

“I guess I was a mystery even to myself”

The Identity of Ari Mendoza in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz

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Abstract

This thesis studies the representation of identity formation of the character of Ari Mendoza in Benjamin Alire Sáenz's novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. The character analysis is divided into four themes: personality of Ari, his Mexican heritage, love and sexuality and finally, his family. Ari's personality and family will be examined through Jung's theory on Psyche, specifically using the concepts of persona, ego and shadow. Heritage is looked into from the perspective of representation. Love and sexuality are investigated through the idea of internalized homophobia and gender performativity. As these themes overlap with each other throughout the novel, a discussion regarding intersectionality is presented as well. The goal of the thesis is to analyse and conclude what the author has presented as who the character Ari is.

Key words: Benjamin Alire Sáenz, close reading, literary analysis, Jungian Psyche, LGBT+ literature, YA literature, Mexican American literature

Tiivistelmä

Tämä pro gradu -työ tutkii hahmon Ari Mendozan identiteettiä Benjamin Alire Sáenzin kirjassa *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Analyysi on jaettu neljään teemaan: Arin luonne, hänen meksikolainen taustansa, rakkaus ja seksuaalisuus ja perhe. Arin luonnetta ja myös perhehahmoja tutkitaan Jungin psyyketeorian kautta, erityisesti keskittymällä personaan, egoon ja varjoon. Etnisyyttä tutkitaan representaation näkökulmasta. Rakkautta ja seksuaalisuutta analysoidaan sisäistetyn homofobian ja sukupuolen performatiivisuuden kautta. Koska nämä eri teemat esiintyvät limittäin, niiden intersektionaalisuudesta keskustellaan myös. Tämän pro gradu -työn tavoitteena on selvittää, miten kirjan kirjoittaja on päättänyt tuoda esille Arin hahmoa.

Avainsanat: Benjamin Alire Sáenz, lähiluku, kirjallisuusanalyysi, Jungin teoria, HLBT+ kirjallisuus, amerikanmeksikolainen kirjallisuus, nuorten kirjallisuus

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Analytical approach	4
3. Earlier research	6
4. Meeting Ari Mendoza	7
4.1 “Just don’t cry, okay?”; Ari after the car accident	11
4.2 “A boy who went crazy”, seeking revenge on behalf of Dante	16
4.3 A Happily Ever After for Ari?	19
5. Ari’s Mexican Heritage	21
5.1 Mexican American People, Culture and History	22
5.2 The representation of Mexican heritage in the character of Ari	23
5.3 Dante and Ari’s Conversations about Heritage	26
5.4 Ari’s parents’ perspective	29
5.5 Conclusion of the Representation of Mexican Heritage in the novel	32
6. Love and Sexuality	33
6.1 First Confessions	34
6.2 Ileana	35
6.3 Discomfort, internalized homophobia, heteronormativity	37
6.4 Ari “comes out,” or does he?	43
7. Family	46
7.1 Parents	46
7.1.1 Lily, Ari’s mother	47
7.1.2 Jaime, Ari’s father	50
7.2 Siblings	55
7.2.1 Ari’s twin sisters	55
7.2.2 Bernardo	56
8. Discussion	60
9. Conclusion	62
10. Works cited	63

1. Introduction

“When do we start feeling like the world belongs to us?”

“Tomorrow” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 88).

In Benjamin Alire Sáenz’s novel, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012), the main character Ari Mendoza is a 15-year-old teenager who has decided that he has nothing else in life except being miserable and lonely. The novel depicts the story of Ari meeting Dante Quintana, a boy who teaches him how to swim, and how meeting Dante impacts the character. Suddenly Ari has someone he can talk to, someone to wonder about the world with. The author presents the reader with the question of who Ari Mendoza is and how the character’s identity is formed.

Much of mainstream LGBT+ storytelling, especially in Hollywood, focuses on white queer experience (Anderson, 2016), therefore Alire Sáenz’s work is crucial for representation and shows the diversity of the LGBT+ community. This is also one of the reasons why I chose Alire Sáenz’s novel for further analysis.

In this thesis, the method of close reading will be used to analyse the characterization of Ari Mendoza and how the author creates the identity of him. This thesis looks into different aspects of the character’s life and how they are represented in this novel; how the author has the character depict himself, his family and as in earlier research, this thesis will also delve into his Mexican American heritage and his sexuality. Ari swears that he is boring, miserable, sad, describing himself as a “screwed up Ari” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 320). But can we trust Ari as the narrator to tell the whole truth of himself? Is he as miserable and screwed up as he claims to be?

This research will be divided into categories of different aspects of Ari’s life that are represented in the novel listed above and will then look into the intersectionality of his identity and how the different aspects of it affect each other. The goal is to understand the complexity of Ari’s identity, what changes and what remains throughout the story.

2. Analytical approach

The material for this study is Benjamin Alire Sáenz's 2012 young adult novel *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the World*. The novel shares the story of the protagonist and the narrator Ari Mendoza, who is a 15-year-old Mexican American teenager living in El Paso, Texas. The author shares through the lens of the character that he identifies himself as moody, sad and miserable. The character wonders about questions of life as teenagers do. The story presents Ari's mother as a middle school teacher and his father as a mailman and a Vietnam war veteran. Ari is told to have two older sisters and an older brother, Bernardo, who is in prison for the duration of the novel. The starting point of the novel is the summer vacation of 1987 and Ari decides he wants to learn to swim. He meets Dante at the swimming pool, and he promises Ari he will teach him how to swim. They quickly become best of friends as the story progresses quickly. The first significant event of the story happens when on a rainy day, the author depicts Dante and Ari are outside and see a hurt bird on the driveway. Dante goes to save it but from Ari's perspective, a car is driving towards Dante. Ari pushes Dante away and Ari gets hit instead. Dante, his parents, Ari's parents, are presented to view Ari as a hero which is presented to be uncomfortable to him. Another challenge to the main character is presented when Dante moves to Chicago for the year and before leaving, he confesses to Ari that he loves him. At this point of the plot, Ari does not reciprocate but they are still presented to be best friends. A year goes by and throughout Ari is presented to wonder about his identity from various aspects, which are analysed later in this thesis. Dante moves back to El Paso, him and Ari happily reunite. Dante starts seeing Daniel, his co-worker, and another significant event in the plot commences as one night they get attacked by a group of boys for kissing in a public place. Ari is presented as angry and due to this the character seeks revenge and beats up one of the attackers. The shadow of Ari's brother being in prison is presented when Ari's parents worry that Ari might be becoming like his brother, which is presented as an insult to Ari's character from his own perspective. Ari's father confronts Ari about his feelings towards Dante; Ari realises he is in love with Dante, confesses to him and they are happily together. The novel ends with Ari feeling free and happy.

