This approach can also be called narrative theory. Riessman (2007) defines the term narrative as a story or storytelling that "demands consequential linking of events or ideas." He also defines narrative shaping as, "imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected." Bal mentions how narrative has an omnipresence within culture and how the two intersect well with each other, thus leading it to become a logical method for analyzing various cultural objects. He also describes narratology as perspective on culture. All of this is incredibly relevant to this project as I am focusing on narratives surrounding Latinx and border culture and representation within comic books and graphic novels.

Within communication studies and various subdisciplines, Clair et al. (2014) examine the contributions of narrative theory and criticism has made across rhetoric, organizational communication, health communication and cultural studies. Within this study, these scholars mention using narrative theory as an approach to examine various artifacts within these subdisciplines, but also develop a series of clusters as a way to examine the theory of narrative empathy. An interesting approach within narrative theory comes from Thoss (2015) as he discusses the concept of narrative metalepsis, which is an intrusion made by the narrator or the narratee within the storyworld. Specifically, Thoss mentions that narrative metalepsis is "the move by means of which a character, frequently a narrator, moves from one diegetic level to another" and as "violations of the moving but sacred frontier between two worlds." I found these

concepts to be incredibly interesting as they reminded me of Anzaldúa's concept of *nepantla*, which describes the state of "in-betweenness" one feels within their identity, but this narrative metalepsis finds this *nepantla* like state within the narrative and characters involved. Sowards & Pineda (2013) also analyze the immigrant narratives of ABC's *Ugly Betty*, Los Lobo's 2006 album, *The Town and the City*, and CNN Presents: "Immigrant Nation." This study's analysis is divided into three sections: first, the lived realities and personalized narratives of the immigrant experience constructs stereotypes through repetition; second, how audiences interpretations leading to their beliefs and attitudes about immigrants; finally, humanizing issues of immigration including hard work and the pursuit of the American Dream in the United States.

Comic scholars have approached using narratology or narrative theory as a methodology to examine the stories, narratives, storyworlds, texts, images, the events surrounding comic books and graphic novels. For example, Aldama (2009, 2010, 2017) uses narrative theory in order to examine the characters and narratives surrounding Latinx characters in comic books to showcase how they are represented within this medium. In a collection edition from Aldama (2011), multiple authors use narrative theory in various forms of fiction including literature, television, and films. Various authors focus on narrative and semiotic themes within these various forms of media including cultural and multicultural approaches. A limitation and critique of this book is the exclusion of comic books and graphic novels. With that being said, in 2013 Aldama released another collected edition that focuses on Latinos and Narrative Media, which included chapters on comic books, borderlands, and border related media. Fojas (2013) analyzes the Latinidad within narratives of border centric media including films and television shows including: *No Country for Old Men* (2007), *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005), *Sin Nombre* (2009), *Day Without a Mexican* (2004), *Homeland Security USA* (ABC 2009), and

Bordertown: Laredo (A&E 2011) and *Machete* (2010). Throughout her analysis of this border centric media, Fojas explains how most of these films and shows transmit erroneous information and representation of immigrants and immigration, or discuss the serious aspects of the subject matters in a humorous and parody type of way. Within this collected edition, Foster (2013) examines the allegory of Chicano identity within Javier Hernandez's *El Muerto* comic book series. *El Muerto* uses a lot of Mexican historical and cultural symbolism throughout its textual and visual narrative including *Dia de los Muertos* and Aztec deities.

Other scholars such as Hescher (2017) examine graphic novels as a genre and through its use of narration by using the narratological approach to analyze these topics. Within his analysis, he describes graphic novels as having seven gradable subcategories that define its genre: 1) multi-layered plot and narration, 2) multi-referential use of color, 3) complex text-image relation, 4) meaning-enhancing panel design and layout, 5) structural performativity, 6) references to texts/media, and 7) self-referential and metafictional devices. In my opinion, these are also great forms of examination one can use while using visual rhetoric to analyze comic books or graphic novels.

While using visual rhetoric to analyze the images involved with comic books and graphic novels, I also plan on incorporating the narrative approach of visual analysis. Visual analysis "draws on thematic and dialogic/performance methods, applying them here to images that are interpreted alongside spoken and written text" (Riessman, 2007). Riessman also describes how within social science investigators must write about images within their research. She states that "we have to make arguments in words about images, that is contextualized and interpret them in light of theoretical questions in our respective fields." As the old saying goes, "an image is worth a thousand words," and in this case, Riessman argues that images contain their own separate

theories based on the understandings of the creators, and those who are analyzing the image including audience members and scholars. Additionally, Riessman explains how visuals in narrative research has changed with technology in terms of data collection. This idea applies to my study as well, as I am not only examining physical copies of comic books and graphic novels, but digital formats of these mediums as well, due to the age of the comic, convivence purposes (as they were easier to find in a digital format), or that these comics/graphic novels are only available in a digital format. As you can see, these methods all intersect for a variety of reasons because of the comic book/graphic novel mediums. The intersection of text and imagery lead to the use of these mixed methodological approaches to become synergized into one collective method in order to analyze the artifacts of this research project.

Method

During this investigation, I critically analyzed the text and imagery of 15 comic book series to discover how these artifacts showcase representation of the U.S.-Mexico border and Latinx identity. The parameters for my artifacts were: they must be in a comic book or graphic novel format, the comic books/graphic novels must focus on the U.S.-Mexico border or U.S.-Mexico borderland related topics. When searching for comic books focused on the U.S.-Mexico border, I used search engines like Google and digital malls like Amazon and Comixology. Also, I searched in various comic book archives and databases (Grand Comics Database, Archive.com, Digital Comic Museum) including contacting various universities that include comic book databases to find the comic books I needed for this project. While searching I would use terms such as “Mexico,” “border,” “Border Patrol,” “Immigrants,” and “U.S.-Mexico Border” to find relevant comic books. An example of an artifact that I had to exclude from this project was called *Borders* (2021) by Thomas King and Natasha Donovan. The graphic novel focused on an

Indigenous boy and his mother road tripping along the United States and Canada border to find where they truly identify and connect. Again, I wanted to focus on comic books and graphic novels with narratives centered on the U.S.-Mexico border, and if they included Latinx representation, which most of them did, that was a bonus.

Once I found the comic books and graphic novels for this study, I read and analyzed each comic book multiple times (2-3 times). Most of the comics were read digitally using an app on Comixology or in a PDF digital format. The books/graphic novels that I read a physical format copy of are: *Migra Mouse* (2004), *Rende-vous in Phoenix* (2016), and *Home* (2021). There is no real difference between digital or hardcopy versions of the comic books/graphic novel. I chose the digital format as it is easier for me to access.

The first read of each comic book was used to get an idea of what each story was about. The second and third time that I read each comic, I took notes on the Latinx identity, border representation, and various imagery or text on immigration, the border and the treatment of Latinx characters. From there, I also transcribed various quotes from the comics and the author interviews on those subject matters in order to later code themes for this study. These coded themes would later be explained in detail to showcase the various themes, cultural signifiers, and forms of representation found within these comics books and graphic novels. In addition, I took notes of the various images focused on the U.S.-Mexico border to analyze and critique through a visual rhetorical lens the way members of the Latinx community, migrants, and other role players of the border are represented. I also provide critical examinations of various images found within the comic books and graphic novels, breaking down each image in terms of representation, culture, race, and how it relates to the border. Using narratology as a methodology, I analyze the various narratives and stories of each of the comic books and graphic

novels, specifically I focus on the stories and themes surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border and members of the Latinx community in order to make sense of various events and actions that revolve around the borderlands. In comic books like *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5* and *The Punisher: Border Crossing* both featured stories that were not located in the U.S.-Mexico border and did not include Latinx characters, these other stories were disregarded and dismissed from the data collection process.

The themes of this dissertation are: Border Narratives - Tales of the Border with subthemes, Defining and Illustrating Borders, Key Spaces - Geography, Key Landscapes and Locations; the next major theme was Latinx Representation and Characters of the Border, which discussed migrants/immigrants, law enforcement of the border, bandidos and coyotes, drug dealers, cartel/gang members, politicians, samaritans and volunteers, aliens and monsters of the border; the third major theme was Use of Language; the fourth theme analyzed was cultural signifiers; Fifth theme examined Gender Roles of the Border; the sixth theme discussed White Saviors and Militants; the eighth theme focused on the Violence and Brutality found within the comics and graphic novels.

Through my search of comic books centered around the U.S.-Mexico border, I found out the aimed audience, the genre of the story, publisher, author, number of books or issues, and the year each of the comics were released. All this information was collected and can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Title	Release Date or Year	Author(s)	Publisher	Genre	Age Group	Number of Issues
Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5	1944	Chas. M Quinlan	Holyke	War		1

The Border Patrol	1951	Paul S. Newman (rumored)	P.L. Publishing Co., Inc.	Western		3 issues
Guía Del Migrante Mexicano	2004	México Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores	México Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores	How to Guide		1 issue
Migra Mouse: Political Cartoons on Immigration	2004	Lalo Alcaraz	Akashic Books	Satire	15+	1 book
I.C.E. Immigration And Customs Enforcement	2011-2012 (print) November 6, 2013 (digital)	Doug Wagner	12 Gauge	Action/Adventure Crime	15+ Only	4 issues
The Punisher: Border Crossing	2015	Nathan Edmondson and Kevin Maurer	Marvel Comics	Superhero	12+	1 book
Rendez-vous in Phoenix	November 15, 2016	Tony Sandoval	Magnetic Press	History/Biography Graphic Novel	15+	1 book
El Peso Hero: Border Stories	2016	Hector Rodriguez III	Rio Bravo Comics	Action/Adventure Original Series	15+	1 issue
Barrier	May 9, 2018	Brian K. Vaughan, Marcos Martin, Muntsa Vicente	Panel Syndicate/ Image Comics	Sci-Fi	Mature	5 issues
Border Town	2018	Eric Esquivel	Vertigo Comics	Action/Adventure Horror	Mature	4 issues
El Peso Hero: Border Land	2019	Hector Rodriguez III	Rio Bravo Comics	Action/Adventure Original Series	12+	1 issue
The Scar: Graphic Reportage from the US-Mexico Border	2019	Renato Chiocca	Fantagraphics	Non-Fiction/Political	17+	1 issue
Red Border	2020	Jason Starr	AWA Studios – Upshot	Action/Adventure	15+	4 issues
The Other Side of the Border	2020	Jean-Luc Fromental	Europe Comics	Drama	12+	1 book
Home	2021	Julio Anta	Image Comics	Action/Adventure	12+	5 issues

As aforementioned, comic books have long been a medium tackling various issues found within society including immigration. The topic of border immigration is highlighted briefly in comic books that feature Superman and in various "Captain America" storylines (Landa, 2014;

McMillian, 2017; Ross, 2015). Yet, the U.S.-Mexico border is still a topic that has been rarely touched upon as a subject matter of comic book stories. I created Table 1 as a database to formally showcase and list comic books and graphic novels that focus on the U.S.-Mexico border as there was not a current list displaying this genre of comic books. Through my research, I was able to find out that there are 15 comic books of various genres that focus on the U.S.-Mexico border (and possibly more that I have not yet discovered) including one from the Mexican government, but as of right now I want to focus on these comic books and graphic novels. With this list, there was not as specific a timeline I was aiming for as I was just trying my best to find comic books that focus on the U.S.-Mexico border. That was my biggest goal for creating this list and table. With this dissertation, I want to bring light to the comic books that do focus on this subject and how the comic book writers of these 15 comic books represent the U.S.-Mexico border and the various people of the border. The next chapter of this project will now focus on the analysis portion of my research.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

This chapter will expand on literature done by those who have conducted comic studies, media representation on Latinx folks, and representation of the borderlands. Additionally, this chapter will discuss my findings including various themes around representation of Latinx people and representation of the U.S.-Mexico border that I found within the comic books and graphic novels of this study. I will go into detail about the narratives and how these narratives contribute to the representation of Latinx folks from the borderlands, and how these images and illustrations further expand on these portrayals. The themes of my analysis were: Border Narratives - Tales of the Border with subthemes, Defining and Illustrating Borders, Key Spaces - Geography, Key Landscapes and Locations; the next major theme was Latinx Representation and Characters of the Border, which discusses migrants/immigrants, law enforcement of the border, bandidos and coyotes, drug dealers, cartel/gang members, politicians, samaritans and volunteers, aliens and monsters of the border; the third major theme was Use of Language; the fourth theme analyzed was Cultural Signifiers; the fifth theme examined Gender Roles of the Border; the sixth theme discussed White Saviors and Militants; the eighth and final theme focused on the Violence and Brutality.

Table 2

Themes	**Subthemes**
Border Narratives - Tales of the Border	● Defining and Illustrating Borders ● Key Spaces-Geography, Key Landscapes and Locations
Latinx Representation and Characters of the Border	● Migrants/Immigrants ● Law Enforcement of the Border ● Bandidos and Coyotes ● Drug Dealers, Cartel/Gang Members

	• Politicians • Samaritans and Volunteers • Aliens and Monsters of the Border
Use of Language	
Cultural Signifiers	• Familismo • Espiritualismo
Gender Roles of the Border	
White Saviors and Militants	
Violence and Brutality	

Border Narratives - Tales of the Border

Figure 4

Image of Libby. Reprinted from *Barrier.* Artwork by Marcos Martin. All rights belong to Image Comics and Panel Syndicate

Defining and Illustrating Borders

While focusing on the understudied topic of Latinx representation within the U.S.-Mexico border in comic books and graphic novels, I found the portrayal of the border was an important aspect of these stories and my project. I found themes of climate, militarization, globalization, and the science fiction and supernatural forms of representation of the border in the comic books and graphic novels analyzed.

Most of the comic books and graphic novels depict the border as mountainous desert, dry, and warm. Some of the comic books specifically describe in detail about the climate of the environment. The authors of *The Scar* mention how heavy the heat is as they have been walking for hours. The Samaritans who are guiding the authors describe that they wear gaiter boots to protect themselves from snake and insect bites, as that is one of the main causes of migrant deaths. One of the Samaritans says,

"Besides hunger and thirst, these are the rises for those who travel at night. The group has to keep going. If you get hurt, lost, or exhausted, they leave you behind."

Representation of Militarization and Globalization of the U.S.-Mexico Border

One of the key themes of the representation of the U.S.-Mexico border is depicted as a militarization zone that is used as a defense mechanism to discourage immigrants from crossing into the United States. According to border and Latinx studies scholar, John D. Márquez (2012), the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border has "unprecedented levels of military and economic resources to prevent 'illegal' immigration across [the United States] southern border" (p. 474). Márquez also explained that an outcome of border militarization is the increased amount of

immigrant deaths and the surge of violence, both victimizing Latinx immigrants and citizens of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Within one of the stories of *The Scar*, one of the Samaritans described how the construction of the border wall increased the militarization of the border. The narrative follows the story of migrants in search of a better life who risk everything crossing a border patrolled by 4,200 agents and ultimately dying in the process. Márquez (2012) describes this militarization of the border as "premeditated" as a way to deter immigrants and enforce immigration policy. Therefore, *The Scar* reinforces this form of "pre-meditated" militarization and border representation as the Samaritan details the impact of the construction of the border wall and the number of border patrol agents has had on immigrants.

Additionally, this imagery of militarization continues in *The Scar* as border patrol officers from both sides of the border policing the border wall. A group of border patrol officers are chasing a group of drug runners along the border of Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. One of the border patrol officers by the name of Lonnie Ray Swartz breaks his jurisdiction and shoots into Mexico and fires ten shots and kills a young 16-year-old Mexican boy by the name of Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez. While most of the stories involved in this analysis are fictional, this story is nonfiction and is based on real events that happened. This real life situation occurred on October 10, 2012 around 11:30 pm as a police officer received a call regarding suspicious activity in Nogales, Arizona (Binelli, 2016). Similar to the story presented in *The Scar,* police and border patrol agents were chasing drug smugglers who had climbed the fence into Nogales, Mexico. They then heard and saw rocks flying from the sky and hitting the ground. Soon gun shots were fired and Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez was killed with ten gun shots to various parts of the body. It was later discovered that Border Patrol Agent Lonnie Ray

Swartz broke jurisdiction in order to shoot the young boy. *The Scar* mentions that Swartz was still on trial in 2015, but the authors did not include that the trial ended in 2020 with Swartz being found not guilty as the jury acquitted him (Trevizo, 2020).

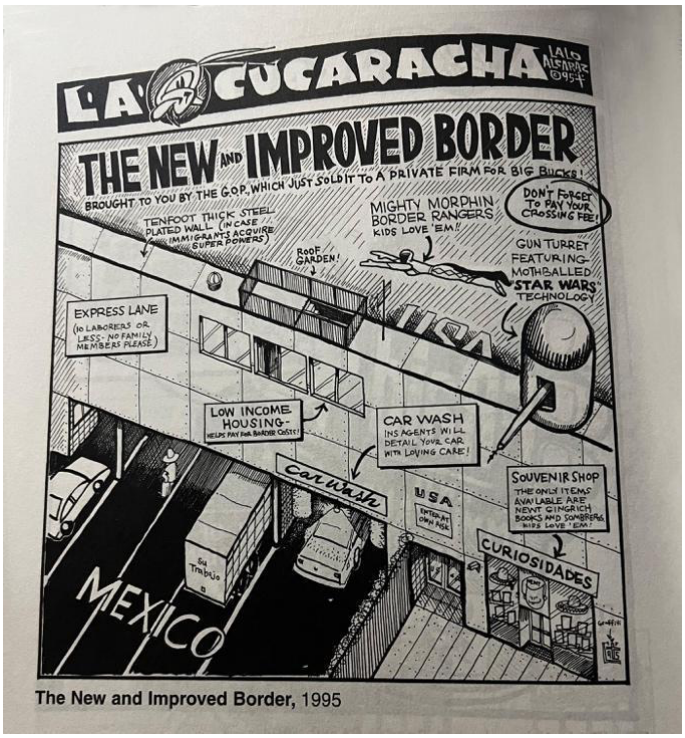
Figure 5

Image of a U.S. Border Patrol Agent shooting a person in Mexico. Reprinted from *The Scar*. Artwork by Andrea Ferraris, all rights belong to Fantagraphics.

In a more realistic take of the border, the creators of the *Red Border* depict the border as a large wall with metal or wooden exes creating a large barrier on top of it with chicken wire all around, which also reinforces the militarization representation from *The Scar*. Márquez (2012) explained how the U.S. government implements border and immigration policies in order to deter immigrants away from the border, the same could be said for *Red Border* and *The Scar* as both comic book's narratives and representations of the border to reinforce these policies from the U.S. government as the story and imagery include these same militarization deterrents for immigrants to not come into the United States. During my time in El Paso, Texas, I lived close to the border and my family would drive on the border highway where we would see the "border wall," which was just a large fence with barbed wire on it, similar to what is described and

illustrated in *The Scar*, and border patrol agent vehicles on the side of the road. These border patrol vehicles would often drive around neighborhood streets slowly patrolling the area. At night, my family and I would hear helicopters patrolling the area and at times shining a spotlight on houses in search of people who crossed the border illegally.

Border scholar, Ewa Antoszek (2018) explores how within the second decade of the twenty-first century the border has changed dramatically both in terms of militarization and globalization. Antoszek explained that globalization has led to borders being open to international trades and services, but it also has turned certain parts of the U.S.-Mexico border into "impenetrable territories" with its status reinforced by militarization. This depiction of a militarized and globalized border is reflected in Alcaraz's *Migra Mouse*, in the comic he illustrated and criticized a satirical vision of the border by the GOP (Grand Old Party) which he called the "New and Improved Border." This "New and Improved Border" featured: a souvenir shop, car wash, express lane, low-income housing, Mighty Morphin' Border Rangers (a satirical parody of the popular Power Rangers franchise), and a gun turret featuring mothballed Star Wars technology.



