

## Topics in Other U.S. Literatures

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### **Irony as a Tool to Challenge Stereotypes in Michele Serros' *How to Be a Chicana Role Model***

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## **Abstract**

Stereotypes are overgeneralisations that dismiss individual traits and create tension among various groups in society. One of the most common stereotypes, ethnic stereotyping, can be considered a form of racism, since the stereotyped group is morally affected. This is the case of Chicanas, who apart from being victims of racism, have also been victims of sexism. Due to this, one of the means to counteract and redefine their identity has been literature. In fact, in works written by Chicanas, irony is a frequent literary tool, since it facilitates social issues to be discussed from a distant point of view. Considering all this, the main aim of this dissertation is to examine how Chicana writer Michele Serros uses irony to challenge stereotypes in her novel *How to Be a Chicana Role Model*. To this end, various instances of ethnic stereotyping from the novel are compared with works written mainly by Chicanas. Through this reading of the novel, I seek to illustrate how the various instances of ethnic stereotyping reveal the multidirectionality of stereotypes, the notion of cultural authenticity and the difficult process of becoming a Chicana writer. In doing so, Serros breaks stereotypes and creates a new role model for Chicanas.

Keywords: irony, stereotypes, ethnicity, Chicana identity, feminism.

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## 1. Introduction

Influenced by the Chicano Movement, the 1960s and 1970s were a key moment for the redefinition of the Chicana identity. Together with their male counterparts, they fought against discrimination based on race. Nonetheless, they were also oppressed by sexism and capitalism, which favoured male dominance. Even if a considerable amount of women took part in the Chicano movement, Chicanas felt that their efforts were dismissed due to the fact that being revolutionary did not conform with the traditional roles of Chicanas—religious, mothers. Instead, Chicana feminists needed to have a more active role in society which could only be achieved through access to education and, what is more important, a redefinition of their roles without abandoning the fight of their male counterparts against racial discrimination.

In order to reformulate these roles, it was necessary to acknowledge a complex and multidimensional identity, that is, a “*mestiza* consciousness” (Anzaldúa 99). This new identity encompassed the mixed heritage of Chicanas, as well as their new demands and needs. By doing so, Chicanas expected to diminish tensions based on economic, racial and sexual inequalities. Influenced by these revolutionary ideas, Chicanas increased their presence in various fields, especially in literature. In this area, Chicana authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa or Sandra Cisneros probably influenced the next generation of Chicana writers, that is, writers such as Michele Serros.

Poet and novelist as well as contributor for works by other professionals, Serros’ literary career has focused on the Chicana experience. Perhaps *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* (2000) can be considered to be her most remarkable work. In this novel, Serros narrates the life of Michele, a Californian teenager who, as part of her generation, is influenced by the mainstream media and the role models portrayed in it. In a process of self-discovery, she faces various misconceptions that affect her not only as a Chicana but also as a woman and a U.S. citizen. These stereotypes have been assimilated by the Anglo society as well as by the Mexican and Chicana/o ones. Probably the most common stereotypes mentioned and challenged throughout the novel are those related to ethnicity, that is, ethnic stereotyping, another form of racism.

As many other Chicana writers, Michele Serros aims at redefining the roles of Chicanas by creating characters detached from stereotypical roles. Indeed, stereotypes

are “overgeneralizations” (Blum 260) that dismiss individual characteristics and diminish social cohesion. This is due to the fact that they are related to ethnocentrism, where powerful groups create stereotypes due to their privileged position and therefore make the stereotyped group feel inferior. As a consequence, ethnic stereotyping has been a recurrent theme in Chicana literature.

Indeed, many Chicana writers have used irony to break stereotypes, enabling them to discuss social issues in a less aggressive way and reach larger audiences. The aim of this paper is to discuss the various instances of ethnic stereotyping in Michele Serros’ *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* and how they are dismantled by means of irony. The examples of ethnic stereotyping analysed in this paper mainly deal with expectations on physical appearance, Chicana/o Spanish and work. Additionally, Michele Serros illustrates the arduous process of becoming a writer through an autobiographical narrative voice, that is, Michele. Since becoming a Chicana writer is a process of self-knowledge and self-definition, when writing, the author is able to identify and reconsider stereotypes. In doing so, Serros expresses a willingness to trespass the notion of cultural authenticity while accepting and redefining her identity.

This paper will begin with a brief introduction of the socio-historical and literary context that has influenced the author. In addition, it will provide an explanation on stereotypes and irony in Chicana works. Next, Michele Serros will be introduced within her literary context and the core aspect of *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* will be analysed: ethnic stereotyping. This analysis will focus on the protagonist’s physical appearance, expectations on language and the act of writing as a relief and a process of self-definition. Finally, this dissertation will conclude with a summary of the main aspects that have been explored.

## **2. *How to Be a Chicana Role Model*: the Context**

### 2.1 The Development of Chicana Identity and Literature

Chicanos tell us what Chicanas are like. Anglos tell us what Chicanas are like...We feel like asking: “Will the *real* Chicana please stand up?” but when she does, we can’t see her, because the room is already packed with a standing mob of stereotyped impersonators. (Tafolla 35)

This statement by Chicana feminist and writer Carmen Tafolla illustrates some of the issues Chicanas had to face when defining their identity. In the first place, the various terms applying to Americans of Mexican descent and their connotations are certainly complex; inasmuch as “Mexican-American” stresses the “half-and-half” of their identity (Tafolla 6), the term “Chicana/o” is preferred for acknowledging their *mestizaje* (miscegenation), that is, it denotes how they are descendants of Meshica Indians, Spanish and African (Moraga; Tatum). Notwithstanding, it is worth mentioning that the connotations of the term “Chicana/o” have evolved considerably. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was used to refer to Mexican Indian immigrants who lacked high education and were regarded as inferior (Tatum 4). When the Chicano Movement began in the mid-1960s, it “arose as the symbolic representation of self-determination” (Pesquera and Segura 298). In other words, “Chicana/o” implied political commitment and pride.

Additionally, the term “Chicana” acquires a “third dimension” (Tafolla 14), a privileged perspective beyond the Anglo female and Chicano male experiences. As put forward by Harryette Mullen, the Chicana is “a woman who is not fragmented but enriched by her multiple roles and experiences” (Tafolla i). I will use the term “Chicana/o” instead of “Chicano/a”, as explained by professor Charles Tatum, to “move beyond the vestiges of a patriarchal culture toward greater equality between women and men” (5).