The story of Ari and Dante is heavily influenced by the author's personal life. Benjamin Alire Sáenz was born in 1954 in New Mexico and is of Mexican descent. He achieved his Bachelor of Arts in Humanities and Philosophy from St. Thomas Seminary, and also studied theology at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium. After this, he worked as a priest in El Paso but left to pursue a Master's degree in English and creative writing at the University of Texas at El Paso. He currently a professor of creative writing at UTEP, specifically in the Bilingual Master of Fine Arts program. Alire

Sáenz was married to a woman for 15 years but divorced her and came out as gay in 2009 (Rodriguez, 2015, pp. 254–255).

This thesis will be a qualitative literary analysis. The chosen method of study of the character is close reading, through which different aspects of identity which are represented within the novel in the character of Ari will be examined, focusing particularly on Jungian model of psyche of persona, the shadow and the ego. Brummett (2019) describes persona from the perspective of close reading as “understood to be *an image one projects of who one is*” (author’s italics, p. 16). This is used to see what the character (in this study, Ari) wants the reader to know about him, and what is told through other characters and the events of the novel. Additionally, the idea of the persona changing through the novel and how it impacts the story, is also utilized (Brummett, 2019). The shadow is described as parts of personality that the person dislikes and wants to hide and ignore, traits that a person would be ashamed of (Hart, 1997, p. 92). The ego is how the person combines their internal and external world (Young-Eisendrath and Dawson, 1997, p. 316).

All the parts of psyche according to Jung are not the whole person but rather different parts of the person and combined makes the people as is. This theory will be applied in the study of the character Ari through the events of the novel and how Ari describes himself and in the family section, the theory will be applied to each character who is part of Ari’s family and how those impact Ari.

Since the analysis has been into different sections, two of the chapters also have additional theoretical frame. These are utilized to understand the persona, ego and shadow of the protagonist. For chapter five, I have utilized Samora’s (2019) book on the history of Mexican American People as well as Galal’s article *Ethnicity* (2012) and Entman (2001) article regarding representation. For chapter six, I have used Meyer and Dean’s (1998) chapter regarding internalized homophobia in bisexual and gay men released in Herek’s book, Butler’s (2009) gender performativity and Riemer and Brown’s (2019) book on the history of the LGBT+ community. These works are used to analyse the character of Ari from different perspectives.

3. Earlier Research

There has been extensive earlier research on the representation of homosexuality and Mexican heritage in the characters of Ari and Dante in this novel. This thesis will focus on the characterization of Ari and how these different aspects appear in the novel. I am more interested in the whole picture of Ari, rather than just one aspect of the character.

In Poole's (2016) article, the writer investigates the queer Mexican experience of the novel's main characters. Poole summarizes the novel (p. 125) but mistakenly states that the novel takes place in New Mexico, when the location is El Paso, Texas. According to Poole, the happy ending for two Mexican gay characters is unrealistic. Poole (2016) states,

“Is that happy ending utopist? Perhaps so, given our day and age, particularly considering Latino culture's still prevalent inclination toward homophobia, which Sáenz's novel reflects as well” (p. 126).

These struggles are especially apparent in Dante's character and will be discussed further later on. Most importantly, Poole (2016) emphasises on how rare LGBT+ Latinx stories are, and Alire Sáenz's work is “a remarkable exception” (p. 126) in that sense.

Mato writes about the historical authenticity of Alire Sáenz's novel and Queer Latinx futurity that is presented in the novel. Like Poole, Mato (2019) is also interested in the overlapping Latinx and queer identities and how it is presented in the novel (p. 30). Additionally, Mato (2019) looks into how sexuality is talked about in the novel from a contemporary perspective, rather than what would have been historically accurate for the 1980s (p. 30). Mato (2019) also refers to other LGBT+ YA novels to further emphasise the storytelling of queer characters through time (pp. 37-38). Mato (2019) summarises the story of two gay characters of the novel as hopeful (p. 51). While this statement is true in a sense, the novel ends with Ari and Dante getting together and being happy and free; the reader does not get to see the full “flourishment” of Ari and Dante, just a happy ending.

Clark and Blackburn's (2016) article investigates award-winning YA novels and how scenes of violence and sex are presented in those. The writers conduct a comparative study of these YA novels, *Aristotle and Dante...* being one of them. Clark and Blackburn (2016) conclude their study with advice to teachers about what LGBT+ novels to read at school (p. 884).

4. Meeting Ari Mendoza

As the novel is written from the first-person narrator perspective, the information about Ari that is presented is told through Ari's perspective. Persona in Jungian Psyche is described as

Reinforcing a purely external image of oneself is the "mask" known as the persona – the personality which, wittingly or unwittingly, one presents to the world. (Hart, 1997, p. 94)

In this chapter, Ari's character will be examined from persona's concept, theory that was presented Carl Jung and then applied into close reading by Brummett (2019), meaning what the character presents himself as well as what is learnt about the character through other characters. What does Ari share about himself as the truth? What is left unsaid? What is untrue? In addition to persona, representations of the shadow and the ego of Ari's character will also be explored through the events of the novel. Hart (1997) shares that Jung describes shadow as "that unwelcome side of our nature" (p. 92), and ego is according to Jung to which the true "I" is attached to (Young-Eisendrath and Dawson, 1997, p. 316).

Atkinson (1997) also writes that one can deny parts of oneself that are considered 'good', as it can threaten "the fragile, narrowly defined persona or ego", as the goodness can be repressed as well (p. 86). As will be explored, Alire Sáenz presents Ari to have challenges with accepting himself as a good person who does good deeds.

When the reader meets Ari, he is on a summer vacation from school. It is 1987, and according to Ari, "I was fifteen. I was bored. I was miserable" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 5). Ari also shares that he does not really have friends (p. 22) and at times, Ari says he likes being alone (p. 56). Despite being teased for his loneliness (p. 12), he still defends himself when he is confronted, sometimes by actions such as flipping his middle finger (p. 12) or by snarky comebacks. Ari presents himself as sad, moody, and lonely, even if he not necessarily might not be all those things. With the concept of persona, we can see what Ari presents as himself, but it is not all there is to it. According to Jacoby (1992), "One of the most important results of Jung's researches is the insight that the human soul strives toward totality; that is toward the realization of all its innate possibilities" (p. 66). With this in mind, it can be seen that in this novel, Ari wants to strive to be a person he wants to truly be, but is not sure who that would be.