The New and Improved Border, 1995

Figure 6

Image of "The New and Improved Border." Reprinted from *Migra Mouse*. Artwork by Lalo Alcaraz. All rights belong to Akashic Books

While Alcaraz is satirically representing border check-points many of the imagery he included reflect Antozek's (2018) and Márquez's (2012) findings of the border, featuring both representations of militaristic and violent forms of defense, and representations of globalization and capitalism through trade. The U.S.-Mexico border is a complex region as it is supposed to represent a "existence of a favorable economic climate that permits borderlands on both sides of the line to pursue growth and development projects that are tied to foreign capital, market, and labor," which is supposed to lead to a "mutually beneficial economic system" between the two countries (Antoszek, 2018; O. J. Martinez, 1998).

The title “New and Improved Border” represents a capitalistic take on the border as if the old border was not good enough and it needed rebranding. When crossing the border, the lanes are often filled with cars and people walking and crossing over to both sides of the United States and Mexico. This rebranding that Alcaraz describes furthers this capitalistic and globalization take of the border by including a souvenir shop in which tourists can purchase items from either the United States or Mexico. Additionally, Alcaraz includes a carwash with his take on the “New and Improved Border,” which is not an idea that is too far-fetched, as there are people on both sides of the border who ask and charge dollars or pesos to clean the windows of cars while waiting in line to cross into either country. One can also correlate the car wash to Latinx car culture as in detailing cars with new paint jobs, rims, making them into lowriders or race cars, and keeping their cars clean (Avila & Carpio, 2019; Lopez, 2010).

While continuing to examine the “New and Improved Border,” representations of social class are also involved within this satirical comic image as Alcaraz includes low-income housing and an express lane within his iteration of the U.S.-Mexico border. The inclusion of an express lane is an accurate depiction of the border bridges, as many of these bridges do include express lanes. These express lanes are meant to allow, at an extra cost, drivers a faster lane to cross the border through the bridge. They are a rite of passage into either country, but with a cost. Express lanes are a representation of social class as people need to purchase an express lane pass in order to use the express lane. The imagery of social class continues with the inclusion of low-income housing on the “New and Improved Border.” In many Latinx neighborhoods, there is low-income housing. A personal example would be low-income housing like the Sherman Apartments or Tays North Apartment Complex near the Cordova Bridge of Americas in El Paso, Texas in the United States. The inclusion of social class within Alcaraz’s comic is important to

state because social class is a big reason many migrants decide to migrate to the United States. They feel that they will be able to have a better life financially and that they will be able to find a job that will help them provide for their families. As previously stated, not everyone can afford express lanes or even obtain the documentation needed to cross into the United States legally due to how expensive and time consuming the process can be.

Antoszek (2018) describes the intersection of globalization and militarization on the border:

> Globalization and people's flows at the beginning of the twenty-first century both opened some borders to international trade or services and at the same time turned other borders into almost completely impenetrable territories with its status reinforced by legislation and militarization.

An intersection of globalization and militarization on the border would be the inclusion of the Mighty Morphin' Border Rangers and the use of Star Wars technology. The parody Power Rangers and use of Star Wars technology are an intersection of globally recognized popular culture characters or motifs, and militaristic characters or weaponry that are meant to defend and patrol the border. While the Border Rangers are a parody, they can also be a metaphor for other militarization tactics and so-called "border defenders" known as the Minutemen. Again, Minutemen are anti-immigration vigilantes who believe that they are defending the border (DeChaine et al., 2012). All of these examples reinforce these concepts of capitalization, globalization, and militarization on the border. Again, I refer back to the tenets of LatCrit, LatComm, and Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory as these authors of these comic books are further refining these theoretical approaches as many of the examples presented

through this analysis centralizes the experiences of Latinx folks, while addressing various issues of racism and prejudice Latinx immigrants are facing.

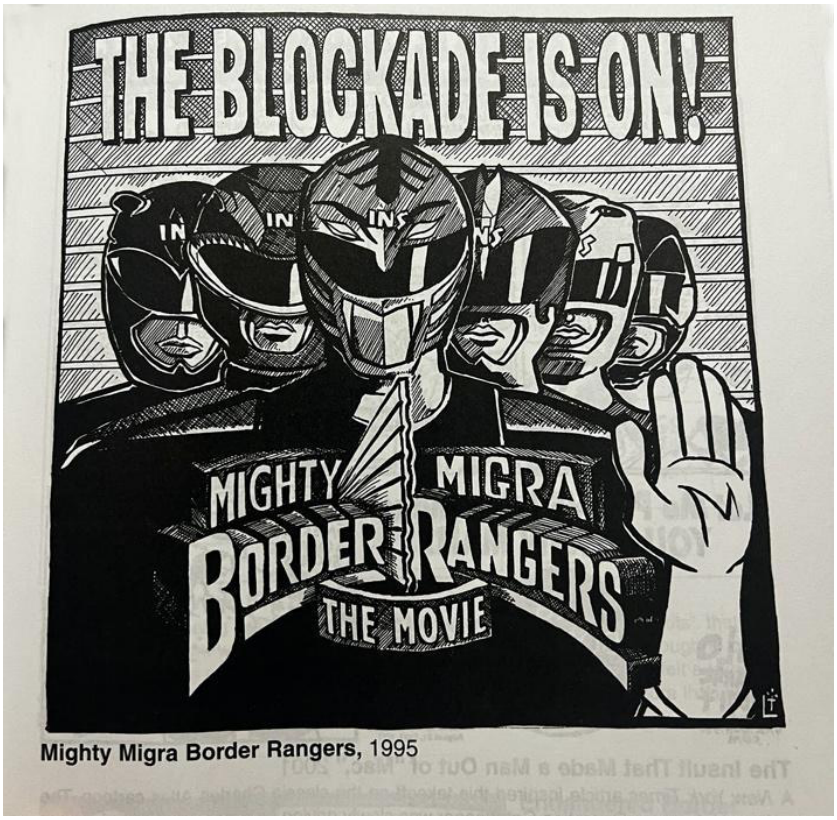


Figure 7

Image of the Mighty Migra Border Rangers, a parody on the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers. Reprinted from *Migra Mouse.* Artwork by Lalo Alcaraz. All rights belong to Akashic Books

Within the two comic books, *Border Town* and *Barrier*, they both depict the border between the U.S./Mexico and discuss immigration, but they also discuss different forms of borders too including supernatural and science fiction like borders. Through key terms like "supernaturally charged" or "border between worlds," *Border Town* focuses on the border in a real-world aspect and supernatural aspect as well. As the literal border was a bridge to the Aztec supernatural world of Mictlan and the real world of Devil's Fork, Arizona. By using supernatural elements within the comic books, Esquivel was able to include not only supernatural aspects

found within comic books, but supernatural cultural signifiers tied to the Latinx community. For example, Esquivel explores supernatural Mexican folklore characters like the *chupacabra, el cucuy*, and *la llorona* just to name a few. The Mexican folklore characters are meant to not only represent a supernatural aspect, but also horror elements too as these characters are rooted in Mexican horror as *el cucuy* is the Mexican equivalent of the boogie man and *la llorona* is similar to the myth of "Bloody Mary." I discuss these characters in more detail later within my analysis. Furthermore, Esquivel also includes *curanderismo,* which is a mix of supernatural and spiritual holistic practices that are influenced by elements of the Aztec belief system and Mesoamerican culture (Hoskins & Pardon, 2018). I continue the discussion of *curanderismo* and *curanderas* in the *espiritualismo* subsection of the cultural signifiers analyzed within the comic books. These various concepts of border could be even traced back to Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* book as she uses a variety of examples of border identity and representation including spiritual imagery of the border. Latinx people who are from borderland zones are conceptualized as "juggling cultures" and having "plural personalities" as they are dealing with dualistic identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). This is showcased within *Border Town* as most of the lead characters of the comic are bi-racial and bi-cultural and are constantly dealing with their own *nepantla* by juggling their bi-cultural and bi-racial identities.

Barrier illustrates the border through "illegal immigration" of the U.S./Mexico border, the use language as the series is written in both English and Spanish without translations. *Barrier* continues to define borders as well through the "shocking sci-fi" border of outer space and Earth, and between space aliens and humans. *Barrier* includes science fiction elements such as aliens, spaceships, and space throughout its narrative similar to *Cloverfield* (2008). It also uses mind-bending elements that are similar to films like *The Matrix* (1999), and colorful non-human

characters and environments similar to *Avatar* (2009). Marcos Martin, who is the illustrator of *Barrier* uses a very psychedelic color palette that incorporates elements of early comic books, comic illustrators like Jack Kirby and Rafael Grampa, and abstract art like Salvador Dali. By using science fiction, Brian K. Vaughn and Marcos Martin are able to create a discussion about the U.S.-Mexico border and border elements on a much larger scale by extending it to space. The authors. With the exception of the science fiction and supernatural aspects featured in the comic books, many of the representations from the comic books and graphic novels are all forms of representation of the border that are found within media and popular culture. On the other hand, Saldívar (1997) states that borderlands regions are "physical and symbolic space of tension and blending where 'different social worlds confront one another, or when boundaries between worlds are crossed.'" With this in mind, spiritual and supernatural borders make sense as they are boundaries that are crossed between worlds.

Throughout the comic books and graphic novels analyzed, the border is displayed in a multitude of ways including being a desert and mountainous terrain with harsh climate with dry and hot temperatures that can be deadly for migrants. Additionally, the border is represented as a militarization zone with border patrol all along the U.S.-Mexico border, and at times even harming or killing migrants. The analysis continues by discussing globalization and capitalistic efforts through trade, express lanes, and low-income neighborhoods along the U.S.-Mexico border. Finally, the border is also represented in two comic books *Border Town* and *Barrier* using elements of supernatural and science fiction genres.

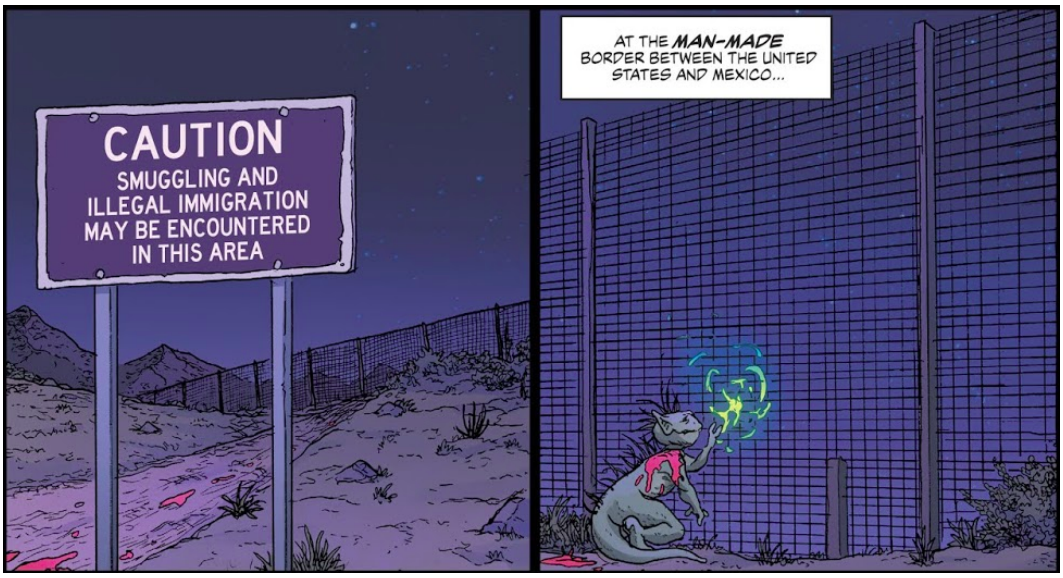


Figure 8

Image of a Chupacabra crossing borders from Devil's Fork, Arizona into the spiritual underworld of Mictlan. Reprinted from *Border Town*. Artwork by Ramon Villalobos. All rights belong to DC Comics

Key Spaces - Geography, Key Landscapes and Locations

When I began this project, I knew location and geography would play an important role within this research. Little did I know that it became much more significant and played a much larger role than I had expected. I had planned on seeing the U.S.-Mexico border often, but then other locations, forms of landscapes, and geography appeared in the comic books, which I found incredibly fascinating. One image that repeated in four of the fifteen comics was that of La Bestia (The Beast). La Bestia is a train many Latinx immigrants try to jump on board of since it travels from Central America to Mexico then into the United States, and it would make their travel to the U.S. faster. While this method of transportation might be quicker it is also much more dangerous, hence the name La Bestia. Many migrants have hurt themselves or have died while trying to board the moving train. If that danger was not enough, there are chances that the train could be detained by the border law enforcement or by bandits just as these comics depict

and describe. La Bestia serves as its own borderland as it offers promise and demise during desperate measures for migrants. Migrants see this as an opportunity to arrive at their destination in the United States much faster, but while it brings a sense of hope, it also brings danger as migrants must jump onto the train as it moves at fast speeds, thus leading many to get injured or killed.

Figure 9

An image of La Bestia (The Beast). Reprinted from *Barrier*. Artwork by Artwork by Marcos Martin. All rights belong to Image Comics and Panel Syndicate

Imagery of the Latinx immigrants crossing the desert and/or river was illustrated throughout these comic books and graphic novels. This imagery is seen in ten of the fifteen comics with the exception of *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5*, *The Border Patrol*, *The Punisher: Border Crossing, I.C.E.,* and *The Other Side of the Border*. Each of the comic books visually shows immigrants crossing the desert during the day or even at night all while the author describes how dangerous this can be for the migrants. Most of the time this image is shown the immigrants are in a group of two or more. The other dangerous frame that is illustrated is immigrants crossing the river. Again, when this scene is shown most of the

immigrants are in a large group crossing the river together. While I did note that *The Punisher: Border Crossing* does not feature a Latinx immigrant crossing the desert or border, it does include Frank Castle (The Punisher) trying to cross back into the United States. I did find this to be interesting, as this is one of the few examples of any type of border related media I have seen that depicts a white, U.S. citizen trying to enter the United States from Mexico.

As aforementioned, the amount of locations found within all these comic books was much more than I expected. There are thirty locations mentioned within these comic books, some of them are not close to the border, but are significant to the storyline and Latinx representation. Locations found in the United States are: Los Angeles, California; San Diego, California; Bisbee, Arizona; New Mexico; Mesa Basin, Arizona; Nogales, Arizona; Phoenix, Arizona; Pharr, Texas; El Paso, Texas; Morning Glory, Texas; Sweetwater, Texas; Houston, Texas (Sanctuary City) (Harris County Jail); Uvalde, Texas (Interim Deportation Camp); Carrizo Springs, Texas (Carrizo Springs Immigration Detention Center); Texas Panhandle; Birmingham, Alabama; Washington, DC (The White House); San Vaca desert (fictional location) and Devil's Fork, Arizona, which is a fictional location. There are also locations of Mexico and Central America mentioned within the comic books, such as: Guatemala City, Guatemala; Ciudad Juárez, Mexico; Chihuahua, Mexico; Tijuana, Mexico; Nogales, Mexico; Sonora, Mexico; Nuevo Laredo, Mexico; Los Brazos, Mexico; Mexico City, Mexico; Costa Rica-Nicaragua border; and San Pedro Sura, Honduras. I created a map that visually represents the various locations from the United States, Mexico, and Central America that are featured in the comic books and graphic novels.

Figure 10

Here is a map featuring the locations of the United States and Mexico from the comic books and graphic novels.

As previously stated, there are four states from the United States that make up the U.S.-Mexico border: California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, and these four states are included within the comic books and graphic novels analyzed (O. J. Martinez, 1998; National Museum of American History & U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2021). All four states are in the southwestern part of the United States, which has a majority of the Latinx population in the United States (Passel et al., 2022). The two states that stand out are Arizona and Texas, both of

which are known to have conservative politics and the strictest immigration policies in the United States.

In 2010, Arizona enacted two laws addressing immigration, SB 1070 "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act" and HB 2162. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, SB 1070 includes "provisions adding state penalties relating to immigration law enforcement including trespassing, harboring and transporting illegal immigrants, alien registration documents, employer sanctions, and human smuggling" (Morse, 2011). HB 2162 is an amendment within SB 1070 that included provisions that were meant to address racial profiling concerns. It specified that law enforcement officials cannot consider race, color, or national origin when implementing provisions to SB 1070 and requires "state and local law enforcement to reasonably attempt to determine the immigration status of a person only while in the process of a lawful stop, detention or arrest" (Morse, 2011). Texas immigration laws are so complex and change so rapidly that the Texas State Law Library created a web page that breaks down each law and even includes a glossary of terms, information, and resources page (Texas State Law Library, 2022). In addition to these laws being enacted, another politically related aspect found in these locations is the White House being one of the locations used in the comic books and graphic novels. Within *El Peso Hero*, the White House is shown and then leads to an appearance from former United States President Donald Trump. The former U.S. President is shown talking with two men about how El Peso Hero must be apprehended dead or alive in order to properly defend the border.

These locations play an important role within the story as I would consider the U.S.-Mexico border another character within the narrative of the stories as well. The U.S.-Mexico border shapes the narrative of the story as many of the characters and situations revolve around the locations. As a comic book reader, I would compare the U.S.-Mexico border to Gotham City

(the fictional city in the Batman comic series), which is often considered a character within the Batman comic books, because Gotham is always a part of the narrative in some way or another and the city is so elaborate in the way the authors and illustrators have the city interact with the characters. Furthermore, by understanding the U.S.-Mexico border as a character, the border can create obstacles through its harsh terrain or militaristic zones, but it can also provide a sense of opportunity and hope for many migrants looking to better their lives. O.J. Martinez (1998) discusses how the U.S.-Mexico border is an interdependent borderland, which means that both countries have a long and established history of shared social relationships, cultures, and an economic trade. This depiction of the border is evident within the comic books analyzed as the relationship and cultures between the United States and Mexico is showcased through the narrative of migrants, the use of various cultural signifiers, and the use of globalization and economy; all of which will be discussed in further detail later in the analysis.

Some of these locations are specifically centered around immigration related themes such as being a sanctuary city or being an immigration detention center or camp. A sanctuary city is a city, a county, or a state that limits cooperation between federal immigration enforcement agents as a way to protect low-priority immigrants from deportation, while turning over immigrants who have committed serious crimes (*Immigration 101*, 2019). Immigration detention centers or camps house captured migrants and their families. The conditions of these are usually kept in poor conditions as they are overcrowded, cold, dirty, lacking materials to clean, and often serve raw food like chicken for hungry child migrants (García, 2021). Additionally, these locations separate migrant parents and children from one another (Al Jazeera News, 2021). This situation is featured within the comic book series, *Home*, and I will go into further detail about it later in my analysis.

Additionally, these comic books and graphic novels also showcase locations from Central America, which represents and highlights the growing number of migrants from Central America. Again, it is important to note that while Central American migrants might not technically be from the U.S.-Mexico border area, they play a central and key part in present day border dynamics due to their increasing presence on the U.S.-Mexico border (Batalova, 2022). Finally, another location that is mentioned is the supernatural realm, Mitctlan, which is the capital city of the Aztec underworld featured in *Border Town* and where the supernatural horror folklore characters are from. This location is completely different as it is not real, but supernatural. With that being said, it is important as it highlights a form of Latinx identity as these characters are a part of supernatural folklore stories of Latinx culture. I believe that the author used this supernatural world in order to create a complex and deeper representation of Latinx identity that is not typically seen within comic books.

In this section, I first discuss how La Bestia is a symbol of hope and promise, but is also a symbol that represents death and demise due to its dangerous speeds. Continuing on the theme of dangerous obstacles, I then analyze the imagery of immigrants crossing the desert and/or river in order to get into the United States. I provide a visual map that illustrates the thirty locations found within the comic books, most of which are located on the U.S.-Mexico border. With these locations, I provide context of why they are important, including how the U.S.-Mexico border is a character within the comic books as it contributes to the larger narrative within the comic books. Additionally, I provide information about sanctuary cities, which are like safe havens for migrants, in comparison to immigration detention centers/camps, which are prison-like locations with unkempt conditions. Finally, I provide an analysis on how Central America is presented

within the comic books, as many migrants are traveling from Central America to the United States.