As mentioned before, the 1960s and 1970s were marked by numerous protests and social upheaval taking place in the U.S.. This was also a key moment for the Chicano Movement, an agitated time of the 1960s and 1970s where many Chicanas/os in general and farmworkers and students in particular fought in favour of social justice and equal rights. They aimed at a new visibility where social, political and economic conditions were improved. Some of the most remarkable leaders of *El Movimiento* were Reies López Tijerina, César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and José Ángel Gutiérrez (Tatum).

Albeit more than half of the participants of the Chicano Movement were women (Nieto Gomez, “La Femenista”), they held secondary positions as secretaries, that is, according to Chicana feminist Martha Cotera, they were given an “observer status” (“Feminism” 230). This may be due to the fact that Chicanos were not used to see their

women in leading positions (Hernández), influenced by their strictly defined roles; whereas the powerful man was the provider of material support, the woman was expected to accept a passive position (Rincón). Consequently, many Chicana activists would be blamed for “not being a good mother” (Tafolla 86).

This view was strongly influenced by the two main stereotypical role models Chicanas/os have traditionally inherited, which at first glance seem to contradict each other; firstly, influenced by *Marianismo* or the “veneration of the Virgin Mary” (Nieto Gomez, “La Chicana” 48), some Chicanas were regarded as strongly religious women faithfully devoted to their men. This traditional attitude was brought by the Spanish colonial women and its main symbols are the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Llorona (Tafolla 41). Yet many other Chicanas are seen as cantina girls, or simple-minded curvy women who wear provocative clothes and “are attracted to tall, good-looking ‘Americanos,’ or basically *any* Americano she is exposed to” (Tafolla 38). Both stereotypes, contradictory as they may seem, reinforce the “social and economic dependency for women” (Nieto Gomez, “La Chicana” 49). All in all, it can be said that Chicanas suffered a triple oppression; they were not only victims of racism as their male counterparts, but they were also discriminated for being women. Finally, they were deprived in economic terms due to capitalism (Madsen), which has traditionally favoured male domination, since “sexism is part of the capitalist ideology which advocates male supremacist values.” (Nieto Gomez, “Sexism in the Movimiento” 97).

Thereupon, Chicanas felt the need to end discrimination by challenging the previously mentioned stereotypes and re-educating Chicanos. Their main aim was to participate as activists, mothers and professionals simultaneously (Cotera, *The Chicana Feminist* 22). This view was shared by many Chicanas who wanted to eliminate sexism within El Movimiento and “move together...rather than against” their men (Martínez 33). In other words, feminism was needed in the Chicano Movement (Nieto Gomez, “La Femenista”).

This leads us to the question “What is a Chicana feminist?” A suitable answer would begin with the distinction between Chicana and Anglo feminism (also called Women’s Lib). In Chicana feminist Anna Nieto Gomez’s opinion, Anglos were “women of different ethnic, cultural and class status” (“La Femenista” 91). Due to this, their demands and status in society were different from those of Chicanas.

Consequently, Chicanas felt that their concerns were not considered by Anglo women, who, for instance, rejected the traditional family, a fundamental part of the Chicana/o culture (Martínez). Furthermore, Chicanas wanted the involvement of women fighting for a greater understanding of their needs within and beyond their community. They aimed at higher education, a redefinition of the views of Catholicism and the reformulation of the male-female roles without losing consciousness of the Chicano Movement (Cotera, *The Chicana Feminist*; Olívarrez; Orozco; García).

In other words, the aims of Chicana feminism were necessarily knitted to the creation of a new identity or, as put forward by Chicana feminist and writer Gloria Anzaldúa, “a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*” (Anzaldúa 99). This new identity encompassed not only the mixed heritage of the Chicana but also her current situation and thoughts. By doing so, instead of being based on gender, ethnic and economic differences, this consciousness would reduce these conflicts and, what is more important, it would contribute to the creation of new roles for Chicanas. This process took place outstandingly during the 1970s and 1980s, but some Chicanas claimed it to be a moderate success due to the persistent presence of sexism within El Movimiento (Mujeres en Marcha).

Together with the development of a new identity, during the 1970s, there was an upsurge of Chicanos in general and Chicanas in particular. They explored a new ground and contributed to a greater visibility in various areas such as education and politics (Cotera 7). Despite being “an anomaly by definition” (Rebolledo in Herrera-Sobek 95), Chicana writers became especially active in literature due to the various feminist publications and to the creation of female characters detached from their traditional roles and stereotypes. In addition, Chicanas “wanted to make a profound contribution to the social transformation of these Américas” ... while remaining “as culturally specific and culturally complex as possible” (Moraga 291).

## 2.2 Stereotypes, Ethnocentrism and Ethnic Stereotyping

In order to analyse how Chicanas have defined a new identity through breaking stereotypes, it is essential to define and delimit what stereotypes are. According to



scholar Lawrence Blum, stereotypes are “false or misleading generalizations about groups” (251), which very often contain “overgeneralizations” (260).

One of the main characteristics of stereotypes is that they ignore the individual traits and diversity of the members affected by them (Blum; McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears). In addition, they are considerably rigid and arduous to redefine (Blum), which is partly enhanced by the impact of the media (Hall). Even if the media transmits stereotypes, it is meaningful to analyse how they are constructed. According to Blum, these preconceived ideas can originate both at the individual and the community level; the individual ones are based on the stereotyper’s own experience whereas the community or “cultural” ones are formed within the beliefs shared by a group, which makes them more influential than the individual ones (254). To a certain extent, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues, it is natural to categorise based on “ideology” (90) and within ideology, stereotypers are the central figure of their ideas and perceive certain divergences between their group and others (Hall). Nonetheless, the problem lies on what is known as the “kernel of truth” (McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears 10), that is, when the existing differences are polarised and aggravated.

Thereupon, it can be argued that stereotyping is closely related to ethnicity and to “ethnocentrism,” as put forward by scholar Richard Dyer (356); whenever stereotypers observe, they are influenced by an ideology and thus, they apply their set of rules and beliefs to examine the other group. The main drawback of ethnocentrism is that, traditionally, powerful groups have applied their criteria to minority groups (Dyer), creating stereotypes. At the same time, stereotypes provoke negative reactions, which are in many cases devastating for the affected group. First of all, they involve a “moral distortion” of the affected group (Blum 251), which increases the sense of alienation of the stereotyped group (Blum). This is due to the fact that stereotypes can also be understood as borders, which, as Gloria Anzaldúa maintains, distinguish “*us* from *them*” (25). Additionally, as some stereotypical ideas are so internalised, the affected group may believe (Blum) and even reinforce them (McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears). Finally, the impact of stereotypes may be so significant that they may determine social roles (Blum). This is precisely what has happened in the Chicana/o culture, as explained before. All in all, the consequences of stereotyping involve ignorance and a major presence of prejudices between groups, which decreases social cohesion.