The novel begins with Ari wanting to learn how to swim. He meets Dante at the public swimming pool, who promises to teach Ari how to swim (p. 17). Despite deciding that he likes to be alone and

has no friends, Ari accepts Dante's offer. This first meeting leads to a summer of spending time together, reading books and comics and having arguments about them (p. 19). Despite Ari describing himself as someone miserable who does not want friends, he seems to completely change when he meets Dante. Choosing an activity at a public place, and subsequently having a conversation with a stranger who becomes a friend already shows different side of Ari than who presents himself as in the novel from his perspective, considering he says he wants to be alone.

The author has chosen an interesting name to the character of Ari: Angel Aristotle "Ari" Mendoza (Ángel in Spanish) to say the least. Ari had not met anyone with a name with heavy importance like himself until he met Dante. They both laughed as they realised the similarities in their names (p. 18). Dante had been named after the author, as Dante's father is an English professor. Ari, however, is named after his grandfather, whose name was Aristotiles (p. 18), the Spanish variation of the name. Ari is well aware of being a namesake to one of the most influential philosophers of our time and he feels the pressure too, which the character will describe more as the narrative develops.

While Dante extensively describes how using the nickname Dan made him feel like a liar and inauthentic, Ari's explanation for the nickname is "Everyone calls me Ari" (p. 18). This exchange foreshadows early on how different Ari and Dante are despite the similarities and will further be shown in their friendship as well. Dante is said to enjoy poetry (p. 74), which could reflect on the author's choice of the character's name, while both Ari and Dante consistently wonder about big questions of life together could reflect on Ari's namesake.

Ari simultaneously says he likes being alone but also likes feeling sorry for himself for his loneliness; "Feeling sorry for myself was an art. I think a part of me liked doing that" (p. 13). Here the character combines his persona with his shadow: he presents himself as lonely which he hates to be at times and wants to hide being lonely, but also says he likes to feel that way. To Ari, sadness and loneliness were uncomfortable and enjoyable at the same time, or at least this is how he presents his persona as. As Ari is the narrator, it is not certain if he can be trusted to share the full story. This would mean that Ari's shadow and persona overlap; attributes that are seen as negative, Ari embraces in his persona. Ari has an interesting way of analysing how he feels about others around him and then looking into what he really, truly thinks. Instead of being friends with other boys, Ari says he studies them. He then concludes that he finds the boys around him boring and is even disgusted by them (p. 22). However, this conclusion may come from the character being presented as an outsider among his peers; the character sees it is preferable to pretend to like solitude instead of exploring why he is lonely. He then thinks maybe he sees himself as superior to other boys his age but then quickly redacts and says "Being around guys made me feel stupid and inadequate. It was like they were all a part of

this club and I wasn't a member" (p. 22). He questions his own masculinity and how he compares to others. While he does spend time with people from school occasionally, he does not feel like he belongs with them. But he still feels thankful that he is not bullied; "I guess I didn't have it so bad. Maybe everybody didn't love me, but I wasn't one of those kids everyone hated, either" (p. 23). He attributes him being a good fighter to being left alone. He concludes that he was mostly invisible to others, but he did not mind it; that is until he met Dante.

Ari returns to thoughts about his full name later on. He has decided that every other guy with the name Angel is horrible, therefore he did not want to be called by that name. He also did not like Aristotle either; though he was named after his grandfather, he felt the pressure of being named after the most famous philosopher in the world. He describes feeling like he also has to have something excellent to share as well (p. 83–84). That is why the character explains to go by his nickname; to be considered as his own entity.

To be named Angel, it is assumed that one is a heavenly being. Ari is a hero to Dante, like the name Angel would suggest. Ari's mother considers him Ari as a poet, "*hijo de mi vida*" (author's italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 69). Alire Sáenz also shares his views on Ari's name:

Ángel is an important name. Even though we know Ari as Ari, we know his real name. And he is a wounded angel. He doesn't recognize his own decency, and in his own mind he has fallen from grace. He is unaware of his own courage (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 261).

As Alire Sáenz explains above, the name Angel describes a part of Ari's personality as a wounded angel, without Ari himself realising it. This would mean that according to Ari, his name does not reflect how he presents himself, even if it seems to be the truth according to the author. This would mean that the persona that Ari has seemingly cultivated, goes against his ego; his ego, in this quotation, would be being a wounded angel, in which angel is considered the character's ego, and the wounds to be his shadow.

Ari's friendship with Dante changes Ari's personality from what he presents himself as. Ari can be sarcastic, straightforward, at times pessimistic but at the same time, a supportive friend with deep, philosophical thoughts, discussing topics that the character has not engaged in before, for example:

One afternoon, after we'd finished swimming, we were hanging out on his front porch. Dante was staring at his feet. That made me smile.

He wanted to know what I was smiling at. "I was just smiling," I said. "Can't a guy smile?"

"You're not telling me the truth," he said.

...

“Okay,” I said. “I was smiling because you were looking at your feet.”

“That’s a funny thing to smile about,” he said.

“It’s weird,” I said. “Who does that—look at their feet? Except you?”

“It’s not a bad thing to study your own body,” he said.

“That’s a really weird thing to say, too”, I said. In our house, we just didn’t talk about our own bodies. That’s just not what we did in our house. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 50–51)

Ari does not feel judged for sharing why he was smiling. While Ari’s character sees Dante’s behaviour as something unusual, Dante is ready to have a conversation about studying one’s body. By noting that Ari is not used to having these conversations at home, it shows that Dante’s character is there to help Ari expand his horizons. These conversations between the characters will be even further explored in the following chapters through the themes of heritage, sexuality and family.

Being a teenager, right in the middle of changes of puberty, Ari admits not knowing who he was; “I guess I was a mystery even to myself. That sucked” (p. 16). While Ari has established his persona in a certain way and his peers at school agreed with it, it seems that Ari is not set on those attributes after all. People from school have decided that Ari is certain type of way and at this point in life, Ari had embraced it. In addition, the same people made sure that Ari did not fit in with them, therefore it is no surprise that Ari feels out of place.

Over the course of the novel, Ari frequently compares himself to Dante, as to Ari, Dante seems to fit in everywhere while he does not; Ari thinks he is just an awkward person who everybody avoids. He vividly describes how being a teenager is affecting his mood and feelings. Ari himself seems to not realise that his confusion is due to his puberty, but rather thinks that this is his permanent state and Dante is at fault.