Latinx Representation and the Characters of the Border

Key Actors

Throughout the comic books analyzed for this research, the center of each of the stories were a series of characters found within each of the story arcs. These key actors became the first theme of this research as all of them were incredibly significant to the overall narrative of Latinx identity and border representation within the fifteen comic stories. The key actors found were: immigrants/migrants, law enforcement (border patrol agents, I.C.E. agents, members of the consulate), coyotes and bandits/bandidos, Mexican gang and cartel, U.S. and Mexican politicians, Samaritans and volunteers, and science fiction or supernatural/Mexican horror folklore characters.

Immigrants/Migrants

Immigrants were the main key actors found within each of the comic books as they are one of the central topics of research for this study. Each of the comic books depicted immigrants in a different light, and ironically, most of them were positive portrayals. Ten of the fifteen comics portrayed immigrants as good characters or even the protagonist of the story. Various themes found within this section were the factors of motivation and perseverance, Latinx immigrant superheroes as a counternarrative, and being undocumented and detained.

Motivation and Perseverance

For many immigrants, motivation and perseverance are two leading factors and themes were represented within the comic books and graphic novels analyzed. Immigrants used various motivators like love, family, or even being scared for their lives as a tool to drive them to migrate

into the United States. Many of these immigrants would persevere through treacherous terrains and various obstacles, in some cases multiple times in order to reach their goal location in the United States. *Rendez-vous in Phoenix*'s main character and narrative focuses on Tony, a Mexican immigrant who perseveres and tries multiple times to cross the U.S./Mexican border in order to be with his girlfriend who lives in the United States. Tony is persistent as he gets caught multiple times before finally being able to cross into the United States and be with his girlfriend.

Red Border is another comic book series that features a persistent couple who are motivated to leave Mexico because of exploitation and the drug wars (Payan, 2006). Payan states that the drug war on the border has been going on for over four decades and that it is in a space far removed from the policy-making circles, and that the border and drug war are complementary of one another and influence each other (p. 864). *Red Border* features a Mexican couple, Karina and Eduardo who were two well to do from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, and due to the Mexican cartel going after them they escaped their home and decided to migrate north towards El Paso, Texas in the United States. Throughout the series the couple faces many obstacles including dealing with the Mexican cartel and White militants, who are also cannibals. While Karina and Eduardo, both have different ideas and ways they want to overcome these obstacles, they decide to work together and persist through their troubles to cross into the United States. This idea and theme of persistence is one most of the immigrants in the story deal with as they are doing all they can to overcome the various hurdles within their path into the United States.

Using Counternarratives: Latinx Immigrants as Superheroes

Within the comic books, *Home* and *El Peso Hero* migrants and Latinx characters are also seen as superheroes as these two comic book series feature Latinx characters front and center of the story, thus leading to a counternarrative not typically found within comic book storylines.

Critical Race Theory includes various principles including the social construction of race, and the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado et al., 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Delgado (1989) constructed counter-storytelling as a method to tell the stories and experiences of those marginalized within society, and as a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and hegemonic members of society. Alemán (2017) who uses CRT as the theoretical framework and uses counter storytelling as the methodological tool discusses how counter storytelling can be seen in two ways: as a group of presumptions or preconceived wisdoms or cultural understandings by the predominant race in their discussions of race, or as a parable, chronicle, or a fictional narrative that centers the experiences of minoritized communities and individuals in order to reduce the validity of assumptions and myths, especially ones held by the predominant race. With that being said, the comic book creators of *Home* and *El Peso Hero* both include counter narrative approaches within their comic book stories as they include Latinx immigrants as superheroes.

Home focuses on Juan, a young migrant who faces multiple traumatic situations including anxiety from being in a detention center, being separated by his mother, and further anxiety from escaping the immigration facility slowly triggers his powers. In the story, the audience learns that Juan's father, who passed away, had powers and it runs on that side of the family as his cousins also have superpowers. *Home*'s author Julio Anta uses familismo in an interesting way as family is the connector both genetically and situationally that leads Juan to have his powers.

Home includes Juan and his cousins having superpowers, while *El Peso Hero*'s title character is a Superman like hero from Northern Mexico, who speaks in Spanish. *El Peso Hero*'s author and creator, Hector Rodriguez III states he made the character because he wanted to feel

culturally connected to a character. “I liked Batman, Superman, and all the Marvel superheroes, but I wasn't really interested in following their exploits. Culturally, they didn’t connect with me. Have you ever seen Batman eat empanadas de calabaza?” (Rodriguez III, 2019). El Peso Hero is a character that leads with empathy, sympathy, and respeto (respect) as he saves migrant children and families who are facing militants, I.C.E., and other negative situations migrants face (as seen in Figure 11). With this being said, both of these characters are significant and matter because they are underrepresented characters that are leading their stories in ways that other comic books have not, by putting the immigrant front and center as the hero. Popular culture scholar, Maurico Espinoza states:

> Mainstream comic book publishers—who had for decades excluded minorities from the exceedingly white and masculine realm of superheroism— created a few Latino/a superheroes during the next two decades, but they generally played minor roles and relied on stereotypes.

Additionally, these authors, characters, and narratives also resist the stereotypical portrayals of immigrants found within the media.

Figure 11

Image of El Peso Hero and migrants crossing the desert and river. Reprinted from *El Peso Hero Borderlands*. Artwork by Chema, all rights belong to Rio Bravo Comics

Undocumented and Detained

With the title *Border Town,* it is obvious that the book will be focused and located in a border area. The comic book is located in a fictional border location called Devil's Fork, Arizona. As previously mentioned, the comic book does feature Mexican immigrants trying to cross the border, and another scene where a Mexican worker is being detained by ICE, alluding to the idea that he is undocumented and illegally in the United States. This is an image that is depicted so often throughout the media and is a stereotype depicting that all Latinx people are immigrants. Not all Latinx folks are immigrants, and most Latinx immigrants are not bad people or criminals, and not all Latinx immigrants are undocumented. There are plenty of Latinx immigrants who are legally documented and just want to make a better life for themselves. For

many Latinx immigrants, there are stereotypes where U.S. citizens feel that they are going to steal jobs, come to commit crimes, bring diseases from their country, among other negative forms of representation (Cobas et al., 2018; Reilly, 2016). It does not help that we have law enforcement and political leaders like President Trump reinforcing these stereotypes to the public (Cobas et al., 2018; Reilly, 2016).

In issue four of *Border Town*, Julietta's finds out about her undocumented status as she excitedly asks her family for her social security number to participate in extracurricular activities in school, later only to find out that she cannot do so due to undocumented immigration status. Esquivel, the author of *Border Town*, creates a sympathetic moment for Julietta as she faces what many other immigrants face on a daily basis. Additionally, Esquivel uses this character development as a way to showcase that Julietta is a teenager who wants to participate in high school activities. She is a teenager who just wants to be a teenager. Esquivel is using his storytelling abilities to create a positive form of representation, in comparison to the negative portrayals of immigrants other forms of media illustrate. Most depictions of immigrants are often characterized negatively, such as being a threat to the safety, economy, and culture of the host country (D. Mastro, 2019; S. k. Sowards & Pineda, 2013). Additionally, Mastro (2019) also mentions that there are instances where immigrants are represented sympathetically, similar to what most of the authors are doing here with their depictions of immigrants. They are creating a sympathetic depiction of an immigrant instead of a negative and harmful misrepresentation. While there are authors like Doug Wagner from *I.C.E.,* Chas M. Quinlan of *U.S. Border Patrol*, Paul S. Newman of *The Border Patrol* continues to use reinforced stereotypes of drug dealers or bandits, instead of progressing representation of Latinx people and people of color within their narratives. The other authors of these comic books and graphic novels do use the sympathetic

trope of the immigrant to create a sense of hope and at times make the immigrants into heroes, both with and without powers. These other comic book authors are trying to break the stereotypes the media and popular culture have reinforced time after time by making immigrants look bad, while most of them are trying to make a better life for themselves and their families.

According to Anguiano & Castaneda (2014) centralizing the Latinx experience and addressing racism faced by Latinx communities are two of the tenets used within Latina/o Critical Communication Theory, and I believe these authors are doing that by creating these stories that centralize the immigrant narrative in an empowering fashion. Furthermore, I also address these tenets within Critical Latinx Border Studies Cultural Studies Theory as this theoretical framework also addresses the need to centralize and promote inclusion of Latinx representation in popular culture. Again, these authors are doing so by creating characters and narratives that do not reinforce the stereotypes seen throughout media and popular culture. On the other hand, comic books like *I.C.E., The Scar*, and *Migra Mouse* depict immigrants as the villains, drug runners, cartel members, and or aliens. Many of these negative forms of representation, I discuss in further detail throughout my analysis. Furthermore, while some of the forms of representation reinforce negative stereotypes, the fact that there are Latinx characters included showcases a form of diversity and inclusion, but not in a positive or equitable manner.

Drug Dealers, Cartel and Gang Members

Other comic books like *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol, The Border Patrol, The Punisher: Border Crossing, I.C.E.,* and *Red Border* include these stereotypical character portrayals of cartel/gang members and drug dealers as well. Ramirez-Berg (2002) states that the Latinx gangster/drug dealer/cartel members are incarnations or variants of the bandido stereotype found within the media. This character is much sleeker and more sophisticated in comparison to

the bandido. Additionally, these characters are known for having vulgar cravings for money, power, and sexual pleasure, and use brutal and illegal means of obtaining these cravings.

Early Incarnations

The two earlier comics *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol* and *The Border Patrol* include early representations of gang members and bandits. Usually, these bandits and gang members have handlebar mustaches and beards, they are the most stereotypical looking characters in the comic book without properly acknowledging it. While these were early comic books in the 1940s and 1950s, the look of the Latino character did not change. Most of the men had mustaches but evolved from banditos to drug dealers or cartel members (Ramirez-Berg, 2002). In later comic books and graphic novels featured within this study, drug dealers, cartel members, and coyotes featured in *The Punisher, Rendez-vous in Phoenix,* and *Red Border* all have mustaches.

The bandit characters of these two early comic books feature names such as "Indian Charlie," "The Craven Gang," and "The Hangman." These two comics also feature two Latinx characters who were early depictions of cartel leaders who were both ironically named Juan, Juan Hernandez from *The Border Patrol* comic and Juan Rodriguez from the *U.S. Border Patrol.* Within these two comics these are the two examples of Latinx characters as the villains of the story, which is a stereotypical portrayal and form of representation with media and popular culture overall. In the modern comics books, these cartel and gang portrayals are increased greatly and these representations are even more brutal and violent.

Figure 12

Image of Cartel member, "El Diablito." Reprinted from *The Punisher: Border Crossing.* Artwork by Carmen Carnero, all rights belong to Marvel Comics

Searching for Respect and Power

The Punisher: Border Crossing, I.C.E., and *Red Border* are three other comic books that feature cartel and gang members. Throughout these comic books and graphic novels, the drug cartel leader constantly was searching for respeto and power. Respeto is a Latinx cultural value that directly translates to respect, but it can also be seen as deference to authority or as being courteous and maintaining harmony (Chen et al., 2021; Kiyama et al., 2016). Most of these narratives would refer to the cartel leader character constantly seeking deference from his followers. *The Punisher* features a character by the name of "El Diablito" (The Little Devil) who is a cartel member and leader. "El Diablito" is constantly seeking respect and validation from his peers throughout the comic book storyline. He believes that by capturing and beating up The Punisher he will gain notoriety and respect from other cartel members and villains such as Crossbones (a Marvel Comics villain that is also featured in this story). Later in the story, "El Diablito" becomes a secondary character and villain to Crossbones. "Maybe I'm more than a two-bit cartel leader," "El Diablito" tells Crossbones, again longing for validity and respect.

During the battle, “El Diablito” is killed by The Punisher, who slices his throat. I will go into further detail later in my analysis on how violence and brutality is common within most of these comic books and graphic novels.

Red Border also features a cartel leader by the name of Javier, who is the Mexican equivalent to Marvel Comics Kingpin within this comic book mini-series. Jason Starr, the author of *Red Border* describes Javier as a “cartel boss who’s going through a midlife crisis” (Starr, 2020). Throughout the series, Javier is constantly using foul language and curse words towards his associates and enemies, always trying to show that he is in power. In one of the scenes, Javier tells the man who is kneeling with a gun in front of his head that he is a patient man and that he puts a lot of thoughts into his decisions. Even saying that patience is the secret of his success and the way that he built his empire. Then he states that he should be more impulsive instead of being patient, again being very machista in the process of all this trying to make a point again showing his power. The man on his knees tries to defend himself as Javier ends up shooting him in the head. This is just one of many examples of Javier searching for respect and deference from his cartel members. Another example of Javier trying to show he is the strongest and most powerful person is found later in the final issue of *Red Border* as Javier shoots one of his gang members in the shoulder and says:

> None of you pinche pendejos know how to take a bullet anymore. Back in the old days we wouldn’t have laid down and just died from a little scratch on the stomach. I got a wife, a sister, a mother beating down my ass to get payback, and you know what? They got more cojones than all of you (Starr, 2020).

With this example, Javier showcases an odd version of familismo as he showcases respeto to various female members of his family as he wants to help them, but frames his female family

members in a machista type of way by saying they have bigger “cojones” than his male gang members.

In the final battle of the story, Javier’s cartel battles the Benson family, who are a white racist militant family who captured the main characters of the story, Eduardo and Karina. Javier is the last person standing from his cartel and does take multiple bullets in the back appearing to be dead, but later comes back and kills the main militant, Colby. He then goes after Eduardo and Karina to showcase he yet again is powerful by being the last person standing in this battle. During this scene, Javier displays overconfidence by thinking he is the manliest of men and how he feels invincible as he overpowers everyone by being the only person from his cartel alive. Javier dies as a piece of the burning building he is in falls on top of him, killing him. Throughout the story, it is evident that Javier is a machista, which is a topic I will later cover in a section focusing on gender roles I found within the comic books and graphic novels of this study.

I.C.E. portrays Mexican immigrants differently as they are seen in a villainous perspective as tattooed gang members, drug runners, members of the cartel. The leader of the cartel in this story is Luis Morales, who is also a drug kingpin. Throughout the series, Morales outsmarts the I.C.E. agents, even having an I.C.E. agent working for him and double crossing the other agents. Similar to Javier from *Red Border*, Morales wants to constantly show he is the strongest and most powerful person by showing his strength physically and verbally as he has a foul mouth which constantly features curse words and derogatory language. Morales tries to outsmart the I.C.E. agents yet again by crossing the border but he gets caught by the agents. “You have my word that the rest of your life will be spent in the worst shithole America has to offer. Your weeks will be filled with cavity searches, shitty food, and keeping the boys off your pretty ass… And I’m begging you please find a way to escape,” said by Cole Matai, the leader of

the I.C.E. agents. When creating villains or antagonists for these comic books, it seems like most of the authors relied on the drug cartel/gang member stereotype as it was the most known Latinx/border villain and the most problematic as well. Many of the aforementioned traits still resonate with these characters, most notably the cartel leaders. These characters long for power and sexual pleasure throughout the narratives of these comic books and graphic novels. Additionally, they use violent and illegal means of obtaining the power and respect they all long for.

Law Enforcement

The next key actors found are the various forms of law enforcement found in all the comic series. Throughout each series a form of law enforcement was illustrated in the comic books such as *I.C.E.* Agents, members of the border patrol, agents of homeland security, and police officers of Devil's Fork, Arizona (a fictional location). With the exception of *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol, The Border Patrol,* and *I.C.E.,* most of these key actors were depicted in a villainous aspect. In the two early comic books, *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol* and *The Border Patrol*, the border patrol agents were depicted as white cowboy like characters or white characters in the classic green suit. These characters would often save the day from minority characters like Native Americans or Latinx characters, both of which were depicted as villainous roles or would fight with the white border patrol agents.

Villainous Agents and Fear Tactics

Border Town, Home, and the two *El Peso Hero* comic books depict Border Patrol agents, I.C.E. agents, Homeland security, and even a local police department as villainous type of characters as they detain undocumented immigrants; including separating children from their parents. This becomes a major fear for *Border Town* character, Julietta, who is half Mexican and

half-Brazilian, and is an undocumented U.S. citizen. In the fourth and final issue of *Border Town*, Arnie Hernandez, a conservative bi-racial Latinx sheriff, who is introduced and written as a villain who is racist against his own race/ethnicity by helping deport illegal or undocumented immigrants, and implements a program called S.A.F.E. (Serious About Finding Emigrants). This is very reminiscent of Phoenix sheriff Joe Arpaio, who believed in harsh immigration tactics, as he would arrest immigrants and racially profile members of the Latinx community (Cobas et al., 2018; Ye Hee Lee, 2017). Julietta goes on to mention how he arrested a pastor who left water near the border and that Hernandez treat Latinx folks horribly:

> All of the Latinx folks he's unable to deport, he finds reasons to arrest and jail in his creepy 'tent city' concentration camp— where women are denied tampons, men are beaten for not understanding English and all of them are expected to live in 114-degree temperatures (Esquivel, 2018).

Al Jazeera News (2021) mentions how in March 2021, more than 171,000 migrants were caught trying to cross the border and that many who were families were separated from one another only to migrate on their own. As stated earlier, the highest number of child migrants in these care facilities was 20,339, which was in April 2021 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). In Texas alone, there are more than 40 facilities that house unaccompanied migrant children. This fear is also illustrated within *Home* as Mercedes Gomez, a migrant mother and her son, Juan are trying to seek asylum, migrating all the way from Guatemala. Within the story, the detention center separates one of the migrants from his son to which Mercedes asks, what's happening and if they are really taking the children and separating them from their families. The person who helps process the migrants says it is already too late and there is nothing that he can do. In the background of the panel, Mercedes starts crying and

Juan goes to reassure his mother, as they both end up reassuring each other that everything will be fine. With Juan asleep, Mercedes sees officers take away another child from another migrant. One of the officers demands the child from the woman. Another officer calls out Juan's name. Mercedes blocks Juan and says, "you're not taking my son!" With Juan crying in the background. The officer moves Mercedes away and grabs Juan, taking him away. Mercedes cries. This is the sad reality for many migrants as many families have been separated from one another while being detained. Later in the same issue, Mercedes is still trying to get answers and save her son. One of the officers rudely threatens her by saying, "Tell this woman to answer the questions now, or we'll send her back across the border right now!"

Again, this mistreatment is common from border law enforcement agents as many treat migrants poorly even beating them (Al Jazeera News, 2021). According to the same article, in September 2021, members of the Border Patrol were caught using cords and whips violently beating on migrants. As aforementioned, one of the stories from *The Scar* includes a story of a young 16-year-old Mexican boy who passed away from the violence caused by a border patrol agent. Jose Antonio Elena Rodriguez was killed by a border patrol agent from the U.S. side of the border, who broke his jurisdiction and shot into Mexico and fired ten shots and killed Jose. The story concludes by mentioning that Officer Lonnie Ray Swartz is the first border patrol agent to be tried by the U.S. Justice Department for murder across national lines.

Figure 13

Image of I.C.E. agents. Reprinted from *I.C.E. – Immigration and Custom Enforcement.* Artwork by Brian Stelfreeze, all rights belong to 12 Gauge Comics.