Notwithstanding, the process of stereotyping is very often a subconscious one, due to the fact that some stereotypes are very rooted in society (Blum).

Also being related to ideology, ethnic stereotyping is another form of racism, as:

Ideologies tend to disappear from view into the taken-for-granted “naturalised” world of common sense. Since (like gender) race appears to be “given” by Nature, racism is one of the most profoundly “naturalised” of existing ideologies (Hall 90).

In order to discuss ethnic stereotyping, it is essential to make a distinction between “overt” and “inferential” racism, as coined by Hall (91). Whereas the first one encompasses the explicit racist allusions, the second one envelops the “apparently naturalised representations of events and situations relating to race” (Hall 91). The latter is therefore more related to ethnic stereotyping in that stereotypes are created on the basis of some racist groundings which have not been challenged (Hall). Ethnic stereotyping is an essential notion in order to understand literature written by non-whites in general and Chicanas in particular, as it has had an impact on their culture and social roles and has consequently been a meaningful topic in their literature.

### 2.3. Irony as a Literary Tool

Breaking stereotypes can also be done at a formal level (Dyer). In this process of redefining their identity and similar to what other coloured women did, Chicana writers challenged the conventional modes of literary expression (Madsen). In fact, humour was one of the most effective tools used by Chicanas in order to reconsider stereotypes which were rooted in society, as the following quotation illustrates:

Stereotypes, in their abbreviation of historical and cultural references, are ideal vehicles for humor. In general, stereotypes, when recognised as such, disrupt a text’s claims to reality, much like an actor’s direct address to the audience. An obviously stereotypical character is presumed to be less than fully human, a surface summation of a group. The danger of stereotypes, however, is that they are frequently taken as truth (Alvarez Dickinson 141-142).

The power of stereotypes lies on the fact that they are a “model for change” (Rebolledo in Herrera-Sobek 105), that is, they disclose some incongruities that exist in society and consequently, they foster a debate on social issues in general and sexual discrimination and stereotypes in particular, as these are some aspects affecting

Chicanas. Thus, humour is regarded as a way to dismantle the stereotypes that affect them. In many cases, Chicanas use a particular kind of humour that denigrates them so that they mock at the features they should be embarrassed of, which diminishes the tension of the conflicts involving them (Rebolledo in Herrera-Sobek). Due to this, humour may serve as a tool to engage wider audiences in social issues that otherwise would not be interesting for them (Alvarez Dickinson), while it strengthens cohesion among Chicanas (Rebolledo in Herrera-Sobek).

In literature, humour can take various shapes, but the most common one is irony. By definition, it is “the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning” (Merriam-Webster). The purpose of irony is to discuss incongruities in an indirect way and from a distant and less aggressive point of view. In literary texts, as the audience is familiar with the circumstances of the characters, readers may laugh at their ironic and precarious situation while they reflect upon the problems of society in an indirect way. In other words, behind the laughter caused by irony, characters long for acceptance and the end of judgements (Alvarez Dickinson 82).

Taking into account that the most frequent issues appearing in Chicana/o humour deal with identity, stereotypes, discrimination, economic difficulties and the border, irony intends to go beyond those differences or borders which can be either physical or social (Alvarez Dickinson 82). Furthermore, it is clear that irony has a didactic purpose and, being a “universal and context specific” phenomenon at the same time (Alvarez Dickinson 5), it has the power to educate broader audiences than the Chicanos/as themselves. Consequently, experiences narrated by Chicanas can relate not only to Chicanas/os themselves but also to non-Chicanas/os and non-Latinas/os (Alvarez Dickinson 213).

Nonetheless, Chicana laughter was absent during the 1970s and 1980s, which was mainly due to their still unfavourable social position. Gradually, Chicana writers gained status and started to use humour in their texts. As stated by writer Rosario Castellanos in Alvarez Dickinson, “we have to laugh. Because laughter, we already know, is the first evidence of freedom” (216). Since the 1980s, many Chicana writers used irony to challenge stereotypes. Taking into account the contributions of previous Chicana feminists and writers, a new wave of Chicanas emerged. They laughed at stereotypes

attached not only to them as coloured women, but also to society in general. Feeling that they were very often conditioned by their (non)conformity to a stereotyped physical appearance, Chicanas aimed at breaking those preconceived ideas. However small and ridiculous they may seem, the truth is that many stereotypes are dangerously rooted in our society (Blum).

#### 2.4 Michele Serros, the “Chicana Falsa”

One representative of this new generation of Chicana writers using irony was Michele Serros (1966-2015). Holder of a degree in Chicana/o studies, Serros was a writer of fiction and poetry who also contributed to media such as Los Angeles Times or Marie Claire, amongst others. Additionally, she made regular appearances at “The George Lopez Show” and National Public Radio and she was selected as a “Road Poet” for Lollapalooza (Mucha Michele). Despite growing up reading what she calls “the three Bs” (*barrios*, borders and *bodegas*), she wrote about a “different type of life, a life that truly goes on that we don’t always see in the mainstream media” (Ulin). Some events in Serros’ life have doubtlessly influenced works such as *Chicana Falsa: And other Stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard* (1998) and *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* (2000).

Her works can be definitely labelled as humorous and it is precisely this characteristic what engages many readers on Serros. *How to Be a Chicana Role Model*, conceived for a young adult readership, aims at redefining the audience’s preconceived ideas on the notion of “Chicana” through laughter. This is due to the fact that Serros herself did not conform to the standard image of a Chicana and was therefore named “Chicana falsa” or fake Chicana (Michele Serros on la Plaza). Based on the aims of Chicana feminists from previous generations, Michele Serros deals mainly with the search for identity as a Chicana and her acceptance by the mainstream society. Additionally, the irony in her writing reveals other problems faced by Chicanos such as “limited job opportunities, ... cultural invisibility and tokenism” (Alvarez Dickinson 231).