“Maybe it was because Dante seemed to make himself fit everywhere he went. And me, I always felt that I didn’t belong anywhere. I didn’t even belong in my own body—*especially* in my own body. I was changing into someone I didn’t know. The change hurt but I didn’t know why it hurt. And nothing about my own emotions made any sense.” (author’s italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 81)

But Ari knows that Dante also feels out of place, especially when it comes to their Mexican heritage, in which Ari is confident in. Ari’s view of Dante’s confidence and ‘fitting in’ is Ari’s personal

perspective, rather than objective information presented by a reliable narrator. And according to Dante, Ari has “this amazing life” (p. 87). Ari and Dante see each other’s lives as better than their own.

Ari’s previous loneliness before meeting Dante is a tricky subject to Ari’s loved ones. Ari’s mother slips up and tells Ari, “You don’t have any friends” (p. 69) which she seems to regret it immediately. In the heat of the moment, Ari scrambles up different defences in order to dispute his mother’s words; he says he does not want friends, he has friends at school, he has Dante. While Ari has insisted that he is lonely, he does not want to upset his mother by portraying this persona to her. But this comment lingers on the back of Ari’s mind. The character concludes that his own mother sees him as lonely, then that must be it (p. 81).

Even though Ari does not know who he is and being confused takes up a lot of his mental capacity, he is still certain that he wants to figure it out on his own, not have anyone else influence his self-discovery. He thinks to himself, “I didn’t think it was my job to accept what everyone said I was and who I should be” (p. 92), even though he may have accepted others’ view of him as sad and lonely. He continues, “Yeah, everyone had suggestions as to what was wrong with me and what I should become” (p. 92). Here, the character suggests that the persona he presents to his family is not enough for them. He felt this pressure especially from his older sisters, because his only brother was in prison and Ari felt that his sisters view him as the same.

4.1 “Just don’t cry, okay?”; Ari after the car accident

A significant turn in the plot is when Ari gets severely hurt in a car accident. His legs and left arm are in casts; Ari is hurting all over (p. 112). Ari and Dante were outside in pouring rain and Dante told Ari that he is moving to Chicago for the next school year. The two then saw a hurt bird walking and decided to save it. Dante walked to the street to gather the bird when a car drove and swerved. Ari had pushed Dante away from in front of a car and got hit instead (p. 17).

The accident shows how important Dante is to Ari. As Ari was shuffled to his room after his surgery, he had asked for Dante (p. 114) but he did not remember this happening. After Ari wakes up and has an initial reaction to pain, Ari’s first worry is where Dante is. Ari is relieved to learn that Dante is a little bruised but otherwise fine, just worried for Ari (p. 113).

When considering his first name Angel, he did as an angel is thought to do; save and help others. To Dante, his family and Ari's parents, Ari is a hero who saved Dante's life. But Ari does not want to be celebrated as a hero; to him, he did nothing:

“You saved my life, Ari.”

“Dante's hero. Just what I always wanted to be.”

“Don't do that, Ari. Don't make fun. You almost got yourself killed.”

“I didn't do it on purpose.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 116)

Ari does not want people around him to feel sad as he tells Dante, “My mom's been crying, and now you're crying—and even Dad looks like he wants to cry. Rules. I have rules. No crying” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 116). This way, the character wants to control the portrayal of the emotions of the others around him, as he claims that this type of appreciation makes him feel uncomfortable. This desire to control other characters' emotions show that Ari struggles with the idea that he helped someone, that he saved Dante, as it is not how Ari presents his personality to be. It does not go with the persona he represents himself as; it is a misperception of his self. When the doctor brings up Ari's heroism, Ari finally shares his perspective on the situation:

I told Dante I didn't do it on purpose. Everyone thought that was funny. It wasn't a joke. I don't even remember diving toward him. It wasn't as if I said to myself, *I'm going save my friend, Dante*. It wasn't like that. It was just a reflex, you know, like when someone hits your funny bone below the knee. Your leg just jerks. That how it was. It just happened. (author's italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 121–122).

Here, Ari suggests that only a person's real self is when he acts consciously. Because Ari represents his actions to save Dante as a reflex, he is presented to reject this aspect of the character's identity; a person who cares for others.

According to Atkinson (1992), Jung has stated that one can deny parts of oneself that are considered good (p. 86). Here, as Ari continues to deny his kind intentions, it is show that Ari cannot accept himself being seen as a good person. The doctor still questions Ari's perspective on the accident and eventually gives up as Ari insists he did nothing special. Through the character of doctor it is shown that Ari may not be telling the truth of why he saved Dante and how the character felt about it, as the doctor does not seem to believe Ari's explanation. At first, Ari had to pretend to accept this appreciation from his loved ones, as opposed to telling a stranger that he did not agree with it. Helping someone he cares about goes against the persona the character presents; Ari is supposed to not care

about others, he is supposed to be lonely. However, Ari allows Dante's father Sam to thank him for saving his son (p. 123). He explains that his reaction to this as he likes Dante, Dante's father is important to Dante therefore it is acceptable.

The accident also reveals new information about Dante, as his father notes that he thinks Dante does not have friends which is a similarity between the characters (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 124). Ari does not seem to believe them as everyone seems to like Dante. While Dante's parents agree, they share that he does not have friends and they are very grateful for Ari being his best friend. Because Ari seems to not be able to receive compliments and gratitude as he reacts to himself "I didn't want to know that" (p. 124). But he does not know why he does not what to know it. As discussed before, the character has been presented as lonely most of the time prior to meeting Dante, it is hard for him to accept kindness from others. Self-loathing seems to be a defence mechanism to Ari as he does not know how to receive the love he rightfully deserves, as he reacts to Dante's parents' gratitude with dismissing himself as boring and not understanding why Dante is friends with him (p. 125). They are puzzled by this answer, and Ari wishes he had not said it. This further shows that the character is written to understand, that other characters disagree with his self-loathing attitude but does not change his ways at this point of the novel. The persona that the character Ari presents depends on clinging into the idea of insecurity.

As Dante's parents leave Ari to recover from his surgery, they show their gratitude and Ari cannot stand it. Dante's mother, in particular, shows her gratitude by saying "Aristotle Mendoza, I will love you forever" (p. 126) for saving his son. Ari understood from Chloe's character that she does not use the word love often so she is serious. Ari concludes this confession to Chloe loving her son, Dante over anything; so much so that she will appreciate Ari saving her son's life, even though Ari thinks he does not deserve it.

The stubbornness of the character is shown through how he wants to control others when discussing the fact that he helped Dante. In order to control how Dante talks about the accident, Ari creates other rules for Dante to follow; they will never speak of the accident again, Dante should stop thanking him and blaming himself and both of them should move on (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 128-129). Ari does not want to be reminded of the accident by Dante because Ari's physical state already reminds him of what happened. "I hated all that gratitude" (p. 132), Ari thinks after spending time with Dante.