Heroic and Violent Portrayals

Within the *I.C.E.* comic book, I.C.E. Agents are written and illustrated as the heroes of the story as they are trying to stop dangerous drug cartel Mexican gangs and their gang leader, Luis Morales. The comic is incredibly violent, and the agents are a racially diverse group as they only have one White agent, while the others are people of color. Within the comic, it tries to redeem itself for not being overtly against the Latinx community by making one of the agents Latino. This Latinx character, Ezra even gives a long speech to the villain of the story, Luis Morales, saying:

> I love my people. It's you who turn my people into drug mules, prostitutes, and gang bangers. Your kind has made life so foul in Mexico that my people flee in hopes of safety and freedom. You even cursed the families that come here legally. Every American looks

> at us with contempt, questioning our legality and honor. No, you are the one betraying my people, Morales. You're a cancer on my people's soul that I'd do anything to remove (Wagner, 2013).

I.C.E. and the characters are written very much like a *Fast and the Furious* film meets C.S.I. or S.W.A.T. type of comic series injected with an insane dose of testosterone. As you can tell by my metaphor, this comic book was intense.

Finally, within Lalo Alcaraz's *Migra Mouse*, border patrol agents are depicted as violent and people who are not smart. The cover of the book (and title) are satirical parodies of Disney and the border patrol, as Alcaraz puts Mickey Mouse into a Border Patrol officer uniform, with a belt buckle that states USA and to the right of him a sign pointing to Mexico, as the character also points towards Mexico. Migra Mouse appears again in the first chapter of the book, as the author created this version of the character in order to showcase the corporate interests of Walt Disney company which donated money to then-California Governor Pete Wilson's reelection campaign. One of Alcaraz's comic strips features two border patrol officers watching sheriffs attacking migrants on television. One of the officers says, "They're taking our jobs!" Officer 2, "Who, immigrants?" Officer 1, "No, sheriffs!" This comic strip subversively reinforces the negative stereotypes of immigrants taking jobs from U.S. citizens both in comedic and satirical ways, but this also provides political and social commentary on how many people from the U.S. feel about Latinx immigrants.

Politicians

The U.S.-Mexico border is a constantly discussed topic within political spaces, so it makes sense that politicians would be some key actors found within these comic books. Truth be told, I expected politics to be included more within many of these comic books and graphic

novels, but out of the fifteen comic books, only three featured representations of politicians. Politicians were most illustrated within *Migra Mouse*, which makes perfect sense due to Alcaraz's background as a political cartoonist. Throughout the book, Alcaraz takes aim at politicians such as: former California Governor Pete Wilson, former Vice-President Al Gore, former president George W. Bush, Republican Pat Buchanan, former President Bill Clinton, former Mexican President Vicente Fox, and former California governor and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Anti-Immigrant Laws and Rhetoric

Most of the time these politicians are represented, they are being criticized for their stances on anti-immigration reforms and their stances on the U.S.-Mexico border. For example, in one of the strips, Cuco Rocha (Alcaraz's cockroach character) removes the vegetables from Clinton's burger stating, "I'm sorry but you can't have this lettuce and tomato because they were unlawfully picked by 'illegal aliens.'" Alcaraz also focuses on the GOP's Bracero Program and how the GOP wanted to attract Latino voters. In 2004, President George W. Bush announced the creation of his "Bracero" proposal for a temporary worker program for new immigrants and current immigrants living in the United States without authorization (Jachimowicz, 2004). From there, Alcaraz goes after George W. Bush and his stance on the border, who is depicted by running away from a border patrol officer and becoming friends with Mexican President Vicente Fox. Alcaraz shows the two in bed together sleeping as Fox dreams of Amnesty for Mexican migrants, while Bush dreams of attracting the Mexican American vote. During George W. Bush's presidency he and former Mexico President Vicente Fox were known to be "amigos" and related to each other due to their backgrounds as ranchers. The two were even friendly with each other, often praising each other and working together on immigration and trade issues, but things

changed as a result of the September 11th attacks, when the United States began to focus on Iraq and Afghanistan instead of Latin America (Reuters Staff, 2007).

Throughout *Migra Mouse*, Alcaraz illustrates many of the GOP/Republican politicians as racists. In a comic strip called, "FRAID, Anti-Immigrant Border Spray" which features a white member of the GOP holding a can of FRAID, which is a satirical can similar to RAID the bug killer, but this spray is an anti-immigrant border spray. The GOP member says, "S.O.S! Spray on Spicks! Keeps on working for up to 2 elections!" A caption on the bottom right hand corner states, "9 out of 10 racist politicians prefer FRAID: anti-immigrant spray."

Figure 14

Image of a comic strip featuring Al Gore and George W. Bush during a presidential debate from *Migra Mouse*. Artwork by Lalo Alcaraz, all rights belong to Akashic Books. Reprinted from *Migra Mouse: Political Cartoons on Immigration*

The introduction of *Home* begins with narration of a statement from the Attorney General of the United States, William Barr issuing a zero-tolerance policy:

> Today, as ordered by the President, We have officially put in place a zero-tolerance policy for illegal entrees on our southwest border. Every day, customs, and border patrol

> agents encounter thousands of illegal immigrants, and supposed 'asylum seekers,' trying to enter the country. The scourge of illegal migrations ends today. No longer will we allow criminals to stream across our border, and prey on the innocent. It's been said that many of these so-called 'parents' use children as human pawns-a way to get preferential treatment when they arrive at our border. To them, we say this: if you bring a child, that child will be separated from you. And if you don't like that, go back to where you came from. It's that simple. America proudly welcomes millions of lawful immigrants who enrich our society and contribute to this great nation. But all Americans are hurt by the uncontrolled, illegal migration of cold-blooded criminals. Day after day, the precious lives of our children and family members are cut short by those who have violated our borders. To quote the President himself, 'When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime, they're rapists.' So today, as a unified American people, we warn you-if you cross this border unlawfully, we will prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law—and then some. It's morning again in America" (Anta, 2021).

These sentiments are felt throughout *Home* as the zero-tolerance policy is brought up multiple times in the first issue and as Juan escapes to save his mother and go to Houston with his aunt. *El Peso Hero – Borderland* features former President Donald Trump as he is being briefed about El Peso Hero's break-into an immigration detention center in Carrizo Springs, Texas. Trump says, "Ha! El Peso Hero. The devalued Mexican superhero… should we be worried?" Later Trump orders his associates to get El Peso Hero dead or alive and then to send him to the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. The U.S.-Mexico border and immigration is a popular topic within political spheres, so it would make sense that politicians and political issues would appear in these comic

books. Additionally, Lalo Alcaraz is a political cartoonist, so his work centers on parodying politics and political issues.

Samaritans and Volunteers

Samaritans and volunteers of migrants were only found within *The Scar*, but I thought it was worthy of highlighting as these characters are making a big impact on the border and on migrants' lives. It is also worth noting again that *The Scar* is based on true events and situations where the authors explored the border as ethnographic journalists in order to tell various stories of the border. The authors mention multiple organizations located around Tucson, Arizona that help migrants such as Coalicion de Derechos Humanos and No More Deaths. The authors meet at a southside Presbyterian church that holds dozens of undocumented migrants every morning and is a space for migrants to find jobs or seek medical attention. While on this journey, the authors are asked by these volunteers if they would like to join them on a weekly trip to leave water and food out on migrant routes. When the authors and volunteers finally reach their checkpoint, they leave food in a large white bucket so animals will not get the food, and also place water jugs next to the large buckets. If the white bucket is empty, it is a sign that a person has been there. This moment brings a sense of happiness and relief as they see it as a sign that they are making an impact on someone's life.

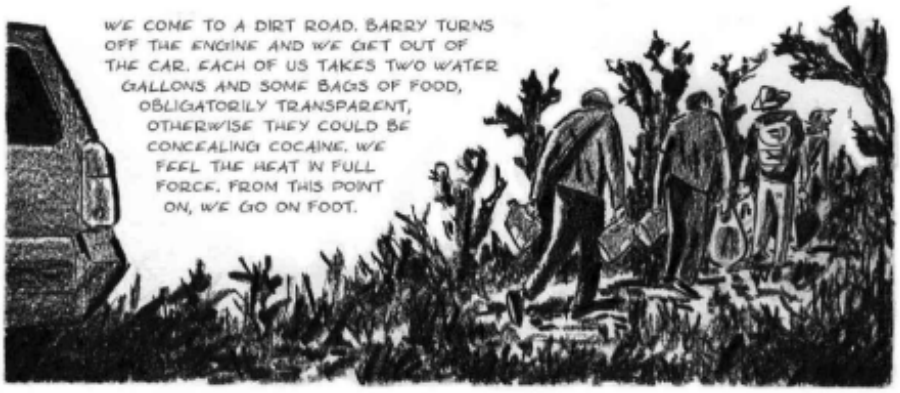


Figure 15

Image of Samaritans and volunteers taking food and water across the desert. Artwork by Andrea Ferraris, all rights belong to Fantagraphics. Reprinted from *The Scar: Graphic Reportage from the US-Mexico Border*

One of the volunteers, Alvaro, makes wooden crosses for those migrants who have passed while trying to migrate in the desert. The authors spot a wooden cross with a red dot which symbolizes a location a migrant passed away. “When the medical examiner’s office finds a body, they map its location with GPS Coordinates. Then I go and place a cross right at that point,” states Alvaro. He continues, “In the last four years, I’ve planted 550 of them.” Alvaro also describes that he tries to put 4 crosses a week, calling it The Red Dot Project. He explains that it extends for over 20,000 square miles along the border. Each cross is made with fresh lumber and is decorated with scraps and materials found in the desert.

Norma Price, another Tucson Samaritan states that due to the lack of roads, if you cannot walk, no one will come to save you, because they won’t be able to find you. She does mention that despite the rough conditions, they have been able to save many people including a female migrant who had a fractured ankle. “Two men from another group tried to carry her, but they couldn’t, she was too heavy. They left her behind too.” The female migrant was able to make it out by wrapping her knees with abandoned rags and dragging herself to a road. She was later

found by a ranger who brought her to the field hospital and treated her. These examples of volunteers and good Samaritans were something I did not expect to find within the comic books and graphic novels as it is not a topic covered often within the media and popular culture I have seen or read around the U.S.-Mexico border. I am aware of volunteers and have seen it personally through my experience of living in El Paso, but due to the lack of media representation I have personally seen, I did not expect volunteers and Samaritans to appear in a comic book or graphic novel. Truth be told, prior to reading *The Scar*, I had a preconceived notion and even bias that the narratives of the comic books would be fictional. Upon reading *The Scar,* I appreciated the inclusion of the volunteers and Samaritans as it provided a diverse point of view of members of the borderlands that many may not be aware of. Although most of these characters were not Latinx, this was a positive and underrepresented form of border representation that was showcased within the comic books.

Additionally, reading a book like *The Scar* showcased how divergent the creators ideology was compared to that of the *I.C.E.* comic book series. *The Scar* provides readers with non-fiction and true scenarios of incidents and experiences of those who are on the U.S.-Mexico border and the affects the border has had on the individuals discussed within the two stories of *The Scar.* The authors of *The Scar* provide an informative look at the lives and experiences of real individuals of the border. On the other hand, a comic book like *I.C.E.* provides an over the top narrative, similar to the *Fast and the Furious* franchise, of the battle between I.C.E. agents and Mexican cartel members along the U.S.-Mexico border. Again, I would compare *The Scar* to an ethnographic study or investigative report turned graphic novel as it is written by a investigator who is examining the U.S.-Mexico border compared to *I.C.E.* that is a fictional, intense and violent fueled narrative that is illustrated in a similar fashion to other comic books

featuring muscular caricatures. The illustrative imagery used in *The Scar* is similar to charcoal art or dark lead pencil drawings that feature shadow like silhouettes throughout the graphic novel.

Bandidos and Coyotes

Other key actors found within most of the books were bandits/bandidos and coyotes. Bandits/Bandidos were always seen stealing from Mexican or Honduran immigrants. Ramirez-Berg (2002) states that the bandido is one of common stereotypical characters found within Latinx media. The bandido is a Mexican villainous bandit that has been seen in various Western and adventure films including early silent "greaser" films. Ramirez-Berg describes bandidos as "unkempt, usually displaying an unshaven face, missing teeth, and disheveled, oily hair. Scars and scowls complete the easily recognizable image" (p. 68). Additionally, bandidos have attributes such as being vicious, cruel, treacherous, shifty, dishonest, irrational, overly emotional, and will resort to violence quickly.

Bandidos

Rendez-vous in Phoenix portrays a group of bandits stealing from the immigrants and one of the bandits even sexually assaults a female migrant, while *El Peso Hero: Border Stories* illustrates bandits in a more militaristic way covered in black clothing with black masks and holding guns, as they stop the train in which migrants travel in order to steal from them. They are shown also trying to capture young migrant children right before El Peso Hero comes in to save the children. *Barrier* illustrates a bandit trying to steal from Oscar, a Honduran migrant and the main character of the story. Oscar reverses the role by taking the gun from the bandit and forces him to help him cross a waterway on a boat with the bandit steering the boat.

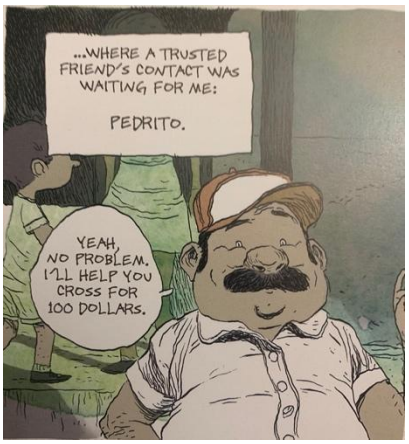


Figure 16

Image of Pedrito the coyote from *Rendez-vous in Phoenix*. Artwork by Tony Sandoval, all rights belong to Magnetic Press. Reprinted from Tony Sandoval

Coyotes

Coyotes are also key actors showcased through most of the stories and for the most part are seen as helpful, but with a price. “Yeah, no problem. I’ll help you cross for 100 dollars” say Pedrito who is a Coyote who helps Tony cross the border multiple times in *Rendez-vous in Phoenix* (Sandoval, 2016). *El Peso Hero: Border Land* also features a character called El Coyote, but this man is seen as someone who helps immigrants. It never is shown if he asks for money or any compensation whatsoever. On the other hand, *Barrier* showcases the coyote as a ruthless gang-like tattooed person, who tries to show his power over the Mexican and Honduran migrants: “Nos llaman coyotes. Pero eso es solo porque los Americanos creen que son ustedes perros” (“They call us coyotes. That is because Americans think that you all are dogs”) (Vaughan, 2018). The coyote even pulls out a trans-woman from the vehicle and calls her names then violently threatens her. “Déjale en paz,” (“Leave her alone”) the main character of the story, Oscar tells the coyote. He then asks the coyote for help to cross the border, “Me dijeron que podían ayudarme a llegar a los Estados Unidos” (I was told you could help me get to the United

States) (Vaughan, 2018). Oscar gives the coyote money and welcomes him aboard the vehicle disguised as a truck carrying bananas.

In *Guía Del Migrante Mexicano,* coyotes and banditos are places in the same category as being dangerous and deceiving. The guide informs migrants to stay away from coyotes and bandits as they are the cause of death for hundreds of migrants. Yet, the guide also does provide information on how to deal with a coyote, if one does decide to accept their services. Some of the information includes precautions to take such as do not let this person out of your sight and do not fully trust this person. Also, it states that the coyotes and banditos may want migrants to cross drugs over or transport (smuggle) other people, and maybe ask to hand over the children of migrants as collateral.

Aliens and Monsters of the Border

Space Aliens and Border Aliens

Finally, the last key actor seen in the comic books is that of science fiction characters of *Barrier* and *Migra Mouse*, and the supernatural Mexican folklore characters from *Border Town*. *Barrier* includes aliens that abduct the two main characters Oscar and Libby, who cannot understand one another because of language barriers. The aliens of *Barrier* are like a mix of the sentinels from *The Matrix* film franchise, and another set of aliens look like floral petals mixed with vascular organs. The space panels of the comic are very colorful and psychedelic, I would compare this work to a modernized take on the classic comic artist Jacky Kirby's *New Gods* series with acclaimed French comic artist, Jean "Moebius" Giraud's artwork.

Migra Mouse includes various comic strips which depict aliens being confused with Mexican migrants. For example, an officer of the Border Patrol apologizes to Spock after beating him. "Gee, I'm really sorry, fella. I thought you was a Mexican!" In another of the comic strips

called “Alienated,” an alien says, “The government denies that I exist. Hollywood vilifies me. Businesses exploit me for profit. You would think I’m Latino.” Let me emphasize that Alcaraz uses his platform of creating comic strips and comic books as a way to provide critical commentary on what is happening within society in the United States. Alcaraz uses counternarratives in his comic strips to critique politics, society, Latinx culture in a satirical and comedic way, all while informing his audience on various topics that are happening within the U.S., the borderlands, and the world. This imagery of the alien plays with the idea that immigrants are migrants are aliens or outsiders and is seen through all media and popular culture as migrants, immigrants, Latinx folks are seen often as the other or as monsters, creatures, aliens just to name a few. As aforementioned, it is a common stereotype for Latinx individuals, especially immigrants being compared and symbolically represented through monsters and aliens in various popular culture media (Calafell, 2015; Lechuga et al., 2018; Walker et al., 2021). This imagery of the alien appears again later in the chapter as a flying saucer in the shape of a sombrero is firing a laser down on a Taco Bell. The comic strip is called “Dia de la Independencia.” “The next time you call them ‘aliens’ may be your last.” This comic strip is a satirical parody of the film *Independence Day* (1996) with Will Smith.

Figure 17

Image of a monster from *Border Town.* Artwork by Ramon Villalobos, all rights belong to DC Comics. Reprinted from *Border Town*

Mexican Horror Folklore

Within *Border Town*, these supernatural characters are important as they are symbolic for a variety of reasons including the fact that they highlight Mexican horror folklore. These Mexican horror folklore characters include: La Llorona, La Siguanaba, La Lechuza, El Cadejo Negro, El Mano Peluda, Los Duendes and El Chupacabra. Characters like *La Llorona* have been featured in other forms of media and other comic books as well such as DC Comics' *Batwoman* (2011) (Aldama, 2017; Guzman, 2011). Another symbolic value the creators provide is that the supernatural monsters and characters enter Devil's Fork through a portal located on the border fence. This imagery is portraying immigrants who cross the border as monsters. Monsters are constructed as symbolic portrayals of Othering and villainizing those who represent fears, anxieties, and threats to "dominant culture" as visual rhetoric and monstrosity scholars explain (Calafell, 2015; Lechuga et al., 2018). Specifically, they identify BIPOC groups as being more vulnerable to these symbolic othering processes. *Bordertown* also includes a green monster portrayed with stereotypically Mexican markers, as it kills the immigrant family crossing. He is

illustrated wearing a sombrero, bullet laced armband, large Texas belt buckle, boots with a long-extended point in front of them, and barbed wire around his wrist and fingers. The pants look like that of a mariachi singer or bandido from Western films. This is a very over the top, stereotypical, and machista depiction for a character. Again, this is another example of the exaggerated presence that Aldama and Gonzalez referred to. The writer and artist are overemphasizing multiple cultural markers in order to showcase Latinx identity.

Before the comic book was canceled, fans resonated with *Border Town's* narrative and imagery in both positive and negative ways. On a positive note, the book was well-reviewed and fans wanted to see more as the first-issue had to go into reprint as there were not enough copies available as fans kept purchasing the comic book. At the time the book was released and prior to his sexual abuse scandel, Esquivel would receive tweets from fans thanking him for creating a book with Latinx representation that they had longed for (Dieppa, 2018). On the other hand, Dieppa's (2018) interview with Esquivel states that the author also did receive death threats and even mentions that stores did not want to carry the comic book due to its conversation on racial dynamics and the U.S.-Mexico border.