Furthermore, the experiences Serros narrates resonate with other contemporary Chicana authors; probably influenced by Gloria Anzaldúa, Serros explores the *mestiza* identity. Similarly, many other authors have approached the Chicana experience;

Cherríe Moraga, Denise Chávez, Mary Helen Ponce or Carla Trujillo among others. In addition, other authors such as Helena María Viramontes, Sandra Cisneros, Josefina López or Alma Luz Villanueva have written about the growing-up Chicana. Influenced by previous Chicana writers and feminists, this new generation aims at analysing the multiple dimensions of Chicanas. This is achieved through characters that dismantle the stereotypes originated in the mainstream society and their own communities.

### ***3. How to Be a Chicana Role Model***

Throughout *How to Be a Chicana Role Model*, the protagonist, a teenager called Michele struggles to find her place as a Chicana and a writer. The novel starts when Anthony Rivera, one of the protagonist's idols, visits her high school. Albeit not making a brilliant appearance, Rivera is still admired by Michele and her classmates for achieving success despite leaving school:

He got us really pumped up, yelling, "Any raza in da house?! Viva el Cinco de Mayo!" Which sorta didn't make sense 'cause Cinco de Mayo was two weeks ago, but, hey, it was ANTHONY RIVERA! (2)  
If you're Mexican, or even Puerto Rican, like Anthony Rivera, and you've dropped out of school and lived on the streets of New York City, you can still make it. You can still be a great role model (3).

Naïve and influenced by the mainstream media, Michele can be at first sight considered a representative of her generation, who associate success with reputation (Alvarez Dickinson). Nonetheless, behind the irony in all the episodes she narrates, readers feel her pressure to abide by the traditional standards linked to a Chicana, including a good command of Spanish, certain physical characteristics, knowledge of Mexican culture and customs and a traditional female role in life.

Due to this, *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* can be understood as a critique of the U.S. society in general and Chicanas/os in particular, where one of the most problematic issues portrayed is ethnic stereotyping, a type of racism. As explained by literary critic Kenneth Lincoln, "'ethnicity' is intercultural, something like counterreflective mirrors, where 'in-group' and 'out-group' are seen (and joked about) from both sides" (qtd. in Alvarez Dickinson 294). Michele's anxiety lies on the fact that her identity is forged by more than a blending of two in- and out-groups, two countries,

two cultures, two generations and two languages. In other words, Michele is part of what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “a border culture” (25). Consequently, Michele feels the need to trespass this dichotomy or border in order for her dual identity to be balanced (Anzaldúa) and accepted as it is.

This concept of borderness has also been analysed by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a Chicano performer and educator who defines his reality as a “new mestizaje” (2084) resulting from a fragmented reality. This existence is marked by the borders that reinforce the differences between the two groups separated by the line. Thereupon, it is precisely through the destruction of borders that, according to Gómez-Peña, Chicanas/os will acquire a “multi-focal and tolerant” identity (2083). Related to this, what Michele and other Chicanas seek is “citizenship, not in a bureaucratic sense, but in a sociological sense” (Alvarez Dickinson 285). Due to the multidirectionality of stereotypes, that is, the fact that they affect many groups at the same time, during this process of breaking ethnic stereotypes, not only Michele but also Anglos and other groups are ridiculed and mocked at by the absurdity of stereotypes. This is one of the main characteristics that hook readers on Serros’ writing.

### 3.1 “I’m from Here, Here”

*“So, where are you from?”*  
*“From Oxnard,” I answer.*  
*“No, I mean originally.”*  
*“Oh, St. John’s Hospital, the old one over on F. Street.”*  
*“No, you know what I mean!” (123)*

One of the most remarkable instances of ethnic stereotyping narrated in the novel is “The Question,” that is, when Michele is asked about her place of origin by an Anglo. Her experience shows that claiming to be Californian does not seem to be a valid answer for Anglos, as he is presupposing that Michele is foreign and, therefore, her appearance is the only marker of identity. In fact, the irony in this extract is to be found when Michele does not know what the Anglo means by “originally” and simply provides a more accurate description of the place where she was born. Additionally, “originally” may be a reference to the common assumption of the immigrant background of U.S. citizens. Michele’s answer defies the Anglo’s expectations and

indeed, her reaction is the one that would be expected from an Anglo. Due to this, this episode can be understood as a reversal of the stereotype.

Even if the situation seems to be humorous as a result of Michele's innocence, readers themselves may realise that the answer expected by them is the same as the Anglo's in the novel. By doing so, Serros questions the audience's criteria to categorise people and the impact of this arbitrary labelling. This idea is reinforced a few lines later, when Michele states that the dominant society's ignorance increases her sense of not belonging:

When Whites ask me The Question, it's just a reminder that I'm not like them, I don't look like them, which must mean I'm not from here. Here, in California, where I was born, where my parents were born, and where even my great-grandmothers were born (123-124).

What the excerpt denounces is that if Michele's physical appearance is different from the dominant one, the person is automatically identified as foreign and therefore does not fully belong to the society she and her ancestors live in. This idea was present in Chicana feminism of the 1970s, which, as claimed by Rosalie Flores, if taken to the extreme, it may even be a way of dehumanising Chicanos/as:

Though she may be an American (born in the United States) ... she must be prepared to be questioned about it, if she is "foreign" looking. She feels she must defend her status... she faces questions like "what race are you" (the human race?) or what nationality are you, and better yet, "what *are* you?" (95)

Taking this into account, Michele decides to go one step further and fight back, imagining a reversal of "The Question"-situation and asking an Anglo about his roots, aimed at making him feel like an outsider:

ME: So are you originally from the U.S.?

EL OTHER: Why?

ME: Just wondering

EL OTHER: Well, my mother is French-Canadian and my father, his family's actually from Iowa. Wait, no, they're from Idaho (125).

In this case, it is the Anglo person who doubts about his own heritage. Naturally, this infuriates Michele, who even if she knows her roots to a larger extent than Anglos, is discredited for her "more Mexican-like" appearance. Additionally, what the author

suggests is that whereas both situations bare a strong resemblance, the Anglo's ignorance is more acceptable than that of Michele and the Anglo's belonging to the community is not questioned whereas Michele's is.