For a few months, Ari is not able to walk as he used to. Being bound to bed rest is agonizing and additionally, Dante is leaving for Chicago. Ari does not like how everyone around him is sad and worried for him all the time.

I hated living in the small and claustrophobic atmosphere of my house. It didn't feel like home anymore. I felt like an unwanted guest. I hated being waited on all the time. I hated that my parents were so patient with me. I did. That's the truth. They didn't do anything wrong. They were just trying to help me. But I hated them. And I hated Dante too.

And I hated myself for hating them. So there it was, my own vicious cycle. My own private universe of hate. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 147).

By acknowledging that he does not want to be hateful towards his loved ones, he is shown to no longer want to be lonely and miserable as he used to be. The character here is shown to recognize his own shadow, by describing that he does not want to be hateful, he does not want it to be his persona or ego. He got used to being lonely and miserable so that when he gets the taste of friendship and spending time with someone outside his family, it is overwhelming when he loses it for a moment. But he does not know how to feel better, how to not be hateful.

Ari's mother usually bathes him after the accident, but on one occasion, Dante is the one to help Ari out. This causes feeling of discomfort in Ari because he is not used to Dante touching him, or anyone for that matter. Ari uses terms such as "softer", "slow, methodical, careful" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 144) to describe Dante washing him. Ari 'wakes up' from the bath and reacts strongly as he realises that Dante was again feeling apologetic over the accident, which Ari had told him not to do;

When he was done, I opened my eyes. Tears were falling down his face. I should have expected that. I wanted to yell at him. I wanted to tell him that it was me who should be crying.

Dante had this look on his face. He looked like an angel. And all I wanted to do was put my first through is jaw. I couldn't stand my own cruelty. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 144).

Here is one again apparent how uncomfortable it made Ari feel to be attended to lovingly, others caring about him as he was not used to it. Feeling appreciated goes against the persona Ari is presented with, as he has decided that he is a lonely person whom nobody truly cares about. Here, Dante caring about Dante is presented to feel painful to Ari as it contradicts with his persona, being that he describes himself as lonely, but others caring about him would argue otherwise. By imagining the acts of violence in his mind, he recognises his shadow and immediately follows those with acknowledging that he does not like thinking that way. Clark and Blackburn (2016) state that this discomfort and violent imagery is due to Ari's internalized homophobia (p. 874). In their article, they had removed Ari's perspective of Dante looking like an angel, which is a loving thought, and merely focused on Ari's violent reaction in his mind. This is faulty because it ignores and reduces the issues

Ari has always had with loneliness as discussed before to “internalized homophobia”, when it is more complex, as it has been discussed in this chapter. As mentioned before, Ari explains that he does not feel like he fits in with his peers, that he feels stupid and inadequate compared to them (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 22) but does not explore further why it is so. Since he is presented with kindness and intimacy, to which he is not used to, he feels uncomfortable due to that constant loneliness of his life. Internalized homophobia could be a part of it, but not the complete reason for it.

The anger and frustration with his situation is presented to be never-ending from Ari’s perspective. He feels that his shadow has taken over his life due to the accident; he is not only in physical pain, but also has the mental ramifications of the accident as well. The pain feels endless until it is not. He heals slowly, and every small victory makes Ari “almost happy” (p. 147). Even he was surprised by this as he was so used to the miserable state of not being able to walk. Ari uses a journal to make lists of what is happening in his life and what he should do. This is a way for him to keep his life organized and find a coping mechanism while he recovers. Even though his journaling style is mostly listing activities to do (physical therapy, school starting), he also writes about his dreams; being able to walk, having a dog, driving to a desert, knowing about his brother (p. 149). Ari is actively finding things to look forward to, which is something he had not really done before the accident. Maybe he is not as miserable as he presents of himself as.

But he also shares his worries: “*Somehow I’d hoped that this would be the summer that I would discover that I was alive. The world mom and dad said was out there waiting for me. That world doesn’t actually exist*” (author’s italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 149–150). In this case, Ari cannot be trusted as a narrator. While he may not think that he was “living”, the character was shown to enjoy himself during the summer as he got to know and spend time with Dante. Through Ari’s joyful memories of the summer with Dante, the reader is given a glimpse of Ari’s ego. But in this diary entry, he denies having those moments, meaning that his shadow has taken over his happy memories. He is not used to having a friend and not being alone, so being in denial is a way to cope with this new phenomenon in his life.

All of Ari’s emotions are presented as unbearable to him, his shadow is presented as too heavy for him. Dante leaving causes another heartbreak to Ari; “I felt like I was the saddest boy in the universe. Summer had come and gone. Summer had come and gone. And the world was ending” (p. 154). The world clearly was not ending, but Ari’s life was changing. This thinking, however, strengthens the persona that Ari presents himself as lonely and sad. The author emphasising that summer was over with repetition, the character himself decides that this means that Ari is miserable again. While Dante and Ari will write letters and talk on the phone, it is not the same for Ari. Ari does not write back to

Dante as often as Dante writes him. Ari goes back to school, and other students do not believe his story about the accident (p. 158).

Ari's casts are removed and he can walk once again (p. 188). He creates a daily routine (p. 195–196) for himself in order to be distracted from loneliness and sadness. One could see that he is trying to make effort to have an enjoyable life despite missing Dante (which Ari would never admit to himself). This would contradict with the persona Ari presents, as the character here is trying to find ways to feel better, something that the character himself would not admit to actively doing.

Long after he recovers from the accident, Ari thinks back to it. His scars stay and remind him of the accident and of getting better;

I sat up on my bed and ran my fingers over the scars on my legs. Scars. A sign that you had been hurt. A sign that you had healed.

Had I been hurt?

Had I healed?

Maybe we just lived between hurting and healing (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 334).

The miserable state he was in after the accident, which he thought would last forever, did not after all. Ari has learnt that in order to feel happy, one has to feel sadness, his shadow as well. But as of now, he is no longer the saddest boy in the world, as he once described himself.

4.2 “A boy who went crazy”, seeking revenge on behalf of Dante

Dante comes back to El Paso, Texas, and Ari and Dante are happily reunited. Sadly, Dante becomes a victim of a homophobic attack and ends up hospitalized. Ari is not satisfied with just trying to cheer up Dante, he wants the people who hurt Dante, hurt too. This is when the reader meets a different side of Ari, which Brummett (2019) refers as “The personae may be disturbing or challenging departures from recurring, formal patterns” (p. 19). This is also what in Jungian theory is described as the shadow, which are the aspects of identity that ego wants ignore and hide (Sugg, 1992, p. 424). However, when Ari seeks revenge for Dante, the shadow becomes apparent, rather than hidden. The reader might have expected Ari to continue to present himself as a calm and quiet person, but he acts completely opposite;

I didn't know that I was going to do the things I did. It wasn't like I had a plan. It wasn't like I was really thinking. Sometimes, you do things and you do them not because you're thinking but because you're feeling. Because you're feeling too much. And you can't always control the things you do when you're feeling too much. Maybe the difference between being a boy and being a man is that boys couldn't control the awful things they sometimes felt. That afternoon, I was just a boy. Not even close to being a man.