While at times these are satirical depictions, the creators of these comic books and graphic novels continue to reinforce the recycled stereotype of monsters or aliens being a symbol or metaphor of Latinx characters including immigrants. The use of supernatural folklore characters and monsters crossing the border is a symbolic analogy of describing a way many immigrants/migrants are portrayed within popular culture as negative stereotypes. Again, I refer to scholars like Calafell (2015) and Lechuga, Avant-Mier, and Ramirez (2020) who describe how Latinx individuals, especially immigrants, are being compared and symbolically represented through monsters and aliens in various popular culture media. To further this argument, film

scholar Charles Ramirez-Berg (2002) notes that aliens of science fiction films can often be understood as other forms of aliens due to the narratives of invoking the nation, hyper-nationalism, and patriotism.

Throughout the comic books and graphic novels analyzed, the characterization of aliens and monsters were used as illustrated metaphors for Latinx immigrants and individuals. Aliens were used as narrative devices to bring in science fiction elements into *Barrier*, while political and satirical cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz depicts and compares aliens to Latinx individuals in a comedic manner. *Border Town* presented Mexican horror folklore characters that would enter from a supernatural portal crossing borders from Mictlan (the Aztec underworld) into the United States, then haunting Devil Fork, Arizona. Through these forms of representation, elements and patterns of machismo and violence start to evolve. Machismo is not just represented through members of the cartel, but through a chupacabra that is personified into a green monster that is reminiscent of a bandido or mariachi. Additionally, these monsters reinforce representations of violence and threatening behaviors as they include bullet laced armbands or barbed wire around their wrists, all while haunting and harassing people of the fictional border town of Devils Fork, Arizona.

Use of Language

Language is a key cultural factor and form of Latinx representation found within the comic books and graphic novels analyzed. I found that seven use Spanish limitedly or rarely, while four comic books use Spanish throughout the comic, and four comics do not use Spanish in the story. The low amount of Spanish and bilingual usage is an issue of representation because it negates the identity of those on the border. A majority of Latinx characters within the comics are bilingual and use Spanish or Portuguese which conveys an accurate depiction to the people in

the border. The makeup of the people at the border is significant as most Latinx people from the border are bilingual, mainly speaking Spanish and English, which is a signifier and representation of their diverse identity. Border scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) describes how there are various languages within the Latinx/Chicanx culture, including Chicano Spanish. According to Anzaldúa, Chicano Spanish is a border tongue that developed naturally and is a living language (p. 79). For people on the border, they needed a language they could connect to, and that incorporates both Spanish and English.

While reading *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5* and *The Border Patrol,* Spanish is rarely used and the only characters to use the language are white characters and they are usually certain words like "pronto," "hombre," "loco," and "dinero." It is worth noting that both comic books are written by white authors, Chas M. Quinlan, who wrote *U.S. Border Patrol* and Paul S. Newman, who wrote *The Border Patrol*. Within *The Border Patrol* issue three, a Latinx character finally uses Spanish sparingly saying words like, "si," and "señor." *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5* includes a character named Juan Rodriguez, and the author tries to write speech or text of the character as if he has an accent. When reading it you could hear the accent being similar to a Speedy Gonzalez like accent.

Throughout the three issues of *Border Town*, it is important to note that all the main Latinx/characters of color minus Frank have spoken Spanish. *Border Town* features speech bubbles written in English, but it says Español due to the fact that it is being translated. There are multiple instances when this motif is used throughout the four issues. Never in the comic is a full conversation written in the Spanish or non-English language (ex. Portuguese); it is only insinuated with the label under the speech bubble. The first couple of pages of *Border Town* feature a group of Minute Men who are "defending" the border and call Mexicans, "lazy

S.O.B.s.," while ranting about Mexicans crossing the border. One of the men uses the Spanish term, "Viva" sarcastically as he says, "'Viva' The American Nightmare!" (Esquivel, 2018). Quinteh from *Border Town* is the character that speaks Spanish the most from all the main characters in both books. Characters like Julietta or background characters will use Spanish, but just to say minor phrases. Even Aimi understands Spanish as she corrects Frank when they meet "La Curandera," an older lady who is a witch doctor in town.

The *Guía Del Migrante Mexicano* is the only comic to fully be written in Spanish, which makes sense since it was written in Mexico. This particular comic book is different from the rest, as it is not only the singular comic book to be written in Spanish, but it is also a comic book that was not sold in stores as it was not meant to be "pop" for the masses and general audiences. The *Guía Del Migrante Mexicano* was meant to be an informative comic book written primarily in Spanish for Mexican citizens looking for information on how to properly and legally cross the border. It is also important to note that this was the only comic book from Mexico analyzed within this study and comic books from Mexico have their own history and tradition, which I hope to research in future studies. With that being said, the artstyle of this comic book is drawn in a similar vein compared to other Mexican comic books which is a mix of cartoon realism and classic pulp comic books.

The next comic that uses Spanish throughout its narrative is *Barrier*. Brian K. Vaughan is a white author and decided to make *Barrier* a bilingual comic using Spanish without translations. *Barrier* creates a series of multiple borderlands within its narrative and how the creators of the comic illustrate and write the story. This creates a border between the characters who do not understand each other and have to communicate by hand gestures or body language. Additionally, *Barrier* creates another language border for readers as those who know how to read

and understand the Spanish language or English language will be able to read the book easily compared to those who do not know how to read in Spanish or English will need to use a translator in order to get the full narrative experience the writers intended. Additionally, another border is created later within the narrative of *Barrier* as the two main characters are in an alien ship and in outer space, as space becomes the border between the alien ship and Earth. The two characters become migrants in space as they enter a new environment and location without even knowing it. The two main characters are now "aliens" from Earth as they are in a foreign spaceship trying to get back home to Earth, specifically, the United States.

The other comic series that uses Spanish throughout its storylines are the two *El Peso Hero* comic books. The book uses both English and Spanish throughout the narrative, but author Hector Rodriguez III wanted to include a title character and superhero that only spoke in Spanish. Rodriguez III (2019) states that he did this because he felt that "it is important for [El Peso Hero] not to lose his culture, language, and self." In *Home,* whenever Juan and his mother speak, it is in a red text signifying that they are speaking in Spanish. *The Other Side of the Border* does use Spanish sparingly throughout the narrative, but never fully like *Barrier* or *El Peso Hero*. Similar to *Border Town*, *The Punisher* uses the < > symbols in order to showcase that the characters are speaking in Spanish. Spanish is also used rarely in this comic book, but one notable use of Spanish comes from The Punisher himself, as he says, "Lo siento, papi" as he kills "El Diablito." *Rendez-vous in Phoenix* also is mainly written in English with Spanish used rarely throughout the storyline. *The Scar* does not include Spanish at all within the story.

In both, *Red Border* and *I.C.E.,* Spanish is used rarely, but when it is used a lot of the words are curse words or minor phrases. Ironically, in both of the comics the character that uses Spanish the most are the villains of the stories. Javier (*Red Border*) and Luis Morales (*I.C.E.*) are

both cartel leaders and use Spanish to say horrible things towards people, again mainly curse words. *Red Border* does also feature The Benson family who are white characters and militants use Spanish in a sarcastic way. For example, they will say things like "chimney changas," or "my Favorit-oh!" Again, this is a very racist take on the use of language. I understand that *Red Border* author Jason Starr is trying to villainize the Benson family and showcase that they are racist characters. This media portrayal can impact how audiences interpret diverse groups within popular culture, and media scholars state that this type of behavior in media can lead to normalizing discrimination against minority groups (Ford, 1997; A. R. Martinez & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Personally, I interpret the use of Spanish from the Benson Family as a discriminatory device as they are using Spanish sarcastically. On the other hand, the cartel leaders use Spanish as a weapon or tool to showcase dominance by using mainly curse words and saying horrible things to those who work for them, leading to *machista* behaviors, which I discuss further later in my analysis.

The beginning of issue two of *Red Border* features an interesting conversation the migrants are having with the Benson family. Junior Benson asks, "So y'all real life Mexicans?" Eduardo responds by saying, "what other kind are there?" Burt Benson replies, "you know what I mean hell, there're all kinds of Mexicans, different kinds of skin, different…what's that word? Futures?" Colby responds, "features." Junior, who is the youngest Benson family member keeps asking questions like, "do y'all speak Spanish?" and is in complete disbelief that he is hearing Mexicans speak Spanish with his own two ears. According to LatComm theorists Anguiano & Castaneda (2014), "language is key to understanding the systemic reproduction of institutional and ideological power relations that mask distinction and privilege." This example of the Benson family trying to use Spanish and asking Eduardo and Karina if they are real Mexicans is a

showcase of power and privilege that the Benson family are showcasing over the two Mexican characters as they are at the "mercy" and "protection" of the Bensons. Additionally, the actions that the Bensons perform within these two examples are examples of racism and discrimination as they make fun of the Spanish language using it sarcastically and questioning Eduardo and Karina's Mexicanidad and Latinidad.

Migra Mouse has a whole chapter dedicated to the use of language, specifically English and Spanish. This chapter critiques the use of Spanish and how many politicians and people mainly want Latinx folks to only speak in English. Alcaraz states that this is a divisive anti-immigrant issue. One of the comic strips has a Mexican man stating in Spanish that he wants to learn English, but the white man he is speaking to mentions how everything should be in English. The Mexican man then asks his son to help him by saying, "Mijo, enseñame como se dice, 'quiero aprender Ingles.'" (Son, teach me how to say, I want to learn English.) The white character says, "no comprendo" (I don't understand). The chapter also criticizes a ballot initiative called Proposition 227 "English for Children," which would end bilingual education for California public schools, forcing many immigrant children to be forced into English-immersion education. Alcaraz also criticizes famed educator Jaime Escalante as being a supporter of Proposition 227. Alcaraz criticized how Escalante was a minority supporting a political cause that works against minority communities, stating that Escalante was racist towards his own community.

A lot of the comics and graphic novels of this study never fully use and take advantage of using Spanish within their series, as most of these comics are meant for general audiences who speak and read in English. The authors, editors, and publishers might have felt that by using Spanish, it would have created a divide within the audience, but realistically, while these stories

are for a general audience, they are also aimed at a Latinx demographic as most of the main characters are Latinx. The authors and publishers could have used the Spanish language as an opportunity to gain a larger audience and even educate/advocate others on the use of bilingual storytelling; thus, furthering the use of Latinx representation within both stories.

Figures 18 and 19

Images of characters talking from *Home* and *The Punisher: Border Crossing*. Artwork by Anna Wieszczyk and Carmen Carnero, all rights belong to Image Comics and Marvel Comics
Reprinted from *Home* and *The Punisher: Border Crossing*

If the author(s) truly wanted to emphasize the Latinx identity or bi-racial ethnicity of the character, the use of Spanish or Portuguese written out could have been used in both comic books. This is a major identifier that needs to be emphasized even further within the comic books. The comic book authors also should write in the language without using the "< >" symbols or writing the text in red in order to show that the character is speaking in another language. I understand most of these authors are not using Spanish in their respective comics due to a lack of cultural capital, but I believe if the publishers really wanted to include native

languages, they could have made it happen. This small change will be effective in encouraging Latinx representation within comic books.

Independent comic book publishers aim to appeal to a targeted demographic within their stories as they do not have as many storytelling restrictions compared to their mainstream counterparts. Most of the independent titles analyzed were from authors of color and were aimed at a Latinx audience. A great example is *Barrier*, while Brian K. Vaughan might not be a person of color, his co-author and artist Marcos Martin is. Both authors decided to take a chance and write a bilingual comic book without translations. This was a bold move and might have deterred some readers away, but it did not affect the story at all. If anything, it strengthened the story by creating further barriers between the narrative, authors, and reader.

Esquivel and Anta especially should have taken advantage of using Spanish in *Border Town* and *Home*, but I believe that this decision might have also been on the publishers as they might not have wanted to deter mainstream audiences. Within comic book spheres, most mainstream comic books are written in English and are written mainly as superhero stories that have to follow a history and structure for their characters. Independent comic book publishers have a lot more creative freedom with their narratives and how they write their characters. Also, comic book fans are similar to other fandoms within popular culture such as music and film fans as there are fans who strictly mainstream comic books and others who are strictly independent titles. There are also fans who are just fans of comic books in general and love comic books overall and purchase both mainstream and independent titles.

With that being said, by using Spanish in the comic books it does restrict audiences who might not understand the language from wanting to read and translate the narrative. Also, as generations of Latinx people in the U.S. continue to grow, their use of Spanish declines (Acosta,

2021; Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). According to Acosta (2017), many third-generation Latinx folks do not speak Spanish, but their parents do. Many of these parents felt that by not having their children speak in Spanish it would protect them from being criticized and ridiculed as they once were. The Pew Research Center states that the number of Latinx folks who use Spanish in the past decade has declined, but with that being said, many members of the Latinx community still believe that speaking Spanish is a vital skill to have (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017).

Additionally, mainstream comic book publishers want to appeal to a general audience in comparison to a small targeted population. It all boils down to capitalism and reaching the largest audience possible in order to make the most profit from these comic books and graphic novels. The lack of using Spanish or native languages might say more about the publisher and capitalism than it does the authorship.

Cultural Signifiers

Within Latinx culture, there are various signifiers such as *familismo*, *respeto*, *espiritualismo*, *machismo*, and *marianismo* just to name a few. Throughout this dissertation and analysis I have described how many of these cultural values are represented within the artifacts of this study. Within this analysis I will be focusing on *familismo* and *espiritualismo* as cultural values found within the comic books and graphic novels. Additionally, I found it important to state another culture value specific to the border, border culture. Border scholar, O.J. Martinez 1998) states that ***border culture*** signifies the traits, influence, and distinctiveness from the border that make up the lives of those who live on the border. People on the border share a unique and regional culture, traditions (holidays, values, customs), cross-borrowing language, religion, foods, clothing, architecture, and more. These are variations in the extent to which border people exude border culture through their lived realities. While border culture is a specific geographic

based cultural value, there are other cultural values that are centered around Latinidad such as *familismo* (family/friend collectivism) and *espiritualismo* (spiritualism).

Familismo or familism is a core Latinx cultural value that has been discussed by many scholars in a variety of ways (Ayon et al., 2010; Calzada et al., 2012; Ruiz & Ransford, 2012; Steidel & Contreras, 2003). Most of these scholars state that *familismo* is a collectivistic trait or cultural value that Latinx people have as the Latinx population tends to be group-oriented people. According to Carter et al. (2008), Latinx people are characterized as interdependent, collectivistic, and family-oriented, compared to White Americans who are viewed as independent, individualistic, and self-focused (p. 7). Additionally, Carter et al. explain that Latinx "values of interdependence prioritize family, unity, honor, and loyalty over individual needs and goals" and Latinx cultural values extend beyond just family, but also to other relationships such as friends and networks beyond relatives (p. 7).

According to Otero (2010), *espiritualismo* or spiritualism is "described as a popular religion that helps generate, and reaffirm, a certain type of 'Mexicanness,' through the integration of indigenous and national symbols." Bermúdez et al. (2010) defines *espiritualismo* as "a value that emphasizes achieving spiritual goals…a strong belief in the importance of prayer and participation in mass." The authors continue to state that Catholicism is the predominant religion for Latinx communities, but many Latinx folks are moving toward Protestant denominations. Within the comic books and graphic novels analyzed there was not a certain religion presented, but there were various signifiers of faith and spiritualism involved, which closely aligns with Bermúdez et al.'s definition of *espiritualismo*. Both *familismo* and *espiritualismo* cultural values are seen in most of the comic books in some form or another.

Familismo

In Latinx culture, family is a big deal, as Latinos have larger family networks, spend more time with family, and rely more on family for instrumental and emotional support relative to non-Latinos (Calzada et al., 2012). Rinderle & Montoya (2008) explain that Latinx people demonstrate strong attachments to their nuclear and extended families. Additionally, the two authors state that *familismo* extends to various "symbolic markers" such as food, celebrations, and connecting with family, friends, and fellow members of their own ethnic group (p. 148).

El Peso Hero comics, *Rendez-vous in Phoenix, Border Town, The Other Side of the Border,* and *Home* illustrates *familismo* through their narrative of migrants crossing through dangerous terrains together with their families. As mentioned before, families become separated as seen in *El Peso Hero*'s comic stories, but in a more positive aspect immigrant families also reunite as seen in *El Peso Hero* and *Rendez-vous in Phoenix*. One of the characters in *Rendez-vous in Phoenix* describes crossing multiple times for many years helping out various immigrants and their families, but this was his last time crossing as he finally brought his family to the United States. "Now that I've got my family with me, I won't need to take any more risks for the next few years" (Sandoval, 2016). The character is reiterating one of the traits of *familismo* by relying on his family for being an instrumental and emotional support for no longer crossing the border and taking risks. Tony Sandoval, the author, and main character of the story, finally tells his family that he planned on crossing the border on his own. His family was in complete shock and his mother was angry. "Are you out of your mind? Have you seen how many people die trying to cross the border on tv?" asks his mother (Sandoval, 2016). Eventually, his family comes to terms with Tony's decision and wishes him the best on his journey. As Rinderle & Montoya (2008) state Latinx people demonstrate strong attachments to their nuclear and extended families, thus making Tony's decision shocking for his mother, as she does not want him to leave

and wants him to be safe.

Border Town's relationships are more friendship based. As Carter et al. (2008) stated that *familismo* can be displayed not only through family members and relatives, but through close-knit friendships as well. The main characters of *Border Town* are all complete strangers who later become friends and must work together in order to stop the supernatural Mexican folklore characters haunting the border town of Devil's Fork, Arizona. The only family members that have been shown so far in the first three issues of the comic book are Frank's mother and stepfather, and Quinteh's mother as she encourages him to go to school even though he is scared to go. From there, she suggests to him to go as someone else, suggesting he wear his "El Diablo Verde" luchador mask. These examples of *familismo*/family- based relationships are only seen in the first and second issues, and after that, most of the relationships that are shown in this comic are that of the classmates becoming acquaintances and working together.

The Other Side of the Border's main character Estrellita *familismo* is a key point of the narrative of the story as she visits her family across the border whenever she can. Estrellita narrates the story and mentions, "A simple fence separates these worlds of abundance and misery. This is where my family lives. My mother, my two brothers, and my sister. My father died five years ago in an accident at work." Later in the story, Estrellita begins to become an assistant for her boss and asks her cousin, Jenni, who is a sex-worker for information on who is killing other young Latina sex-workers. Jenni is later killed in a horrible manner, and Estrellita attends her funeral. She narrates, "Mom refused to come to the funeral and forbode my family from doing so either. But someone had to be there to hold poor Mariposa's hand. Jenni was her only daughter." Estrellita felt that it was only right to support her family, even if her mother disapproves of it.

From the very start of *Home, familismo* is a key signifier that is strongly tied to the narrative of the story. The protagonist, Juan, is learning to cope with his powers, on top of coping with being in a new environment and being separated from his mother. His aunt becomes his superhero mentor and guide throughout the story, which again ties everything back to *familismo* and the connection of family. Family is a recurring theme found within each of the five issues of *Home* as it becomes the connection or narrative thread that each of these issues have. Familismo is a common cultural value found within Latinx media and *Home* continues this trend as Juan and his family play a big part of the story and how he obtains his superpowers.

Within *I.C.E. familismo* is shown as the agents consider themselves as family. After one of the I.C.E. agents, Ezra is brutally killed by Morales (the Mexican drug cartel leader), the agents seek to avenge his murder by going to Mexico and getting Morales. During what is meant to be an emotional moment in the comic, I.C.E. agent Benno tells Cole what Ezra told him when they first met.

> So, you know what Ezra said to me on my first day, Cole? He jabs a finger in my chest and tells me this isn't just a team to him. It's his family. He's willing to die for some hick kid from Montana because that's what family means to him. He says family always sticks together. No matter what. (Wagner, 2013).