This criticism can also be seen when analysing the extract from a formal point of view; first of all, Michele's question is more straightforward than that of the Anglo (the Anglo's "where are you from?" vs. Michele's "are you originally from the U.S.?"), pointing at the false modesty of the Anglo's question. Besides, Michele uses "originally" as the Anglo does, in order to make him feel like her. Surprisingly enough, the Anglo's first reaction is not to give a proper answer but to ask "Why" is Michele asking "the question," as if there was something in his appearance that made him an outsider. When he finally answers, we see that he doubts about his own heritage.

Finally, concerning the name given to the Anglo, "EL OTHER," three aspects are worth mentioning: firstly, the blending of Spanish and English as a characteristic of Chicanas/os. In addition, the labelling of the Anglo as "EL OTHER" subverts the margin-centre relationship that is considered normative. In this case, she adopts a central position, providing her Anglo interlocutor with a marginal one. Indeed, this is an indicator of the previously explained ethnocentrism, since whites are usually the main group whereas all the non-whites belong to "the *other* group." Finally, the fact that he is "the other" suggests that Michele wanted to point at the border that separates them and increases the sense of alienation of those who do not belong to the dominant society, as Gloria Anzaldúa explains:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary (25).

It is interesting to see how Anzaldúa defines it as an "unnatural boundary," as Michele's main claim is that appearance as they only marker of identity is also unfaithful to reality. The logical consequence of this problem Serros points at is the increasing feeling of not belonging among anyone who does not fit the "Californian blonde girl" stereotype, and at the same time, Serros criticises the excessive importance given to physical appearance, as this conversation between Michele and her friend illustrates:

"But you're Mexican."



“So?”

“So you look like you’re more from Mexico than California.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, California is like, blond girls, you know.”

“Yeah, but I *am* Californian. I mean, real Californian. Even my great-grandma was born here” (16).

The main idea behind this extract is that, as Michele’s naïve friend infers, if you do not fit the stereotype of the Californian girl but that of the Mexican, you have to be Mexican, whereas blonde girls can be Californian without being questioned. In addition, it is also suggested that stereotypes are multidirectional, that is, that they affect all groups.

### 3.2 “Your Nose Looks very... Indian”

The previous section has dealt with appearance as the only marker for identity and it has also pointed at its exaggerated significance in society. The latter will be repeated various times throughout the novel but one of the clearest examples is the controversy of Michele’s nose. At the beginning of the book, we learn that she squeezes her nose daily in order to make it look less Indian, which, according to her, is her “main goal” and at the same time hints her willingness to look more Californian (14). This reflects the pressure of the protagonist and many other people (especially women) to fit the mainstream ideals of beauty. This criticism was also made by Carmen Tafolla back in the 1980s:

Our modern society bypasses much of the awareness of actual beauty for a concern with standardization-stressing that women (and sometimes men) should all fit some single standard of physical proportion and appearance (101).

Despite acknowledging that some men in her family had an Indian nose, Michele still squeezes her nose to make it look less Indian for the Senior Picture Day, stating the following: “I might be too skinny. My chest might be too flat. But God forbid I look too Indian.” (19)

At first sight, the problem with her nose may be regarded as a mere physical complex suffered by many teenagers due to the pressure to fit certain beauty ideals. Notwithstanding, the fact that a Chicana who is supposed to look Mexican by the mainstream society does in fact have an “Indian nose,” shows that there is no single

way of looking Mexican or even Latina/o. This stereotype is still persistent in the media and it oversimplifies the multiple dimensions of the Latina/o identity and therefore narrows their portrayal and presence in society and the media (Alvarez Dickinson 202).

Later on in the novel, once Michele is in college, a woman enters the art store where she works and she starts questioning her identity in a very embarrassing and demeaning way:

“Are you Indian?” she asked.

“Nope”

...

“You sure look Indian”

“Well, I’m not”

...

“Are you sure?” (76-77)

The woman turns to be a photographer who, surprisingly enough, is attracted by Michele’s nose and asks her to pose for her. The humorous situation is created not only by the fact that the woman, again, infers that Michele is Native-American due to the appearance of her nose, but also when the woman dares to question Michele’s heritage. The message behind this extract is that Anglos feel somehow superior and allowed to judge and question Chicanas/os. Even if readers are relieved by the irony of the situation, it questions the criteria and status of Anglos when judging other ethnic groups. Albeit being aware that the woman is “exoticising” her (82), Michele accepts her proposal and by doing so, it can be concluded that while she benefits from the unfortunate scene, she finally acknowledges her nose as it is:

This nose would never be caught dead in a *Marie Claire* spread, but was able to negotiate supply and demand (83).

Nonetheless, echoing the underrepresentation of Latinas/os and other minority groups in the media mentioned before, Michele admits that her nose would never fit the strict beauty ideals of the dominant society. This is due to ethnocentrism, as Gloria Anzaldúa states, “is the tyranny of western aesthetics” (90).

### 3.3 “But I *Can* Speak Spanish!”

As illustrated in *How to Be a Chicana Role Model*, language can also be regarded as a tool for discrimination against Chicanas. They are expected by Anglos, Mexicans and Chicanas/os themselves to have a good command of Spanish and when they do not, as it happens to Michele, they are disregarded.

In the very beginning of the book, Michele narrates how she was invited to a Chicana conference. Amused by the idea, as it could be an opportunity to share her literary work, Michele accepted and rehearsed her poems for weeks. Nonetheless, one week before the event, Michele is told that she is not expected to read her poetry aloud but to serve food at the meeting. Even if she feels disappointed, Michele still attends the conference and while serving the snacks, a Chicana complains about the fact that Michele “can’t even speak Spanish” (8). Consequently, the protagonist is humiliated and thinks about the mistakes or “*grammaticas wrongos*” (10) she may have made, such as saying “‘muy’ instead of ‘mucho’” (8).

This situation may be illustrative of the generational gap between Chicanas. When analysing the construction of both characters, they can be considered to be stereotypical ones; on the one hand, there is an adult Chicana who vindicates Spanish and aims at transmitting it to the younger generations. On the other hand, Michele is a young adult Chicana influenced by the media. It is also worth mentioning that the protagonist of the novel is a fifth-generation Californian who has inevitably become more acculturated to the U.S. mainstream society than her previous generation, who felt closer to Spanish and regarded it as a fundamental ingredient to be bicultural (Sosa Ridell). In broader terms, it can be said that Serros presents the stereotype of the Chicana activist of the 1970s together with the image of the new Chicana in order to present the clash and generational gap between them; in the same way as Chicana feminists of the 1970s wanted to vindicate new roles and challenge stereotypes, they created new ones and in this case, Michele Serros aims at reconsidering them by showing a new Chicana identity that does not conform to them.