I was a boy. A boy who went crazy. Crazy, crazy. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 312).

Just as when Ari saved Dante's life by pushing him away from the front of the moving car, Ari does not know how to explain his behaviour this time around either. Ari is presented not wanting to acknowledge parts of himself that indicate he cares for Dante. Here he does not assign it due to an impulse behaviour, but rather his feelings. He does not disclose what his feelings are; are they of anger? Love? Wanting to protect Dante? All Ari can say is that he feels too much and does not feel in control of those feelings. With the emphasis on the word *crazy*, Ari further shows confusion of his actions and feelings. The author describing Ari's actions as "going crazy", the character distances his actions from his conscious. "Going crazy" is a part of shadow, rather than persona, as the character is described that seeking revenge was due to a different mindset he is in.

The shadow is also projected onto other people as well; behaviours that are seen as shameful in other people besides oneself can be regarded as one's own shadow (Hart, 1997, p. 92). With this in mind, Ari's seeking for revenge and being violent towards homophobic people could have been due to the character seeing a possibility to let out his anger physically, just as the other characters had. Ari was angry that they had been violent towards Dante, so he chose to be violent himself. But Ari himself presents not knowing why he did so. Ari's anger towards his life is often presented in the novel, but it had stayed just as his thoughts until now. While the reader may have been used to Ari's thoughts, Ari's violent behaviour integrates the shadow into his persona.

Ari first confronted Daniel, the boy Dante was seen kissing. He is not happy with Daniel running away and leaving Dante alone; he does not feel any empathy or remorse for Daniel who was not physically attacked but must have been intimidated as well; "You bastard. Don't you feel anything?", "Don't screw with me, asshole" (p. 311). Ari demands to know from Daniel who hurt Dante and after finding you, he shoved Daniel (p. 312).

After a visit to Daniel, Ari seeks out Julian, one of the attackers. Ari drags him out of work to get his revenge. Ari was so blinded by hate and revenge that he does not even remember everything he did;

He took a swing at me. That was all I needed. I just went to it. His nose was bleeding. That didn't stop me. It didn't take long before he was on the ground. I was saying things to him, cussing at him. Everything was a blur and I just kept going at him (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 315).

He only stopped hurting Julian after Julian's father grabs him. In this attack he did not think, feel anything, just purely acted on the adrenaline of seeking revenge. Julian threatens Ari afterwards, but Ari is not fazed. Julian's father notes to Ari, "You're lucky I don't call the cops", to which Ari responds with "Go ahead and call them. I don't give a damn. But before you call them, you better ask Julian what he's been up to" (p. 315). With this, Ari justifies his behaviour and refers that Julian is not innocent.

Ari slowly realises what he had done and starts to tremble. He explains to his parents, "I wanted to hurt him" (p. 317), to which Ari's mother instantly reacts with "Your brother hurt someone once" (p. 317). Ari lives in the shadow of his brother and his mistakes are seen as the same trait as his brother. He finally tells his parents how it makes him feel;

"I'm not my brother", I said. "I hate that you think that. I hate that I live in his f-" I stopped myself from using that word in front of my mother. "I hate that I live in his shadow. I hate it. I hate having to be a good boy just to please you." (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 318)

Ari's parents do not understand where the violence was coming from because they did not know that it was Julian who hurt Dante and it was because he was kissing another boy (p. 318). He explains what happened. And it is there, as Ari explains to his parents, he realises what he was feeling: anger. Earlier, Ari did not regret his behaviour but now admits that he feels ashamed for wanting to hurt them (p. 319), meaning that he did not behave this way because of his brother, but because he was angry for Dante and wanted his attackers to go through what Dante did; an eye for an eye, so to speak.

The author reinforces Ari's view of himself by having Ari say "I'm not an angel, Mom. And I'm not a saint. I'm just Ari. I'm just screwed up Ari". To counter this statement, his mother disputes this by calling him "sweet, good and decent", words that Ari has never used to describe himself. As he comes out of his revenge-seeking state, Ari admits that hurting Julian was "not very nice" (p. 320). Later on, he comes clean to Dante's parents as well, "It was wrong. I know it was wrong. I just did it. I can't explain it" (p. 327). When it comes to Dante, saving him, helping him, Ari seems to not understand why he feels the way he does and what makes him act this way. At least he thinks he does not know why, or he is too afraid to admit it to himself. It is only when Ari's father notes that Ari is also in love with Dante (p. 348), that it clicks for Ari; it makes sense why he saved Dante, why he had to beat up people for Dante.

After Dante gets out of the hospital, Dante and Ari discuss Ari's brother and then steer the conversation to Ari's actions.

"You look like you're going to cry."

"I'm not. It's just too sad, Dante. And you know what? I'm like him [Ari's brother], I think."

"Why? Because you broke Julian Enriquez's nose?"

"You know?"

"Yeah."

"Why didn't you tell me you knew?"

"Why didn't *you* tell *me*, Ari?"

"I'm not proud of myself, Dante."

"Why'd you do it?"

"I don't know. He hurt you. I wanted to hurt him back. I did a stupid kind of math in my head." (authors italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 333)

Because Dante is not happy with Ari's actions, Ari takes accountability to show that he knows he should have not done what he did. Just like before, Dante comments "Maybe you just like to fight, Ari" (p. 334), which Dante said once before in the novel. "Maybe", Ari responds (p. 334), as he does not know how to react to this attribute of his. His persona is different to what he had imagined it to be; instead of Ari only being angry in his mind, the author also manifests the anger in physical violence as well. Ari is happy when Dante decides to not be with Daniel anymore (p. 352). Ari attributes his happiness over Dante's decision to the fact that Daniel left him alone, but it is clear he is happy because Ari has feelings for Dante.

4.3 A happily ever after for Ari?

"What do you love, Ari? What do you really love?"

"I love the desert. God, I love the desert."

"It's so lonely."

"Is it?"