Familismo is one of the positive cultural values showcased throughout the comic books and graphic novels. The authors of these stories wanted to highlight the importance of family and family-like relationships/bonds. It is a cultural value those who are Latinx and those who are not Latinx can relate to. Familismo is also a character trait that can be used on protagonists and antagonists to further develop the character's narrative. Within these comic books, familismo extends beyond just family, and its definition changes due to the situations the characters are

being put through. Within most of these comic books, migrant strangers must unite in order to face the obstacles the border brings including militarization, supernatural elements, or to stop a cartel leader. Familismo also evokes various emotions as families are separated and united along the border. Additionally, familismo raises concerns as many families worry about their loved one's safety, as individuals like Tony from *Rendez-vous in Phoenix* decide to cross the border. On the other hand, familismo can also cause separation as families grow apart because of arguments and situations surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border. This example is shown in *The Scar,* as Estrellita's family decides not to attend her cousin's funeral due to her cousin being a sex-worker investigating the deaths of other sex workers along the border. While familismo can be as simple as the inclusion of family members or a close knit group of friends/co-workers, but the inclusion of familismo within these comic books of the U.S.-Mexico border also brings complex narratives and experiences of Latinx characters. Another cultural value seen within the comic books is *espiritualismo*.

Espiritualismo

Espiritualismo is seen in five of the comic books: *Barrier*, *Rendez-vous in Phoenix*, *The Scar, Border Town,* and *I.C.E.* Most of the time that espiritualismo is illustrated and shown in a very subtle manner and through symbols. As Otero (2010) stated, *espiritualismo* is a form of a popular religion that is reaffirmed by either indigenous or national symbols. Within many of these comic books and graphic novels, the symbols rooted within religion are crosses or the crucifix, prayer candles featuring Catholic saints, and images of the Virgen de Guadalupe, who is the patron saint of Mexico.

Espiritualismo and Fatalismo

For example, in *Barrier* a crucifix is shown in the background of a violent past dream

sequence that Oscar is having. The crucifix is shown as a metaphorical way that God is watching and is there protecting Oscar. Additionally, a rosary and a small figurine of La Virgen de Guadalupe also is inserted subtly into one of the frames or panels of a man driving in the desert, early in *Barrier's* first issue. Another instance where espiritualismo is mentioned briefly is in *Rendez-vous in Phoenix* as Tony is about to leave his home, "Between dreams and prayers, the bus carried me quietly away from Esperania towards Nogales up North…" (Sandoval, 2016). While these symbols of *espiritualismo* are found within these two comic books, I would also note that *fatalismo* (fatalism) is also shown as these religious markers are also symbols of protection from the journey ahead. Fatalismo is the belief that one's destiny is beyond their control and that it is a protective measure that closely intersects with faith (Cuellar et al., 1995; Wilson et al., 2020). Using the symbol of the crucifix, rosary, and Virgen de Guadalupe, and the use of prayers to help guide these characters in their journey is an intersection of both *espiritualismo* and *fatalismo* as they want to be protected from the various dangers and obstacles that might come their way.

Figure 20

An image of a man driving with a rosary and small figurine of La Virgen de Guadalupe hanging from his rearview mirror offering protection wherever he travels. Artwork by Marcos Martin, all rights belong to Image Comics. Reprinted from *Barrier*

Crosses as Symbols and Tributes

As mentioned before, *The Scar* features two examples of *espiritualismo* with symbolism

of the cross. The first story of *The Scar* features a cross which is a tribute to Jose Rodriguez, who is the 16-year-old Mexican boy who was killed by a border patrol agent is found in Nogales, Sonora. The cross is a memorial with a picture of Jose on it. Yet again, the symbolism of the cross appears in *The Scar* as mentioned before there is a volunteer by the name of Alvaro who creates crosses for fallen migrants. Alvaro states, "To me crosses aren't just Christian, they are universal symbols that help us remember. Three thousand people have died here and 2,000 have disappeared. More keep dying every week." Chavez (2012) explains how the effects of border militarization on border crossers and those living on the border is often erased or minimized because of U.S. immigration policies and the rhetoric of national security. The erasure of migrants is evident within this example of *The Scar* as many of these migrants are erased from the hearts and minds of officials of the U.S. government. The authors of *The Scar* and people like Alavaro want to create a counter-narrative to the invisibility these migrants face by sharing their story and by providing a proper burial for those who have passed on while trying to cross into the United States. Many of these migrants die alone and without a proper burial or life tribute. Alvaro tries to make up for that by making these crosses for those migrants who have passed on.

Border Town uses a variety of religious imagery and symbolism in the comic series. Some of which have already been mentioned, such as the rosary necklace worn by one of the immigrants crossing and the prayer candles featured in *La Botanica*. The store features not only the prayer candles but also a small, subtle image of *La Virgin de Guadalupe*, who is the patron saint of Mexico (Editors, 2018). On that subject, interesting yet stereotypical imagery found in *Border Town* are on religious prayer candles featuring Catholic saints on them. This imagery is yet another example of the Latinx cultural value *espiritualismo* found within the comic books that also can be seen and used as a tribute. Religious prayer candles are used within Mexican

American households that are Catholic as a form of protection, faith, and fatalism. When I was growing up, my grandmother and mother had candles of Saint Jude and the Virgen de Guadalupe in their rooms and would light their candles everyday as a form of protection, guidance, and as a tribute to the respective saints they would pray to. Most of these "Easter eggs" and folklore characters are symbols and visual cues for audience members who are Latinx as these various images connect to their cultural identity. They are a part of cultural history, narrative, and popular culture that resonate with Latinx communities.

The final example and the most interesting is the use of *espiritualismo* in the *I.C.E.* comic series. Throughout the comic, one of the I.C.E. agents, Ezra, wears a gold necklace with a cross on it. Similar to the other symbols mentioned earlier, the cross necklace is meant to showcase a sense of faith but also a form of protection from God. In the second issue of the series, the agents capture Luis Morales (the villain of the story), and Morales notices the cross that Ezra is wearing and states, "A believer. Does it help with the guilt of betraying your own people?" Ezra responds to Morales that he will need the cross more than he will, due to the fact that he killed a federal agent, and tosses Morales the necklace with a cross. This is the first time the cross becomes significant in the comic. Within this example, the cross signifies a symbol of defense or protection, and forgiveness. The cross becomes a symbol of protection as Ezra believes that Morales will need protection after killing a federal agent, but at the same time, Ezra as a believer in God also believes that Morales might be forgiven by God for his heinous actions.

The next significant moment is at the end of the second issue where Morales escapes with the help of a crooked I.C.E. agent that is later killed by Morales. After that moment, Morales holds the cross up concluding the issue. In this instance, Morales uses the cross as a symbol to mock Ezra and the I.C.E. agents, and even God or a "higher spiritual entity" showcasing that he

was able to escape the I.C.E. agents. From then on Morales wears Ezra's dog tag as a symbol of irony and as a trophy as he later kills Ezra. The third time the cross is shown, it is represented in the final battle between Cole (the head I.C.E. agent, who is also a person of color) and Morales. Throughout the battle scene, the cross grew in significance even being highlighted in one panel of its own as it became a symbol of faith but also a symbol of the end. The cross becomes a symbol of conclusion as this is the final battle between Cole and Morales. Finally, the cross is seen on the last page of the fourth and final issue of *I.C.E.* as a picture of all the agents is shown with Ezra's cross hanging on the picture as a tribute to honor his life. The cross is now symbolized as a trophy again, but as a trophy of faith, friendship/family, and loyalty towards one another. As you can see, the cross carries many uses within *I.C.E.* and also within *The Scar* as it became a symbol of spiritualism and faith, but also a trophy, a symbol to mock, and loyalty.

Espiritualismo was showcased through various symbols such as a crucifix, rosary, prayer candles and the Virgen de Guadalupe, and most notably the cross. These symbols not only represent a sense of spiritualism and faith, but a sense of remembrance and visibility. As aforementioned, the cross became a symbol of loyalty, a trophy, and a symbol to mock I.C.E. agents and God. Furthermore, *The Scar* showcased how crosses are used along the border to give migrants who have passed on a sense of visibility and remembrance after they have died. While many of these migrants remain unidentified and unknown, the cross remains a symbol that is a tribute for their efforts, perseverance, and their life. I will now move on to discuss the gender roles found within the graphic novels and comic books analyzed for this investigation.

Gender Roles of the Border

When reading these comic books, I was surprised to find how big of a role gender played in these stories. Throughout media and popular culture gendered Latinx stereotypes such as the

Latin lover, bandido, the harlot, the male buffoon, and the female clown have appeared on film and screen (Ramirez-Berg, 2002; Rodriguez, 2008; Valdivia, 2008). *Machismo* and *marianismo* both played a role in the comic books as well. *Machismo* is often associated with negative male behaviors such as being a womanizer, toxic masculinity, dominance over family matters and over his wife (Cuellar et al., 1995; Wong & Wester, 2015). *Marianismo* is often associated with the feminine values of the Virgin Mary, specifically La Virgen de Guadalupe, submissive to her male partner, giving and generous mother (Da Silva et al., 2021; J. Villegas et al., 2010). The bandido is already a character that has been discussed, but within these comic books and graphic novels other gender roles appeared as well, including the harlot.

White Saviors – Border Patrol Officers and Bosses

According to Cammarota (2011), white saviors are lone white actors who use their agency to help guide people of color escape their predicament of marginalization. These types of storylines including a white savior occurred within *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5* and *The Border Patrol*. White males (border patrol agents) were represented as the heroes who would "save" the damsels in distress (two of which were Latinas) from the villainous male minorities (Native American and Latinx characters). Ironically, in two of the stories, the Latina characters would also be the characters who would save the border patrol agents from the villains of the story, but these female characters would still make it seem that the white border patrol agents were the heroes at the end. *The Other Side of the Border* also included the white male savior and boss to the Latina maid. Estrellita's boss uses his privilege of being her boss and having money as a way to seduce Estrellita and to showcase power over her. In the next section, I continue to describe this example and how it connects to the Mexican maid stereotype.

Figure 21

Image of a border patrol officer from *Holyoke One-Shot 05 - U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5*. Artist uncredited, all rights belong to Holyoke. Reprinted from *Holyoke One-Shot 05 - U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5*

Maids, Marianismo, and the Malinche

The Latina maid is a common gendered stereotype found within media and popular culture, and I was shocked to find it in a comic book (Aldama & Gonzalez, 2019). Estrellita's boss constantly flirts with her and even asks if she would like to sleep with him, "You won't sleep with me, isn't that right?" She responds, "you would fire me afterward, sir. And I like working here." One can also associate this behavior that Estrellita is showcasing as marianismo, which is a passive, submissive, and nurturing role for women (Da Silva et al., 2021; Flores & Holling, 1999; Villegas et al., 2010). Other female characters in *The Other Side of the Border* were also oversexualized as many of them were sex-workers and would appear nude or topless throughout the graphic novel. Many of these women would be called "putas," "whores," "dirty sluts." This oversexualization of the character is nothing new as the harlot is a gendered stereotype for Latinas. The harlot is usually portrayed as a nymphomaniac, constantly lusting for sex from a white male; another example would of an overly sexualized Latina stereotype would

be the Latina Spit Fire, who is the embodiment of exotic sexiness (Baez, 2018; Cortes, 1992; Flores & Holling, 1999; Molina-Guzmán, 2018; Ramirez-Berg, 2002). Flores and Holling (1999) also discuss the Latina stereotype of La Malinche, who is often seen as the traitor/whore who was deemed responsible for the downfall of Mexico. As previously mentioned, Jenni, the cousin of the protagonist of the story, is a sex-worker who is later killed and is brutally crucified naked with her intestines falling from her body. The words "whore" and "slut" are written next to her. Jenni could be seen as a mix of the harlot and La Malinche stereotype as she was using her sexuality to her benefit, but similar to La Malinche, Jenni was seen as a whore and traitor which led to her downfall.

Figure 22

Image of Jenni from *The Other Side of the Border.* Artwork by Philippe Berthet, all rights belong to Europe Comics. Reprinted from *The Other Side of the Border*

Motherhood

One of the positive forms of Latina representation found is the mother role or motherhood depiction within *Home*. Mercedes Gomez is the mother of the protagonist of the story and she is seen taking care of her son, Juan as the two are migrating into the United States.

Even as the two are taken into custody, her motherly instincts are there guarding her son as best as she can. Flores & Holling (1999) state that motherhood is another central theme in media representations of Latinas. As Latina mothers often fall into the role of the good mother, which is seen here with Mercedes in *Home*. According to Baez (2018), Latinas, like Latinx folks in general, have been underrepresented, but appreciate when they are recognized within media and popular culture. Nevertheless, Latinas are not satisfied with the representations and portrayals that are in media and popular culture and desire more nuanced depictions that reflect hybridity and complexity found within Latinx communities.

Machismo and Misogyny

Within most of the comic books, *machismo* (masculinity) was a common trope for most of the male characters. This hypermasculine trait includes aggression, dominance, and chauvinism (Wong & Wester, 2015). *The Punisher*, *I.C.E.*, *Red Border* all featured *machista* cartel leaders, who would show traits of aggression, dominance, and misogyny towards women. "El Diablito" from *The Punisher* always wanted to show his dominance and would aggressively beat The Punisher in order to try and gain respect from other cartel leaders and villains. I would also note that while The Punisher is not a Latinx character, he does exude *machista* qualities throughout the comic such as aggression, dominance, and violent behavior.

In *I.C.E.,* Luis Morales says during a battle with I.C.E. agent, Cole Matai, "Surrender and I give you my word you will die like a man. Instead of some squealing *puta*." Morales being machista is trying to show a display of dominance over Cole and feels that he is more of a man than Cole is. By saying, "you will die like a man" and "some squealing puta" Morales is saying Cole is less manly than he is. Morales continues, "I was afraid you had lost your fight. You

Americans have become soft. Ripe for the picking by stronger men." Not only does Morales feel that he is superior but that Mexican men are more masculine than male U.S. citizens.

Red Border's Javier is the most misogynistic character from all the comic books and graphic novels. For example, Javier is getting a massage by a Afro-Latina woman who is topless. Javier says that the woman is not sexy enough for him to get an erection. "I got no problem getting it up for blondes." He yells at the woman, "go back to Guadala-fuckin'-jara! ... She's terrible, has hands like claws. I never wanna see a black-haired hooker in this house again." In issue 2 of *Red Border,* Javier has another conversation with one of his gang members as they are looking for Eduardo and Karina, the main characters of the story. "[Where] the fuck are they?" One of the gang members tells Javier that he does not know where they are. Javier tells the gang member that it is his job to know where Eduardo and Karina are. Javier says that it is his job to run the organization, but states that he cannot do that at the moment because of this issue. The gang member says it is due to bad phone service, to which Javier responds, "no service? All night? Sounds like some bullshit I tell my wife when I'm not getting laid." This conversation displays Javier's attitude towards women, and how he always wants to be dominant and in control of the situation.

In a final battle between the two main villains of the story, Colby Benson and Javier, Javier kills Colby then goes after Karina. Javier angrily tells Karina, "Fucking woman. Busting my balls, thinking you got all the control. Get ready to get fucked, bitch." Javier continues to scream obscenities at Karina, as a piece of the burning Benson house falls on top of him killing him. As seen throughout this analysis, Javier is very aggressive and constantly uses foul language and curse words to show dominance and power, all of which are *machista* behaviors and characteristics. Most of the comic books showcased plenty of gender roles that were both

positive and negative, especially with female characters. Many of these gender roles have been repeated throughout media and popular culture, again reinforcing many of the stereotypes of Latinx people and those who live on the border. The next section will discuss the white saviors and militants represented within the comic books and graphic novels.

White Saviors and Militants

One of the common narrative threads found within these comic books and graphic novels were the white saviors or protectors and the white militants. White saviors is not a new concept, as it is a common theme found within media and popular culture, as the white (most of the time) male character is the hero of the story saving the minorities (Aldama & Gonzalez, 2019; Aldama & Nericcio, 2019; Underwood, 2016). Within popular culture, the White savior trope is seen tremendously within film and multiple scholars have pointed out how problematic it is towards people of color (Belcher, 2016; Cammarota, 2011; Rodesiler & Garland, 2018; Vliet, 2021). The White savior narrative continues within comic books as well as most superheroes and protagonists are White within mainstream comic books. White militants or a group of minute men who believe that they are "defending" the border (M. A. Holling, 2011; S. K. Sowards, 2021). While analyzing the comic books and graphic novel for this dissertation, I noticed that at times these two motifs intersected as the White Savior later turned into the militant.

As aforementioned, within the *Holyoke One Shot – U.S. Border Patrol Comics 5* and *The Border Patrol* series white males (border patrol agents) were represented as the heroes or white saviors/protector of the border from the villainous male minorities (Native American and Latinx characters). Every single border patrol agent from these two comic series was a white male and saved a small village or saved the damsel in distress. One could consider that The Punisher is a white militant as he kills many Latinx characters, who are villains. The Punisher, whose real

name is Frank Castle, was a member of the military and uses his militaristic background to be a vigilante or anti-hero to eradicate crime. Cortes (1992) mentions how Mexican-American characters served the role as "Othered villain" because U.S. audiences need an easily identifiable and easily despised foil for white heroes. On the other hand, The Punisher can also be a white savior as he has saved the lives of many including people of color.

An example of militants, in this case, they are minute men who believe they are defending the border are found within *Border Town* earlier within the first pages of the first issue. The minute men in *Border Town* are wearing Make America Great Again (MAGA) hats that are closely related to the conservative values of former U.S. President Donald Trump. Additionally, these men are holding guns and rifles along the border, all while saying racial slurs about immigrants and Latinx folks. According to Holling (2011), minute men consider themselves to be a border policing organization, specifically found along the Arizona-Mexico border, similarly to *Border Town*, all while building an ideology and identity that is also rebellious towards the government. The minute men analyzed in Holling's article, believe that "the government is responsible for the nation's safety and therefore should be responsive to the needs of those who experience the immigration problem near the border" (p. 98).

Figure 23

Image of the Benson family preparing to fight in *Red Border*. Artwork by Brian Stelfreeze, all rights belong to 12 Gauge Comics. Reprinted from *Red Border*

Another example of militants appears in *Red Border* as the Benson family appears to be migrant friendly as they help the main characters of the story cross the border safely and even give them a place to stay. The Benson family fit the White savior trope as they believe they are helping immigrants. Popular culture and media scholar, Jaime Schultz (2014) defines White saviors as "[White] characters who rescue people of color from dire circumstances because, for whatever reason, they cannot seem to do it for their own accord." Things then begin to change as it is revealed that the Benson family are racists who have a history of killing Mexicans. Colby Benson offers to give Eduardo a tour of the Benson family ranch. Through this conversation we find out that Colby was in the military and had two tours in Afghanistan. He states, "where a war family, freedom fighters, all of us. Uncle Bert was in the Gulf, mama was in the Gulf, too."

Colby then shows Eduardo a painting of the Alamo. “My great-great-great granddaddy had it done outmanned and outgunned, are people defending our land and our freedom against them ruthless southern invaders at the border near San Antonio, fighting along Davy Crockett himself.”

This is definitely foreshadowing. Eduardo responds, “many Mexicans were slaughtered in the battle too.” Colby responds, “and damn well deserved it.” Eduardo responds, “well I’m not sure there are any winners in war.” Colby asks Eduardo, “you think our border should have a turnstile on it so criminals and terrorists and drug dealers can just waltz on in here like they own this damn place?” Colby is following in suit with many of the discriminatory and racialized stereotypes Latinx immigrants have faced throughout media, popular culture, and politics. Many of the terms Colby uses are the same derogatory terms that President Trump used to describe Latinx immigrants. Eduardo responds by saying, “I think there should be security, but I also think there should be compassion for those in need.” Colby continues the conversation by saying, “I’m a Texan. This is our land. There’s some crazy shit happening on the border and if the government can’t take care of the problem, then we good honest citizens got to keep things in order, or else the whole goddamn world will go to hell.” It is in this conversation, where Colby’s true intentions begin to show. Throughout the issue, Colby tries to represent himself as a protector and person only willing to help the migrants, again reinforcing that he is a White savior.