Additionally, this passage reveals the multidirectionality of stereotypes, that is, how they affect various groups at the same time. While the woman complains about Michele for being Chicana and not speaking Spanish fluently, Michele complains about Chicanas, as the following passage illustrates:

[Michele referring to this woman] “And when I answered her in my choppy Spanglish, she got really offended and uppity on me, totally made me feel like I didn’t belong there.”

“Was she Mexican?”

“Yeah, well, Chicana.”

“They’re the worst.” (112)

In this extract, the irony is to be found in the fact that due to this clash of stereotypes, Chicanas exert the hardest criticism against each other. In fact, this attitude goes against one of the main tenants of the 1970s Chicana feminists, who saw themselves as “carnalás” or sisters who fought together and supported each other (“El Movimiento and the Chicana” 81). In addition, the passage shows how Michele’s sense of not belonging increases due to the Chicana’s hidebound attitude, who does not acknowledge the various possibilities of the Chicana identity, as Gloria Anzaldúa stated:

We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the “real” Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language as there is no one Chicano experience (80).

In fact, Chicano Spanish and its status have been analysed by Gloria Anzaldúa in what she labelled as “linguistic terrorism”:

*Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente.* We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified (80).

This quotation depicts the status of Chicano Spanish in society. For many, both Chicanas/os and Mexicans, it has negative connotations, since it is considered a flawed version of Spanish (Anzaldúa). Nonetheless, Chicano Spanish must be understood as a dynamic language; in other words, it is a “border tongue” (Anzaldúa 77), or the tangible consequence of the border which shows how identities meet and intermingle.

As this language must be understood within a context of coexisting languages and cultures, it is not surprising to find code-switching and Spanglish among Chicanas/os. Throughout *How to Be a Chicana Role Model*, there are various instances of Spanglish such as the previously mentioned “*grammaticas wrongos*” (10), which, according to Gloria Anzaldúa, are known as “anglicisms” or “pochismos” (78). The second term derives from “pocho,” which in the 1960s was used by those living in the U.S. with Mexican roots to refer to themselves, who had forcedly acculturated to the dominant

society (Alvarez Dickinson). The word “pocho” itself denotes a lack of purity or cultural authenticity, which resonates with the Chicana/o experience and therefore Michele’s, as they do not fully fit any category.

The figure of the pocha/o has been a recurrent one in Chicana/o literature, since, from a humorous point of view, it mocks at the divergence between cultures and enables to discuss social issues such as “cultural literacy, linguistic proficiency, and ‘authenticity’.” (Alvarez Dickinson 61). Michele can be regarded as a pocha, since, throughout various passages of the novel, her identity is questioned due to authenticity and linguistic proficiency. These issues will also be seen when she narrates her experience in Mexico.

### 3.4 “El otro lado”

Throughout the novel, the main issue Michele denounces is that she suffers from ethnic stereotyping not only in the U.S. (where she is regarded as Mexican) but also in Mexico. In fact, her experience resonates with that of other Chicanas/os such as border theorist and performer Guillermo Gómez-Peña:

When they ask me for my nationality or ethnic identity, I can’t respond with one word, since my “identity” now possesses multiple repertoires: I am Mexican but I am also Chicano and American. At the border they call me *chilango* or *mexiquillo*; in Mexico City it’s *pocho* or *norteño*; and in Europe it’s *sudaca* (2082).

While being in college, Michele is in need of the foreign-language credits in order to graduate and she decides to spend some weeks in Mexico. Once there, she meets other students of Spanish, many of which are white. The ones Michele establishes more contact with are nicknamed as “The White Socks” by her (105). “Dandruff Sock, Pink Sock, Clinique Sock, PMS Sock and Slutty Sock” (105) were given those names according to their appearance and personality. Superficial and childish as it may seem for many, physical appearance is the criterion used by the dominant society to label Michele. In this case, Michele’s judgement is less frivolous, as she, to some extent, also takes their personality into account, something that society dismisses when considering her Mexican.

Surprisingly for those who regard Michele as Mexican, while being in Mexico, she feels isolated and constantly encounters the stereotype that she, being Chicana, should have a good command of Spanish and use it as the first language:

“Was a Cuernavaca?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I told her.

She frowned.

“Sí,” I corrected myself (109).

As her Spanish is not perfect, Michele also feels that she does not belong in Mexico: “It was only a matter of weeks before I grew homesick. Really homesick. I began to feel isolated not having anyone to have a real conversation with” (108). Additionally, Michele is at a disadvantaged position when her Spanish is compared to that of Anglos; even if they all are learners of Spanish and should be treated equally, the protagonist believes that while her efforts are criticised, other groups’ choppy Spanish is regarded more positively:

“That’s just another privilege for white people, they’re allowed to fuck up and they still get the credit and encouragement, especially all these white politicians who start their speeches in shitty Spanish. The crowds always go so crazy! And how about Oprah? Like when she did that special on the Macarena or whenever she has Gloria Estefan or those two white women that cook Mexican food? Everyone thinks it’s so great when she speaks shitty Spanish just because she’s trying. That’s so fucked” (112-113).

The irony of the situation lies on the judgement of Spanish by Chicanas/os and Mexicans; when other ethnic groups try to speak Spanish, even if it is not good and their knowledge of Hispanic cultures is narrow and full of clichés, their efforts are much more valued. On the other hand, they are highly critical with Chicanas/os, whose experiences are closer to theirs and therefore should be understood by them. Consequently, it can be said that the excerpt points at the hypocrisy of Chicanas/os and Mexicans and questions the validity of their criteria to judge both groups so differently. This situation, together with the ones previously mentioned, increase Michele’s sense of alienation both inside and outside the U.S.

At this point, Michele’s identity can be defined as a *mestiza* one, as coined by Gloria Anzaldúa (99). This new consciousness aimed at reconstructing the beliefs of the cultures influencing Chicanas (Anzaldúa 92) and creating a new culture, that is, “a new story to explain the world” (Anzaldúa 103) that goes beyond the “*us-them*” dichotomy

explained before (25). Serros will try to integrate the creation of this new Chicana identity through writing, which will also be done by the protagonist of the novel.

### 3.5. “You Gotta Have a Real Job”

Another alternative is for Hispanas with writing and media skills to write, write, write—and write some more (Cotera, “La Nueva Hispana e Hispanidad” 238).