Dante didn't understand. I *was* unknowable. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 337)

The desert is presented as Ari's safe space, where he drives his truck to look at the stars. Ari sees the desert as infinite and quiet and realises he is like that as well, meaning that he connects the desert to his ego. The location of the desert by the U.S.-Mexico border hints the complexity of his Americanness and Mexican heritage. This used to be a sad, negative feeling for Ari but now it is more so solemn, calming.

When Ari realises his feelings for Dante, he no longer feels as moody, lonely and lost as he had throughout the novel. He allows himself to be truly himself and that is a person who is in love with Dante. Realising his feelings and acting on them changed Ari: "I was free. Imagine that. Aristotle Mendoza, a free man. I wasn't afraid anymore" (p. 359). This would present that the character is now letting his internal world be connected to his external world, as the ego is described as (Young-Eisendrath, Dawson, 1997, p. 316). It also shows that Ari acknowledges his shadow, as he describes himself as free.

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the novel presents the story of Ari trying to find himself. Even though it is presented that he reached a place of satisfaction, as Jacoby (1992) says, reaching a "realization of all its [human soul's] innate possibilities", is "a goal that we can never quite reach" (p. 66). While Ari is presented as happy in the end of the novel, it is not the whole truth, especially considering the sequel.

5. Ari's Mexican Heritage

In this novel, being Mexican American is presented as a fundamental part of Ari's identity; being Mexican is a part of Ari's persona and ego. His family is presented proudly Mexican American and showcase that in their home in different ways, such as by making Mexican food and listening to Mexican American music such as Carlos Santana (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 9) and the song La Bamba (p. 215). This behaviour is what Galal (2012) considers as "socialization of the family finds habitual, language-based, inherited dispositions for solidarity and loyalty toward one's ethnic group". But Ari's character is also shown to have had his doubts about his heritage and questions about what it means to be Mexican in the United States.

Entman (2001) argues that part of representation is framing, which is the "process of selecting, highlighting, suppressing, it is the means through which most media representation takes place" (p. 740). This chapter will showcase different ways the author represents Mexican heritage through the characters of the novel with the concept of framing.

As the story takes place in 1987, attitudes towards Mexican American people were presented mostly as negative in media. In popular culture, they were often ridiculed and were mocked for their language and appearance (CBS Evening News, 1980, 00:55-01:01). El Paso, where the novel takes place, did not avoid this discrimination. Author López-Stafford (1996) shares her own experience of discrimination in El Paso; in school, a child yelled out "Texas is for Texans" (p. 4) which left the author as a child stunned. While Ari does not share all the animosity he may have faced, or may have not experienced any at all, it does not mean El Paso is an accepting place for Mexican American people just because its' population is mostly Mexican.

This chapter will include an introduction to Mexican American in the United States in general and then dive into the representation of this cultural context in relation to Ari, his parents and Dante and how they view their heritage and ultimately, how people around him impact his heritage in different ways as well; he has many conversations with his parents and Dante. Additionally, Dante's parents and people in El Paso also have their own perspectives of what being Mexican really means. The novel portrays how Ari attempts to come into terms with his own Mexican heritage while also discussing what it means to be Mexican generally.

5.1 Mexican American People, Culture and History

There is no one way to describe a Mexican American person. Many Mexican American people hold various ethnic backgrounds in their family history. Due to colonialism and slavery, many Mexicans are a mixture of Hispanic, African and Indigenous heritage as are, of course, Mexican Americans (Samora, 2019, p. 8). However, this is not the definitive for all Mexican Americans; Some may be of only Indigenous heritage (those who are usually identify as Indigenous connect to their tribe rather than being Mexican as they were there before Mexico existed), some only Hispanic, while some may be of African descent and identify with that background. Much of Mexican culture and tradition is also a mixture of all these different backgrounds. This also means that skin colour cannot be direct indication of being Mexican either; for the main characters of Alire Sáenz novel, according to the author himself, he has visioned Ari to have a darker skin tone while Dante has a fairer skin tone (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 263) and both are of Mexican background.

Mexican American people are located all over the United States, but the largest concentrations are in California and Texas due to those states being in close proximity to Mexico and former Mexican territories (Samora, 2019, p. 13). It was estimated that in 2017 around 36.6 million Mexican Americans live in the United States (Noe-Bustamante, Flores, Shah). Many of Mexican Americans are Catholic (Samora, 2019, p. 223). According to Samora (2019), Mexican American Catholicism differs from other forms of the denominations of it; the Mexican American/Latino Catholicism was seen as a problem towards American Catholicism, but now is seen as “unique pastoral opportunity” (p. 223), meaning that Latino Catholicism is appreciated, not seen as an issue.

The Spanish language is an important aspect of the Mexican American heritage and culture. Although The United States has no official language, English is the most spoken language. According to Samora (2019), speaking Spanish is something that for a long time Mexican Americans were really proud of, specifically talking about Mexicans in an Industrial age (p. 151), this pride of keeping their own language is still evident. Different organizations and community efforts have been created in order to honor and celebrate Mexican Americans’ heritage and culture.

Alire Sáenz sees it as crucial to represent various portrayals of Mexican American people in his novel. The author exhibits the struggles that Mexican American people go through in order to seem American enough to their fellow Americans but also Mexican enough to their Mexican counterparts. The author wants to show that there are many ways to be Mexican and not just the stereotypical way, even if those stereotypical aspects are present:

“Too many people, who should know better, have a very particular view of what it means to be Mexican American. We often contribute to this stereotypical view ourselves when we begin (perhaps unconsciously) performing our own ethnicity. Tamales, tortillas, tacos, mariachis: the works. (I love all of those things, by the way.)” (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 263)

Therefore, both Ari and Dante’s experience in their Mexican heritage that are represented in this novel are valid for what some Mexican American people experience. They all, in their own way, battle with being Mexican and American, what it means to be in the United States while originating from another country. As Entman (2001) argues, “No representation is completely accurate. All media representations inevitably omit some aspects of the item represented” (p. 738). There is no one way to be Mexican and there is no singular way to represent one people group.

The location of El Paso by the U.S.-Mexico border is key to the story of the novel. It is truly Mexican and U.S.-American at the same time; according to Alire Sáenz, is a city that is close to its sister Ciudad Juárez and the elements of Mexico and the U.S. are present in the streets of El Paso; “I love this place, because it reminds me that the U.S. and México cannot divorce each other” (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 266). Alire Sáenz’s comments show that the location of El Paso is important to the plot of the novel.

5.2 The representation of Mexican heritage in the character of Ari

Mexican heritage is presented as a fundamental part of Ari’s identity, ego and persona in this novel, whilst also acknowledging that there are aspects that are not clear to him. While Ari presents himself confident in his heritage at the time of the novel, there are times of confusion and questions as well as security in his development.