Eduardo and Karina want to leave the Benson family ranch, but Colby says, “Look, I’m tellin’ you straight up! If you go out there now, you’ll be shot like dogs. I took a drive before and border patrol and local cops are on a search an’ kill for any Mexicans that might’ve gotten across last night.” Colby is using imagery and examples of militarization of the border as a scare tactic

to manipulate and keep Eduardo and Karina on the ranch. As the story progresses, Eduardo and Karina begin to start uncomfortable with the Benson family try to escape from the Benson household only to discover that the family has a collection of heads and bodies of migrants they have killed in their basement. They see a dead taxidermied person standing tall in front of them. Later in the comic, it is revealed that the meat from the farm and served in their food comes from Mexican who are immigrating. Colby says, "The scrawny ones, like your girlfriend, go on the wall. The plump ones like you, we don't' put to waste." In the final issue of *Red Border,* the Benson family and the cartel begin to battle, but as the cartel barges in they are then is stunned by the Benson family with a huge machine gun. Colby holding the large gun declares:

> Jesus loves Texas tonight! Been waitin' for this day for over a century—the mother lode of Mexicans has finally arrived. It's the Alamo all over again! We ain't gonna starve this winter, that's for damn sure. Our walls are gonna be full and our bellies, too (Starr, 2020).

As Colby continues to kill off members of the Mexican cartel he screams, "Damn invaders! You'll never win. Victory's our destiny." These quotes reinforce that the Benson family are militants who believe that they are protecting and defending their country with militarization tactics and techniques from immigrants.

Characters like minute men or similar to the Benson family are horrifying as they have no remorse for killing Latinx folks. On 3 August 2019, tragedy struck as a self-proclaimed white supremacist who drove 10 hours to El Paso, Texas at a local Walmart where he would shoot and kill 23 people that day (S. K. Sowards, 2021). It was discovered that the shooter had posted a white-supremacist manifesto online prior to the shooting and stated that he intended to kill as many Mexicans as possible (Arango et al., 2019; P. Baker & Shear, 2019; Hafez, Farid, 2019).

Within his manifesto, he referred to the 2019 Christchurch Mosque shooting and a white nationalist right-wing conspiracy theory known as "The Great Replacement" as inspiration for the attack. During a news conference, it was reported that among the 22 fatalities, 13 were U.S. citizens, eight were Mexican nationals, one was German, and another was undetermined (Arango et al., 2019; P. Baker & Shear, 2019; Hafez, Farid, 2019). Months later another person who was a U.S. citizen had passed away, making the death toll to 23.

On a personal note, this specific event resonates with me personally as I am from El Paso, Texas and was in town the day of the shooting. That specific Walmart is the store my family shops and gets groceries at, and I remember my mother and aunt saying that they had planned to go later that evening. Additionally, I have a cousin who works at that specific Walmart as well, and I am thankful that none of my family members and friends were harmed that day. As you can see, these Latinx and border media representations do matter, whether on screen or in a comic book, these depictions have real life consequences that can do harm to others. The use of minority stereotypes in the media can influence the audience's real-world feelings and beliefs about the group (Ramasubramanian, 2010). The next section will focus on the violence and brutality found within the comic books and graphic novels of this study.

Violence and Brutality

Throughout most of the comic books and graphic novels, violence and brutality were romanticized and featured in the narratives. Early comic books like *Border Patrol* issue 3 included a scene where a border patrol agent ends up killing a Native American by tossing him, leading the Native American to hit his head on a rock. In the same issue, the villain of the story, Juan Hernandez discovers gold with a white companion, as Hernandez later kills the white companion to have the gold for himself. Later in the same issue, the border patrol agent shoots

Hernandez in the arm with an arrow, and Hernandez drops a dynamite that he is holding it later explodes making it seem as if he has died. *The Other Side of the Border*'s main narrative centers around the murders of Latina sex-workers who are being killed around Nogales, Sonora. Most of the women are killed by being stabbed. As previously mentioned, one of the most brutal scenes of the graphic novel comes from the death of Jenni, who is killed then crucified naked with her stomach cut open and organs falling out. A crucifixion type of death also is show in *I.C.E.*'s third issue as Ezra is brutally murdered by Gonzalez and is left hanging on the cross. Throughout *I.C.E.* many of the Latinx characters are killed by head shot or in other violent fashions, but this death is by far the most grotesque. As I have stated throughout my analysis, *I.C.E*. is an incredibly violent comic book that makes me question, who is reading this comic book? Who are the audiences reading this comic book, and what effects does it have on readers? This is something worthy of analyzing in future research down the line.

Migra Mouse includes various comic strips that feature law enforcement brutality toward immigrants. In a comic strip called, "Another Immigrant Success Story" it features sheriffs brutally beating an immigrant. Other comic strips display the caution migrant silhouette and silhouettes of vigilantes going after them. Again, this depicts the violent side of the border as vigilantes, border patrol members, police officers are seen as hunters and immigrants as targets. Further imagery of hunters going after immigrants continues as Elmer Fudd is depicted as a Sierra Club member holding a rifle that states anti-immigration ballot going after an immigrant who looks like Bugs Bunny but with a handlebar mustache. As previously mentioned, *The Scar* features a border patrol agent, Lonnie Ray Swartz breaking his jurisdiction as he shoots into Mexico to kill Jose Rodriguez, as Swartz believes Rodriguez was a part of a drug smuggling group. The second story of *The Scar* also mentions how the border patrol demolished a base

camp in a raid with 30 officers, 15 trucks, and a helicopter. One of the volunteers says that it was a clear strategy by the border patrol to "cripple" the base, no longer making it a safe area for migrants.

In *The Punisher,* violence is found throughout the comic. The first example begins with "El Diablito" and his gang are torturing The Punisher by waterboarding him and hitting him with a bat, hence the pinata reference from earlier in the comic. "El Diablito" records himself beating up The Punisher in order to have his competitors respect and fear him even further. Overall, this is an extremely violent comic as The Punisher bites a thumb of one of the gang members torturing him. Again, violence happens as The Punisher kills the gang members who were guarding his cell. Violence is on both ends as the cartel members are just as violent. The Punisher is escaping and killing people left and right, including headshots.

Figure 24

Image of cartel leader Javier pointing a gun at a cartel member in *Red Border.* Artwork by Will Conrad, all rights belong to AWA Studios. Reprinted from *Red Border*

Red Border also features violence heavily throughout the four issues of the series. Early in the first issue of the series, Karina and Eduardo are having dinner with friends discussing how they can make progress within Juarez without using violence. "We must lead the way with ideas,

not weapons," says Karina's partner (Eduardo). There is a knock at the door to which Karina opens it. Two men with guns (Manny and Cesar) are there with angry expressions. They start shooting and killing Karina and her partner's friends, as Karina and her partner run in fear. Karina's partner stabs one of the gunmen in the back, killing him. The other gunmen comes after them screaming, "You're gonna fuckin' die, both of you!" Karina and her partner escape and rush to a car.

As previously mentioned, the villain of the story, cartel leader Javier, is extremely violent, shooting multiple people in the head and killing many throughout the series. As Karina, Eduardo, and Tito get to the border they run into the drug cartel again. One of the cartel members says, "you really thought we'd let you bitches get away?" Eduardo tries to convince the cartel to kill him instead of killing Karina, because he killed the man in the house. The gang member says, "oh don't worry will kill you too." The gang member than refers to Karina saying that they are going to have some "fun" with her, referencing raping her. Suddenly, a shot happens out of nowhere, and the gang member is shot right on the crotch. One of the gang members says "fuck, somebody shot his dick off!" They do not know where the shot came from. Cartel members are going down one by one head shot after head shot as Karina, Ed, Tito are all on the ground trying to protect themselves. A man walks out of the shadows and states, "five out of six ain't bad. "A white man holding a rifle with a cowboy hat smiles at Tito Eduardo and Karina. The man then shoots one of the cartel members who still alive, and takes a selfie with him saying, "say queso." The man turns out to be Colby Benson, one of the white militants, who pretends to care for migrants, but is a racist. In the final issue of *Red Border,* the Benson home is burning with fire as Eduardo and Karina are trying to escape. Javier sees the couple and stops them. Javier is then shot in the back by Colby. "I gave both y'all a fightin' chance… to die with dignity. You coulda

filled up our all-American stomachs all winter long. Prettied up our walls, too. But now your gonna die like all the other desert rats." Javier fires a shot at Colby killing him then chases after the couple.

At times, these comic books were unnecessarily violent and grotesque. It seems that the creators of these comic books and graphic novels wanted to push the envelope as far as they could and were gratuitous with their depictions of violence and killing within these narratives. I believe that the writers of these comic books wanted to reinforce the stereotype of the U.S. Mexico border being a violent area, unfortunately, it is a reality as many people including migrants are being killed every day (Bonmatí, 2021). The U.S.-Mexico border is represented as a warzone within various news outlets, media portrayals, and is further showcased as a violent landscape within these comic books and graphic novels (Domínguez et al., 2010; Rodriguez III, 2019; Sarabia, 2020; Silva Londono, 2016). The final chapter will summarize this project, discuss limitations and possibilities for future scholars, and concluding statements.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Overview

As discussed through this dissertation, I have introduced my topic and provided an overview of various concepts and terminology regarding the U.S.-Mexico Border and Latinx representation in comic books. Moreover, the second chapter of this project focused on scholarly literature on the U.S.-Mexico border, Latinx representation in comic books and graphic novels, and the theoretical approach I am using for this dissertation, Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory. The third chapter focused on my methodology section which discussed the uses of textual analysis research, visual rhetoric, and narrative theory to properly collect data for this project. The fourth chapter, which was my analysis, focused on the various themes and categories I have found while interpreting the data I collected from analyzing the comic books of this study.

The themes of my analysis were: Border Narratives - Tales of the Border with subthemes, Defining and Illustrating Borders, Key Spaces - Geography, Key Landscapes and Locations; the next major theme was Latinx Representation and Characters of the Border, which discussed migrants/immigrants, law enforcement of the border, bandidos and coyotes, drug dealers, cartel/gang members, politicians, samaritans and volunteers, aliens and monsters of the border; the third major theme was Use of Language; the fourth theme analyzed was cultural signifiers; Fifth theme examined Gender Roles of the Border; the sixth theme discussed White Saviors and Militants; the eighth theme focused on the Violence and Brutality found within the comics and graphic novels. Finally, I will end my dissertation with a summary, future implications for further research on this subject matter, and concluding statements. This study answers the

questions: how is the U.S.-Mexico border represented in comic books? How are Latinx immigrants represented within comic books about the U.S.-Mexico border? Do these comics books about the U.S.-Mexico border reinforce or challenge Latinx immigrant stereotypes? The overall purpose of this dissertation was to explore and inform how comic books and graphic novels represent the U.S.-Mexico border and Latinx people of the border.

Discussion

Throughout the comic series analyzed, various Latinx cultural values, forms of U.S.-Mexico representation, and identity were found. Each of these forms of representation are important as they emphasize a small sense of diversity within the larger realm of comic book media, especially with the Latinx community. One of the first points of analysis was the geographic location, specifically around the U.S.-Mexico border, which made a big impact on the narrative of these comic books and graphic novels. The location of the U.S.-Mexico border became a character of its own within the narratives of these comic books and graphic novels. Similar to how many comic book authors use Gotham City as a character and narrative motif in the Batman comic books.

Within the discussions of representations found within the characters of the comic books and graphic novels, there were plenty of discussions surrounding militarization on the border. Various stories included images and narratives of weaponry and defense mechanisms to "protect" the border from migrants crossing into the United States. For Latinx communities, militarization on the U.S.-Mexico border is a racist scare tactic that the United States government frames as a "protectant and defense mechanism" when in reality it is just a tool to keep people of color, specifically Latinx people outside of the United States (Márquez, 2012). Furthermore, militarization only increases the negative stereotypes that politicians and the media portrays of

Latinx people. This tactic is being used to stop people from trying to better their lives and their families lives. I understand that there are legal and legitimate ways to properly become a U.S. citizen or to cross the border in a safe and secure manner, but it is also extremely expensive for families who cannot afford a passport or the documentation needed to enter the United States legally. There are many families and individuals who are a part of lower social classes who want an opportunity at a better and/or safer life. Some of these families and individuals are desperate and chose to cross the border illegally. On the other hand, there are plenty of Latinx individuals who support strict immigration policies as they prioritize their identity as a U.S. citizen first over being a Latinx person, and also perceive their livelihood and well-being is affected (Hickel et al., 2020).

Furthermore, discussions of the border also included brief examples of social class and how social class affects how people cross the border, legally but with a price or illegally, and at times with a price if they are using assistance from a Coyote. Two characters in particular stood out from the main characters analyzed and that was Juan from *Home* and El Peso Hero from *El Peso Hero.* Both immigrant characters were featured in counter-narrative stories as they featured intersectional identities of being Latinx, immigrants, and superheroes. This is not a stereotypical trope found in comic books as most superheroes are not immigrants and most of the superheroes featured in mainstream comic books are White. A critique I have regarding this narrative is adding the inclusion of a female Latinx immigrant superhero. I think that would be an inclusive, diverse, and interesting storyline from a female immigrant perspective.

An example of a female character who is a superhero in a border town, but not an immigrant would be *La Santa* (2021) written by Latina comic writer Kayden Phoenix. La Santa is a Latina superhero, who is a part of the A La Brava, Latina superhero universe. Additionally,

this character is located in a fictional border town called Wexo, Texas and she must face a conservative politician and villain, Illena Chavez-Estevez a.k.a. ICE. Unfortunately, I did not find out about this character until the final stages of my dissertation process and did not include this graphic novel in my data collection. I plan on continuing building my database of Latinx and U.S.-Border related comic books and graphic novels and research, and *La Brava* would be a comic I would love to analyze and examine for future research.

Cultural values like familismo, machismo, marianismo, and espiritualismo were featured in some of the comic books, and at times in a very subtle fashion. With all these cultural signifiers of Latinx and border identity found within the comic books and graphic novels, cultural capital becomes a major concept that becomes involved as audience members need cultural capital at times to understand some of the references found. By having cultural capital and prior knowledge of cultural references, it showcases that writers and audiences have a greater understanding of their racial and cultural backgrounds. It was clear that most of these comic books and graphic novels, even those that were published independently and not by a major publisher, were meant for a general and mainstream audiences all while trying to attract a Latinx demographic as well due to the subject matter and characters. This was notable as most of the comic books were written in English and the sections that were meant to be in Spanish or Portuguese used markers of language to distinguish itself as another language.

For the audience or readers who are not familiar with Latinx tropes, it might have created a "border" as well. Some people might not be aware of some of the subtle forms of representational ethnic/racial markers found within the comic book series like images and names of the Latinx folklore characters and the religious prayer candles featuring Catholic saints. Subtle forms of imagery, cultural values, and representation go a long way in terms of creating a larger

impact on minority diversity in comic book media. Additionally, some of the imagery and text analyzed emphasized both positive and negative stereotypes to provide further representation within the Latinx.

On another note, it is important to state that the representations of Latinx people and the border are still very stereotypical in comic books. Each comic book illustrates and tells a different story of Latinx identity and border representation, but throughout each of the comics and graphic novels there are positive and negative stereotypes reinforced in each comic story. For example, being the criminal or villain of the story is a common negative stereotypical representation in the media of Latinx individuals (Madriz, 1997; Ramasubramanian, 2010). The criminals of these comic books reinforced what general audiences already believe Latinx folks from the border to be cartel members, drug dealers, and rapists. With that being said, there were also positive depictions of Latinx characters such as superheroes, characters who persevered and who were determined to fight for their goals, and motherly figures.

Throughout most of the comic books and graphic novels of this project, reinforced stereotypes such as rapists, drug dealers, cartel members, gang members or all discovered within the artifacts are analyzed. These stereotypes are all negative and are all commonly found not just within comic books and graphic novels, but throughout media and popular culture (Madriz, 1997; A. R. Martinez & Ramasubramanian, 2015; Ramasubramanian, 2010). I found this incredibly disheartening as I believed that comic books and graphic novels were more innovative with their thinking but unfortunately, it was more of the same reinforced and repeated racial tropes found in popular culture. In a chapter analyzing the character Mandy from *Chloe, Love is Calling You* (1934), Robin Means Coleman states how the certain characters face oppressions such as discriminations, exploitations, police brutality, and corruption because of their

communities including gang affiliations, drugs, prostitution, and racism (Means Coleman, 2014). While Means Coleman is discussing Black communities within her chapter, most, if not all of these forms of oppression have been faced by the Latinx community and have even been represented within the comic books analyzed within this dissertation.

Seven of the fifteen comic books analyzed for this study had these tropes within their narratives. *Home* included the statement from the former United States Attorney General who compared immigrants to criminals who prey on the innocent or people who bring drugs, crime, and that are considered rapists. *Red Border, I.C.E.,* and *The Punisher* featured cartel members, while *The Scar* included migrants who were drug smugglers. Within *Red Border*, many of these stereotypes or negative depictions are reinforced by the white characters of the story who ask the Latinx characters who ask, "are you real life Mexicans?" and "do you speak Spanish?" Throughout *Red Border,* Colby Benson uses terms such as "ruthless southern invaders," "damn invaders," "criminals," "terrorists," "drug dealers," "you people," "grape-picker type," and "future rapist."

Out of the six comic books, two of the authors were Latinx, Lalo Alcaraz and the México Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores. Ironically, both Alcaraz and the México Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores are meant to be advocates and supporters for Latinx folks, yet, reinforced many of these negative racialized stereotypes and tropes within their work. Alcaraz uses terms and concepts such as "beaners," "illegal aliens," "wet back," and "they're taking our jobs" to comedically make strong points about U.S.-Mexico border issues, but at the same time reinforces many of the repeated racialized stereotypes. I would compare Alcaraz's work to that of a comedian who uses stereotypes and cultural references in order to create content, but in Alcaraz's case also brings awareness through his political satirical work. There are media

scholars who have stated that humor serves as a tool that helps facilitate relationships between diverse groups by destigmatizing social issues (Avila-Saavedra, 2011; A. R. Martinez & Ramasubramanian, 2015). On the other hand, others have stated that humor can have the reverse effect and normalize discrimination against minorities (Ford, 1997). This leads audiences to believe that many of these stereotypes and tropes are what represent Latinx people and communities. With that being said, Alcaraz uses humor in order to "take back" and challenge these terminologies and stereotypes by bringing awareness to the issues he is discussing within his comics. Alcaraz uses his platform to showcase the issues going on within the Latinx community, specifically within California and the U.S.-Mexico border, in order to bring awareness to the communities that read his work.

Casillas (2008) states that Latinx folks are seen as "invisible" laborers, many of which are absent from larger discussions of U.S. politics and political discussions. When Latinx individuals are represented, they are represented as "brown-collar" workers, largely in low-level occupations such as construction, agriculture, and manufacturing jobs. Exposure to racial stereotypes could cause further outgroup interpretations of Latinx individuals, who are immigrants and to those who are already living in the U.S., thus causing further stigmas about them (A. R. Martinez & Ramasubramanian, 2015). Again, I believe that these stigmas can be reduced by better representing minorities throughout media and popular culture in order for audiences to truly understand people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. On top of all that many of these graphic novels and comic books use racially discriminatory terminology and slang terms to describe Latinx characters. For example, one of the I.C.E. agents asks Morales:

> Tell me, Morales. Is Mexico even considered a third world country? I mean what do you spics have other than beans and whores. Don't get me wrong. I understand why you

would want to leave that sewer you call a country, but we only have so many hotel rooms to clean (Wagner, 2013).