In order to cope with the anxieties that her lack of cultural authenticity generates, Michele decides to fight back by writing. This activity also serves as a process of self-knowledge, as Michele realises who she is and wants to be and breaks the conventions where writing is an unsuitable job for a Chicana. In order to do so, she will have to confront not only her family but also society, as it will be explained throughout this section.

First of all, one must understand what writing means to Michele; at the beginning of the book, that is, at the conference where Michele is humiliated by a Chicana due to her command of Spanish, Michele finally reads her poetry aloud, a gratifying experience for her. There, she meets a publisher interested in her work, increasing Michele’s motivation to write. Later on, Michele acknowledges that writing means freedom to her, as she is able to express the views she “was too afraid to say out loud for fear of sounding unlady like” (41). Additionally, writing is Michele’s refuge from the tensions she may have at home, which resonates Esperanza’s situation in Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*.

The picture at home can be partly due to the fact that her family (aunt Annie in particular) does not regard being a writer as a proper job, as it is considered “selfish” and “rude” (94). Consequently, in order to continue writing, Michele will become more distant to her family and will even have to feign illnesses continuously. Instead of writing, what Michele’s family wishes is a traditional role for a woman, that is, a Catholic marriage between her and a Mexican man. Nonetheless, decides to become a writer even if she has no role model to follow. This was an advancement made by the Chicana feminists of the 1970s who aimed at occupying unprecedented stances in society while maintaining their Chicana identity (Cuarón, Vigil and Rentería 243).

Nevertheless, as a Chicana writer, Michele still faces not only preconceived ideas from her family but also from society. When trying to accept and develop her new status, Michele discusses a potential pseudonym with a friend:

“Look” she said, “people aren’t gonna be interested in what a girl has today, let alone a Mexican one. You need to make yourself less Mexican, less girl.”

...

“A man’s name. A nice regular American man’s name”

...

“Like...Tunlop?”

“No, not a PE-teacher type of man.”

...

“Why not... Michael?” (43)

From a humorous point of view and naïve as both characters may seem, this extract can be regarded as another instance of ethnic stereotyping, as it reveals how Chicanas/os among other minority groups are disregarded by the mainstream society. Besides, male dominance is also criticised, as it is also suggested that, according to society, women are not suitable for writing.

Even if she needs to be “less Mexican,” ironically enough, when Michele publishes her first book and attends book signings, a Mexican boy approaches her and shows his fascination for Michele’s first book. Startled, Michele asks him which was her first book and the boy answers “*The House on Mango Street*” (204). This illustrates not only the lack of knowledge of Chicana/o culture but also the multidirectionality of stereotypes and cultural authenticity present throughout all the mentioned excerpts; in this case, it is not Michele but a Mexican man who “fails” to know what he is “expected” to know by society.

Later on, at the end of the novel, Serros also mocks at Anglos for the same reason. When reading some of the letters written by her admirers, there is a woman complaining about the fact that her work may not be “universal” enough, as “the average kid in Connecticut may not understand” her work and suggests that Michele should use mainstream terms such as “a ham sandwich” instead of “chicharrones” (207). Even if readers of *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* laugh at the absurdity of this episode, it shows Michele’s anxiety, as she is caught between the contradictory expectations of society; whereas she is expected to be Mexican due to her appearance and consequently have a good command of Spanish, she is supposed to assimilate to fit in the mainstream society. This phenomenon, also known as the “melting pot” has been denounced by



many non-whites fighting for a better visibility within the U.S., Chicana feminists amongst others:

Like most artists, we Chicano artists would like our work to be seen as “universal” in scope and meaning and reach as large an audience as possible. Ironically, the most universal work—writing capable of reaching the hearts of the greatest number of people—is the most culturally specific (Moraga 291).

In other words, what Cherríe Moraga, amongst other artists, aims, is at acquiring a new visibility and status within the dominant society without losing their particular characteristics of the Chicana/o community, that is, a *mestiza/o* identity.

Nonetheless, Stephanie Kendall, a teacher of a school Michele attends to promote her book, is the responsible for the ultimate instance of ethnic stereotyping in the book. This last scene echoes the beginning of the book where Michele and her high school classmates are visited by Anthony Rivera, a celebrity regarded as a role model. Amazed by the event, Michele arrives late at school and meets Mrs. Kendall. Despite being a teacher who is supposed to be an expert in Latino cultures and promote them in school, Kendall does not know the diversity among Chicanas/os and Latinas/os, as the following extracts show:

“I wanted to talk about some of your stories. I have some suggestions.”

“Suggestions?”

“Yeah, just a few minor improvements. You know, in college I majored in English with an emphasis in Latin American policy.”

“Well, I’m not from Latin America. I’m from here” (220).

In this case, the Anglo teacher dares to suggest some improvements for Michele’s writing. The aim of this extract is to question the validity of the Anglo’s judgement, since Kendall claims to be an expert merely for having a Major in English with an emphasis in Latin America. Nonetheless, her judgement is not accurate, since she infers that Michele does not belong to the U.S. but to Latin America and therefore increases her sense of not belonging. In addition, Kendall asks Michele the following:

“Do you know Eva Perez, the Peruvian poet?” she asks.

“I’ve never heard of her,” I lie.

“Really? She’s Hispanic.”

“Yeah, well” (219).

Being a Chicana, Michele is supposed to know about a Peruvian poet, as if Chicanas/os and all Latinas/os were one culture. Ironically, Michele pretends not to know the poet to force the expected reaction of the Anglo woman. Indeed, Kendall is

surprised by the fact that Michele does not know a Latina author even if Kendall knows Michele is Chicana.

All in all, these two situations are illustrative of the ignorance of presumably expert Anglos towards Latinas/os and Chicanas/os, as there is supposed to be a homogeneous community, the “Latino people” (Alvarez Dickinson 202). Being unable to acknowledge the complexity and multidimensionality of the various Latina/o communities and identities, the mainstream society reduces the possible representation of Latinas/os to a few stereotyped roles (Alvarez Dickinson). This lack of knowledge also fosters racism in general and ethnic stereotyping in particular.

### 3.6 “Michele, a New Chicana Role Model”

Due to the preconceived ideas on ethnicity existing in society, it is fundamental that artists and particularly minority authors express their views in order to counteract and transform the world. This task is even more necessary for women, since they also face sexist stereotypes. This is brilliantly done by Michele Serros through the protagonist of the novel, who can be considered an autobiographical voice. Throughout the book, as the title indicates, Michele searches for a role model, as she does not approve the views of the mainstream society and her own community. She decides to devote to what she really enjoys, writing, and finally finds a role model: herself.

This is not a straightforward process, as she is questioned repeatedly due to her appearance, her Spanish and her validity as a female writer. Nonetheless, the following quotations are illustrative of how she challenges the establishment and gradually transforms her lack of confidence and insecurity into an individual with agency:

“Can you believe that? You think people are gonna want a poetry book? Like who’s really gonna care?” (36)

Didn’t you have to make compromises to get what you really wanted in life? (45)

Anyway, today I sold a book! Can you believe it? This girl actually gave me six bucks for my book! I mean, she could have bought a hemp bag or a beaded choker or even a Big Belly Burrito, but no, she bought my book (131).

“Michele, you shouldn’t be rolling burritos. You’re there to read your poetry” (135).

In just the last hour I finished a job created by me—with my own thoughts, words, opinions, with my *own* name. I created something out of what I was told I could never do. The so-called obstacles in my life that so many people tried to make me feel ashamed about suddenly seem less important ... Here is someone telling me they actually stopped what they were doing just to hear what I had to say. It's pretty cool having people listen to what you want heard. No, it's *very* cool. I begin to feel this incredibly intense sense of excitement and happiness. I look up at the woman and smile. She smiles back. And then, more than at any other time during my fledgling career as an aspiring Chicana role model, I sorta, in a way, actually feel like one (222).

These are the Michele's last words. Self-confidently, she accepts her "flawed" identity—her Indian nose and choppy Spanglish amongst others—and acknowledges that despite not being neither "Mexican enough" nor even "Chicana enough," she has become a role model, that is, a collective voice with whom many (from Chicanas to non-Latinos) can identify. Additionally, after reading the book, the audience rethinks what being a Chicana means and consequently broadens their horizons.

#### **4. Conclusion**

I hear that we, as women, are ready to explode all the myths, abolish all institutions and otherwise change the world (Cotera 19).

In order to understand the complex identity of Chicanas, it is essential to acknowledge the contributions made by Chicana feminists during the 1970s. In fact, these women mainly aimed at a new visibility and a redefinition of their roles within and beyond their community. This had to be done by reconsidering the stereotypes that had been traditionally attached to them and made them occupy lower positions than their male counterparts. This redefinition of their identity was especially present in literature, where many Chicana writers constructed characters detached from traditional roles and therefore broke stereotypes. In fact, one of the most compelling ways of dismantling them is through laughter in general and irony in particular; mocking at absurd situations can be regarded as an effective way of discussing social issues in a less intrusive way and engaging wider audiences in this social debate. It is due to this that irony has been used by many writers, Michele Serros amongst others.

The central aim of this acclaimed author is to redefine the multiple identities of Chicanas by mocking at the silliness of stereotypes, and this is precisely what she does in *How to Be a Chicana Role Model*. This paper has attempted to discuss Serros' claims on stereotyping in general and ethnic stereotyping in particular. This manner of stereotyping is based on ethnocentrism, or how, within ideology, a group constructs stereotyped ideas after exaggerating the divergences with regard to another group. Indeed, ethnic stereotyping is another type of racism which decreases social cohesion.

Through this reading of the novel, six aspects have been analysed: firstly, by narrating "The Question"-situation in terms of content and form, Serros has aimed at reverting stereotypes and pointing at their multidirectionality. By defying Anglo people's expectations and making them feel like outsiders in their own country, Serros denounces the situation of non-whites. Additionally, she complains about appearance being the only marker for identity and therefore criticises the excessive importance given to physical traits. This is also present in the next section, dealing with Michele's "Indian" nose; it does not only show the pressure to conform to mainstream ideals of beauty, but it also reveals the underrepresentation of Latinas/os in the media. This is related to the previously mentioned ethnocentrism, since Anglos occupy a privileged position in society and therefore foist their views on it.

The next two episodes have dealt mainly with language; on the one hand, the confrontation between Michele and another Chicana at the conference illustrates the generational gap between them, since both characters represent two stereotypes; in that the woman at the conference may represent Chicana feminists of the 1970s who felt closer to Spanish, Michele, being more acculturated, challenges this stereotype and consequently shows that while some stereotypes are broken, new ones emerge. Related to this, the next section has dealt with the expectations of Mexicans while Michele was in Mexico; whereas the efforts of white students were highly valued, Michele was criticised by Mexicans. Due to this, this episode can be regarded as a critique to the different criteria of Mexicans when judging Anglos or Chicanas/os speaking Spanish.

As a consequence, Michele's sense of alienation increases both in the U.S. and Mexico and she finds a refuge in writing, where she still faces stereotypes; even if her traditional family does not regard writing as a proper occupation, Michele becomes a writer. Nonetheless, being a Chicana writer, she suffers racism and sexism.

Additionally, and mainly due to the ignorance of Anglos and Mexicans, Michele is trapped between contradictory expectations; inasmuch as her works should be universal to be widely understood, they should also be culturally specific, acknowledging her *mestiza* identity. Taking all this into account, writing helps Michele acquire self-knowledge, since she comes to terms with society while transforming it; albeit not being an “authentic” Chicana, that is, neither “Chicana enough” nor “Mexican enough,” Michele accepts to have become the role model she was looking for.

All in all, Serros redefines the Chicana identity by reconsidering stereotypes through humour; in doing so, she not only shows that stereotypes are multidirectional but also demonstrates that, as identity is changing, stereotypes are in a constant state of change. Consequently, roles and role models also become outdated and need to be replaced by new ones (Cisneros 289). Additionally, Serros illustrates the difficult process of becoming a writer; since the novel has many autobiographical elements, through Michele, Serros dismantles stereotypes and redefines a new and complex identity. This *mestiza* identity acknowledges the complexity of Chicanas and thus increases “tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity” (Anzaldúa 104), not only among Chicanas but also in society.

In other words, having a conversational tone that can be enjoyed by young adult Chicanas as well as non-Latinas/os, *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* aims at having an impact and making society more tolerant. Perhaps the most interesting aspect is that, echoing Chicana feminists encouraging to write, Serros presents one story; even if readers do not like it, Serros invites them to write (Michele Serros on la Plaza), emphasising that “there is no one Chicano experience.” (Anzaldúa 80)

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