Within this statement alone, there are plenty of negative stereotypes such as considering Mexico a third world country and a sewer as many believe for the country to be low-income or dirty, the derogatory term "spic," eating beans, Mexican women being "whores." This statement also includes the racialized and gendered stereotype of Mexican women being maids and feminizes men as cleaners too. This was a representation that was found within *The Other Side of the Border* with Estrellita being a housemaid for a rich, white family. Gendered stereotypes continued as the terms "puta," "whore," and "slut" were commonly used throughout books like *Red Border*, *I.C.E.* and *The Other Side of the Border* to degrade Latinx women or demasculinized men. Again, these are all terms associated with Latinx gendered stereotypes like La Malinche, the harlot, and the spitfire, as Latina women are overly sexualized within media and popular culture, not just comic books and graphic novels (Cortes, 1992; Flores & Holling, 1999; Ramirez-Berg, 2002).

Imagery wise, *The Border Patrol, Migra Mouse*, *Rendez-vous in Phoenix* all featured illustrations and depictions of older Latinx males that were depicted with brown skin and handlebar mustaches. *The Border Patrol* and *Migra Mouse* also included depictions with sombreros and characters with accents written out. *The Border Patrol* also did this with Native American characters. "Native Americans appear in this issue in stereotypical wardrobe. They are called "red men" and "braves." The Natives do not trust the white characters even stating, "White man speak with forked tongue of snake!" and "White Man talk – no good!" The Border Patrol officer fights the Native American chief. "Pretty War Paint, Chief" "Kill White Man!" Native American chief says, "Finish paleface quick! – Indian Style." These are all racialized

stereotypical representations and phrases that are commonly used to illustrate Native Americans within popular culture (Leavitt et al., 2015).

Throughout this project, resurfaced and repeated Latinx stereotypes were represented within the comic books and graphic novels analyzed within this study. Many of these stereotypes are those that Latinx folks have been racially and culturally labeled throughout media and popular culture. In a few cases, positive representations stood out, but many of the representations of the characters were negative. Of course, in comic books, there are always heroes and protagonists, which were showcased in positive aspects, but overall, the negative depictions of characters heavily outweighed the positive forms of representation.

Apart from the Latinx superheroes, most of these stereotypes are found throughout other forms of media and popular culture. These forms of representation can all be seen as both a positive and negative implication, as it can further the idea one already has about that minority's identity or further promote a negative stereotype or representation of that ethnicity. Having a racist in-group minority (Arnie Hernandez) within the story furthers the idea of a realistic and complex form of representation as there are people of color who are against their own kind (ex. Uncle Tom or Tio Taco) (Alonzo, 2009; D. Mastro et al., 2007; D. E. Mastro et al., 2008). Furthermore, this could lead the audience to develop a certain idea of that minority if a common stereotype is constantly portrayed in the media. Rodriguez (2008) is hopeful as she states that Latinx images and portrayals are changing and that Latinx folks are not the only community to face negative representations within the media. She states other minority groups such as Indian, Black, Hispanic, and Jewish folks have all faced ethnic and racial stereotypes in the media repeatedly. This is why scholarship like this is important to highlight these forms of

representation and create a discussion on how we can reform these images into better and more complex depictions.

Theoretical Implications

Using Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory as a theoretical approach that intersects theoretical frameworks like CRT, LatCrit, and LatComm as foundational approaches helped provide a better understanding of critical cultural and racial dynamics that Latinx folks on the border are facing. The theoretical implications of this dissertation and of Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory contribute greatly to a growing discipline in comic studies, and series of work around border studies, Latinx studies, popular culture studies expanding the way Latinx popular culture and critical cultural scholars analyze comic books, and the reception of Latinx and U.S.-Mexico border representation in comic books and graphic novels. Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory has so much potential as other scholars can use this as a theoretical framework and possibly grow it into a discipline of its own.

While this theoretical approach is still early in its development, Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory can be applied to other forms of Latinx border related media, not just comic books and graphic novels. I believe scholars who focus on news and journalistic work related to the U.S.-Mexico border can also use this approach down the line as well, due to their narrative related work and use the visual rhetoric related aspect as well if they are doing documentaries or visual work. In regard to the use of visual rhetoric, I feel that while I did analyze imagery found within the comic books, I found visual rhetoric to be more useful as a methodology than as a theoretical approach. I believe that Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory will continue to adapt and morph structurally, and maybe the use of visual rhetoric within it might be replaced by another structural theoretical approach to help future scholars and

research conducting work on this subject matter. With that being said, I do believe visual rhetoric has so much potential within the comic studies field, but as previously stated, it may be better suited as a methodological approach.

While conducting the research for this dissertation, I realized that the true theoretical pillars of Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory are Narrative Theory, CRT, LatCrit, LatComm, and Border Studies. Throughout my dissertation, I found myself using theories, concepts, and approaches rooted within these specific theoretical frameworks. I believe this dissertation provided informative and broad perspectives of various elements of the U.S.-Mexico border represented within the comic books and graphic novels analyzed. The research from this dissertation includes principles of critical cultural studies and border studies as I analyze race, culture, and artifacts within popular culture that focus on the U.S.-Mexico border. Referencing the first tenet of LatComm, my dissertation centralizes the Latinx experience many face on the U.S.-Mexico border as one of my primary goals of this dissertation was to highlight the representation Latinx folks along the border.

Furthermore, I use principles and tenets from foundational theoretical approaches like Critical Race Theory and LatComm I was able to showcase how there are elements of racist depictions, discussions of the social construct of race, and the uses of storytelling and counter-narratives. By using CRT and other theoretical approaches that have stemmed from it including LatComm, this dissertation examines elements of racist depictions and stereotypes Latinx individuals along the U.S.-Mexico border face including discriminatory rhetoric claiming that people from south of the U.S. border are drug dealers and rapists. While it is unfortunate that these forms of representation do appear in some of the comic books analyzed, it is also important to note that these negative depictions were not the only forms of Latinx representation that were

included within the artifacts analyzed. Authors like Hector Gonzalez III, Julio Anta, and Lalo Alcaraz all used counter- narratives to showcase complex and diverse forms of representation of Latinx individuals along the U.S.-Mexico border. Gonzalez III and Anta create Latinx immigrant superheroes who help fellow migrants or Latinx individuals within the borderlands. Alcaraz uses his platform to create counter narratives through his critical and satirical body of work in order to inform audiences of societal issues the U.S. and Mexico are facing.

Additionally, this dissertation represents the first tenet of LatCrit as this research provides information and further scholarship revolving around Latinx migrant communities that have been silenced in the past due to discriminatory beliefs and negative media representations. The research conducted within this dissertation also provides an advancement of transformation specifically on the representation of Latinx individuals who live in the borderlands. While these comic books present both positive and negative depictions, and most of the stories being told are fictional, these stories are important as they do include reality based scenarios that many Latinx migrants and individuals face along the U.S.-Mexico border. These stories of the U.S.-Mexico border are important, need to be read, and need to continue to be made. This lack of Latinx diversity is disheartening and unfortunate:

> From Media Studies we have learned that what is missing from media representations is not necessarily an indicator of that which is not present in our culture but rather a sign of that which we desire to ignore, extirpate, or marginalize. …the fact that Latina/os have not been, or have barely been, represented in mainstream popular culture does not mean that they have not been there, nor that they have not contributed to the nation's culture, economics, and politics, but rather that from a center-of-perspective, they are not important enough to be mentioned (Valdivia, 2010 p. 70).

This leads me to the fourth tenet of LatCrit, which is the cultivation of community and coalition because the sharing of this research helps bring individuals together to form an alliance to push

against majoritarian discourses, and also the fifth tenet of LatComm, which is promote a social justice dimension. When reading this dissertation, I want scholars and comic book creators to see the need of Latinx representation and see why stories like these are important to create, analyze, and highlight. With a large Latinx population in the United States, a greater amount of media representation of the Latinx community should be seen. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

According to the UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report, it showcases just how underrepresented the Latinx community is within film, 7.1% of leads, 7.7% of overall cast, 5.6% of writers and 7.1% of directors (Hunt & Ana-Christina, 2021). Representation in media matters, and that includes comic books and graphic novels. The Latinx community wants to see their stories being told in a variety of formats, including comic books (Barbosa, 2018). One can only hope that this does happen in the future as Latinx fans, creators, and scholars need to make their voices heard. Not only should media representation of the Latinx community grow, but the stigma many news outlets and politicians have created surrounding Latinx immigrants needs to change. It is understandable that politicians on both sides of the border do need to create immigration policies, but these regulations need to be helpful and safe for people on both sides of the border. Again, I believe that these stigmas can be reduced by better representing minorities throughout media and popular culture for audiences to truly understand people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. We need to create bridges not borders to support one another.

Of course, there are plenty of scholars who have analyzed and critiqued various aspects of immigration within the U.S.-Mexico border and popular culture, but these scholars focus on film, television, and music, and I believe that they also could contribute to Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory as well in the future with their work being narrative, popular culture/media, and border centered (Maciel & Herrera-Sobek, 1998; Saldívar, 1997). I

understand that Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory is a new approach and not many scholars have focused on the artifacts I covered in my dissertation, I want to use this project as a way to fill the gap found within academic literature due to the fact that there is limited research that focuses on the U.S.-Mexico Border identity and representation found in comic books and graphic novels. Additionally, I hope that Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory has room to grow within communication studies, popular culture studies, border studies, Latinx studies, and within interdisciplinary academic spaces as various scholars can use the theory to analyze text, visual imagery, and even the creators on a much deeper level through their own data collection, U.S.-Mexico related research, and Latinx popular culture artifacts. I want to be as inclusive as possible with Critical Latinx Border Cultural Studies Theory.

As I continue my research and expand this project into a book and articles, I would also like to continue to strengthen this theoretical approach even further. I plan on dropping the Latinx from it, in order to bring further inclusivity and to explore borders even further within media and popular culture. An example would be the exploration of portals into the multiverse with Spider-Man character Miles Morales and Marvel character America Chavez in order to analyze this as a metaphor for border crossing. Additionally, I want to explore other graphic novels and comic books that focus on other borders beside the U.S.-Mexico border.

Using the various methods, such as textual analysis, visual rhetoric, and narratology, I was able to examine the fifteen comic books and graphic novels in a variety of ways including the stories, images, characters, geographical environments, and other facets of culture and identity relating to Latinx and border representation. While there are plenty of scholars who analyze comic books using narrative theory, this dissertation covers an understudied topic within comic, border, and communication studies. Additionally, visual rhetoric is also a methodology

where comic books are an understudied topic, and I hope by using this method within my dissertation to fill the literature gap on Latinx and border representation in comic books.

Additionally, while conducting this dissertation I designed and provided a map that includes all the locations featured in the comic books and graphic novels. I wanted to use this as a visual design in order to illustrate all the different locations around the U.S.-Mexico border and other central locations that were in the artifacts analyzed. Furthermore, I was able to start and create a database for comic books and graphic novels that revolve around the U.S.-Mexico border. I understand that there are other comic books and graphic novels of the U.S.-Mexico border that were not included within this dissertation, but I plan to continue adding the further data to this database as I continue to research this topic.

Practical Implications

Through this dissertation, I was able to provide a deeper understanding of media and popular culture representation of the U.S.-Mexico border and Latinx folks, specifically found within comic books and graphic novels. Further representation on Latinx immigrants and the U.S.-Mexico border was presented through comic books and graphic novels, which is a medium that is underrepresented within scholarship. By analyzing comic books that focus on the U.S.-Mexico border and center around Latinx representation, I discussed how many of the comic books include complex forms of representation of Latinx immigrants including intersectional identities such as being immigrant superheroes. Further practical implications that this dissertation provides is regarding comic book and popular culture enthusiasts can gain a new perspective on the U.S.-Mexico border. The U.S.-Mexico border is a topic that is rarely covered and discussed within comic books, especially mainstream comic books. Many of the comic books and graphic novels are independent titles (non-Marvel or DC comic books) that are not

typically available in comic book stores and have to be found in comic conventions, the independent publishers website, or online comic readers like Amazon's Comixology. After reading my dissertation, I hope that comic book readers and scholars gain a new appreciation for the comic book medium because of its storytelling capability and how it can be used within academic and educational purposes. Comic books can include complex and diverse characters, and powerful narratives that can teach audiences about diverse representation, inclusion of people of color, and fight for equitable rights and representation with popular culture. With the database that I included in this dissertation, I would love for scholars and comic book enthusiasts to read the comic books listed, and contribute to the database if they know of any other comic books or graphic novels that center around the U.S.-Mexico border. I plan on including this database on my website so the public can gain awareness of comic books and graphic novels that focus on the border. Additionally, I hope that this dissertation inspires more people to read comic books and graphic novels, including the ones mentioned and analyzed within this dissertation. With this being said, I believe this dissertation also provided further arguments on why Latinx creators are needed within comic books and popular culture overall. There is a massive need of Latinx storytellers to continue to share their stories, experiences, and culture with mass audiences to further showcase rich and complex forms of Latinx representation.

Limitations and Future Research

The biggest limitation of this study was of the whole investigation the number of comic books that focused on border identity and Latinx representation together. While I feel that I was able to analyze plenty of comic books and graphic novels that discuss Latinx identity and U.S.-Mexico border representation, and I was able to collect plenty of data that answered my research questions, I always feel like there will always be more to discover. I know without a doubt, there

are plenty of comic books and graphic novels that I missed and was not aware of or did not include while writing this dissertation such as the *Love and Rockets* series or *La Santa*. Honestly, *Love and Rockets* would be a fun series to analyze down the line, but I know there are plenty of scholars who have textually analyzed this critically acclaimed series (Aldama, 2009; Garcia, 2017).

With that being said, comic books like the examples investigated in this study need to continue being written to highlight Latinx characters, immigration stories, and border representation. Of course, there are already plenty of Latinx superheroes and comic characters, but very few are border related like El Peso Hero, Juan from *Home*, and as I recently discovered *La Santa*. I plan on using this research and framework to analyze these Latinx superheroes centered on the border and write an analysis on how they are represented and how they contribute to the larger conversation of popular culture, comic, and border studies. Also, it is with great hope that in the future, there will be comic book creators who continue to write, illustrate, and focus on stories and issues of the U.S.-Mexico border even further. Also, one can only hope that these future Latinx representations will be done in a positive manner, and in a not so violent and demeaning tone such as the ones depicted in *I.C.E.* or *Red Border* or in racist depictions as seen in the early comic books, *U.S. Border Patrol* or *The Border Patrol.* While representation and portrayals of people of color have progressed since the 1940s and 1950s there is still plenty of work that needs to be done as creators of color and other minorities need to continue to write stories featuring BiPOC characters and other minority groups.

For future research on this project, I would love to expand this project into a graphic novel format in order to educate both academics and general audiences. I am inspired by the work of Scott McCloud and so many other innovative academics who are turning their academic

work into critical and creative pieces that are interactive and fun, all while being educational still. I want my dissertation to be able to be "digestible" for audiences who are academics, comic book fans, people of the border, and other audiences in general. I want readers to have a better understanding of the U.S.-Mexico border and realize that while it might be stereotyped and portrayed in certain ways, there is so much more to the border than what the media and popular culture shows audiences. Plus, I believe that the format of an academic book in the form of a graphic novel is something that is not seen often within academic spaces. I would love to change that and help scholars perceive the way we examine, analyze, and publish research in a different light. I would also like to add that I could use this as a way to use my background as a graphic designer and illustrator to create imagery, illustrations, and visuals for this book project.

I also plan on using various chapters and sections of this dissertation and making them into journal articles. For example, I would love to expand on the section of geography and locations of the border and examine the use of place making techniques and methodologies but with the artifacts I analyzed. There are various scholars who have examined placemaking and have used it to discuss boundaries, geographies, and locations that have influenced various communities, specifically communities of people of color (Brown, 2017; R. L. Carter, 2014; P. E. Villegas et al., 2020). While researching placemaking, I found there is a major gap of literature surrounding Latinx communities, the use of place making in popular culture, and within comic books studies. I would like the opportunity to contribute to this literature and the conversation of this subject. Furthermore, I would like the opportunity to collaborate with my co-advisor, Dr. Antonio La Pastina, who has analyzed media representations in Brazil and telenovelas and cultural proximity (La Pastina, 2004; La Pastina et al., 2014; La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). Specifically, I would like to collaborate with Dr. La Pastina and write a paper

similar to his 2014 piece, “Why Do I Feel I Don’t Belong to the Brazil on TV?,” which analyzes audiences who feel disenfranchised from telenovela representations because of their identity, but use my data on comic books, immigrant representation, and the U.S.-Mexico border to formulate a similar piece about border and immigrant representation. As previously mentioned, I would also like to write a textual analysis on Latinx immigrant or border superheroes like *El Peso Hero*, Juan from *Home*, and *La Santa* as these characters are countering stereotypical superhero tropes and immigrant narratives by including intersectional characters that are not seen typically within comic books.

Additionally, I could see this project expanding even further as I would love to interview the various creators of the comic books and graphic novels in order to get their perspective and insight on their respective perceptions of the U.S.-Mexico border, and Latinx culture and identity. This project could be turned into a chapter in my graphic novel project or I could make this project multi-modal or transmedia like and create a podcast out of the interviews. I have had the chance to meet both Julio Anta, the author of *Home* and Hector Rodriguez III, author of *El Peso Hero*. Hector was even a guest of mine on my podcast, *Academics and Amigos*. So this is something I can totally see being feasible down the line. Additionally, I would love to have this dissertation be a section of a larger book or project that focuses on the representation of the U.S.-Mexico border in popular culture and media. This concept and type of creative/critical research is something I hope many future comic studies and popular culture scholars use in the future. Another future project I see myself exploring is broadening the theme of this dissertation to not only focus on the U.S.-Mexico border, but other borders found within the United States and even internationally. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the comic books and graphic novels from this study with others that tackle the subject matter elsewhere.

For future scholars, reading this or inspired by this project, I invite you to continue this journey of exploring the representation of Latinx folks and the U.S.-Mexico border in all facets, because as you can tell, representation truly does matter not only in media and popular culture, but also within academic spaces. Your work matters and this is your time to shine.

Let's Create Bridges not Borders

This dissertation project was meant to dive deeper into the world of comic books and graphic novels in order to explore the representation of the U.S.-Mexico border and Latinx folks. Along the way, this project became something much deeper and became a reflection of myself as a Mexican American from the border as my identity is rooted in my love for comic books and my love of being from the border. That love is what inspired this project and along the way it clarified what I already knew that representation matters in so many ways. Additionally, I felt myself reflected on a much more personal level as some of the connections of the border resonated with me on a deeper level such as connecting some of the border representations to the August 3rd shooting that happened in my hometown of El Paso, Texas. Seeing people, specifically Latinx folks, from my hometown being killed because of media representations that inspired the shooter, reflected to me on a personal level on how much media representation matters and the affects media has on people. While I want to encourage and promote positive forms of Latinx representation, I cannot help but think of the harm negative forms of representation have caused and may continue to cause in the future.

I believe the future is looking brighter as comic book media is beginning to include Latinx characters within comic books, video games, television shows, and films. It is with this hope that publishers and studios continue to produce Latinx centered projects, especially within comic books. Latinx creators like those featured within this dissertation wanted to create stories

that related and resonated with them. Latinx audiences are longing for it as well. As a Latinx consumer and scholar, I long for it as well. Of course, I long for this media as it keeps me busy analyzing Latinx representation within popular culture, but I also long for greater Latinx representation for future generations to grow up with and fall in love with these amazing characters and stories. We as a Latinx community need to build bridges and support one another through our content, scholarship, and community efforts. It is through that bridge building that we can truly find the representation we long for in media and popular culture. Additionally, by building bridges to other communities outside our own we can showcase the beauty in our Latinx cultures and identities. We will not let these negative depictions define us; we are better than that. I hope to encourage through my scholarship that we are more than these reinforced stereotypes characterize us to be.

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