In a diary entry from the year before, Ari shared that he had had worries about looking and being American enough:

“The only thing I was worried about was trying to speak perfect English. I made up my mind that year—when I was ten—that I wasn’t going to sound like another Mexican. I was going to be an American. And when I talked I was going to sound like one” (author’s italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 94).

Here, the author depicts Ari equating American English and lack of accent being more American, using the act of framing, which Entman (2001, p. 739) shared, to highlight the importance of language

(English) in order to fit in within The United States. To note that the character was ten years old when he had decided to change his accent, shows that it had been a worry in his early childhood, prior to his teenage years as well. Language and accent are something often used to identify a person as a member of a group, and as mentioned previously, some Latinos in the United States were ridiculed for their accent and lack of knowledge of English. By sharing this anecdote from Ari, the author shows that the character has internalized the idea of lack of accent and ‘better’ English would make him more American.

Within the same diary entry, Ari also states “*So what if I don’t look exactly like an American. What does an American look like, anyway?*” (author’s italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 95). Here, the author shows the conflict of the character wanting to look a certain way whilst not knowing what that certain way would be and equating appearance to being American. However, the character makes the conclusion that he does not look American because he has more hair around his body (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 95) and according to Alire Sáenz’s comments in an interview, Ari’s character has a darker complexion (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 263). The character’s questioning of American appearance also shows a certain type of carelessness on the topic; if the character was truly worried about how he could look more American, perhaps they would have considered those attributes within the diary entry.

The author presents Ari going through puberty and what it is like to have the changes others do, but still differing from others because of the character’s Mexican heritage (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 95). Ari is only a year or so younger when he wrote this diary entry, yet it seems that while he had all these worries about fitting in and being American, he seems to not struggle with it any longer. The current Ari presented in the novel is shown to feel embarrassed by his thoughts. In fact, he often makes comments about feeling secure in his Mexican heritage and additionally defends it when it is questioned, meaning that his Mexican heritage is a part of his persona and ego. The novel presents Ari is embarrassed by his younger self, even calls himself “a *pendejo*” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 95), meaning stupid. Codeswitching between Spanish and English shows that Ari is comfortable in using both languages and both are important to his identity.

The author does not explore Ari’s insecurity and desires to be American further elsewhere in the novel as Ari’s anecdotes on the topic are only present in the diary entry. Supposedly, the author decided to share this diary entry as to show that even though Ari’s character at fifteen no longer has a conflict within himself about his Mexican and American parts of his identity, it is still something that the character has struggled with in his past. Perhaps as proof of Ari’s strong connection to his heritage now, the struggle is not present in the same way as it used to be.

Ari attributes his moody personality to him being Mexican; “Mexicans are a tragic people” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 20). He uses this quality to contradict his personality from Dante, who according to Ari is “An optimistic American” (p. 20), even if Ari says so in a joking manner. By attributing his character to him being Mexican, Ari offers an explanation to his behaviour and personality. Here, the author has used the process of framing by selecting the attribute of being tragic for Mexican people. The author presents Ari as a confused teenager, therefore any answer to his moodiness is welcome to him. However, Ari does not present this thought in a serious way as he and Dante laugh afterwards.

In this novel, insulting comments about ethnicity and heritage come from Ari’s Mexican American peers. Ari gets visited by Charlie Escobedo, a fellow Mexican American teenager from Ari’s high school. In their conversation, Ari gets the feeling that Charlie questions Ari’s identity as a real Mexican American. When Charlie suggests doing drugs to Ari and he refuses, Charlie is infuriated; Ari recalls Charlie saying, “that nobody liked me because I thought of myself as Mr. *Gabacho*” (author’s italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 205) and other insulting names. These insults refer to a person who is a foreigner in the context of being Mexican, even though Ari is not a foreigner and does not see himself as one, and this connection to his heritage seemingly annoys Charlie. Charlie saying that nobody likes Ari shows that Charlie may have discussed Ari with their peers. Charlie even threatens to kick Ari all the way to the border. This mockery annoys Ari as he feels his heritage is being questioned over him not wanting to do drugs; “I hated that. I was as Mexican as he was” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 205). It is a common stereotype, especially in the United States, that all Mexicans do drugs and are criminals. and this leads to harmful treatment. In this scene, Alire Sáenz shows that while there are individuals of Mexican heritage that these stereotypes apply to, as Charlie’s character would suggest, obviously not all of them are the same.

Interestingly enough, Ari thinks to himself “—I was really curious about the heroin thing, but you know, I just wasn’t ready” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 206). This was before Dante and Ari had tried marijuana together. This implies that Ari as a person would be interested in trying drugs, but it is not because of his Mexican background, unlike how Charlie’s perspective is represented.

A lot of Ari’s connection to his heritage is thanks to his parents keeping up the Mexican tradition alive in their household. Ari’s parents speak Spanish at home (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 9, 43), Ari speaks Spanish and often codeswitches between Spanish and English. Due to having an older brother in prison, he feels like he is the only son in the family; “And I felt the weight of a son in a Mexican family. Even though I didn’t want it” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 93). Ari feels like he must be the ‘man of the family’, in addition to his father, due to their Mexican heritage.

5.3 Dante and Ari's conversations about heritage

Every person experiences their background differently from others. Societal background, occupation, educational background all impact how one views their heritage, as Galal says:

The individual might simultaneously belong to different communities within the receiving country and to different nations, and take part in cross-border practices. Thus, the significance of ethnicity becomes positioned, situational, and contextual, on the one hand, and an expression of hybridity, syncretism, and mixture, on the other (2012).

As Dante is presented someone with a different, more insecure perspective to heritage compared to Ari due to his parents' educational background and prestigious occupations, Dante seeks out for answers from Ari when it comes to their Mexican heritage. Many of Dante's questions and comments to Ari are formed in generalizing, stereotypical ways; why do Mexicans have nicknames, Mexicans are supposed to be poor, not highly educated like his parents (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 38, 87).

Ari sees it clearly that Dante has issues with his heritage, "It bothers you that you're Mexican, doesn't it?" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 39), which would mean that Dante's Mexican heritage is Dante's shadow. Although Dante refuses at first, he admits his complicated feelings towards being Mexican. This leads to Dante asking Ari questions about what qualifies a person as Mexican; "We're not really Mexicans. Do we live in Mexico?" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 44). Here, the author has chosen the selection of location to represent Mexican heritage, which Entman (2001) says to be part of framing (p. 739). This question is interesting as El Paso is located near Mexico and is mostly populated by Mexican Americans; it is only the border that divides them from the country. However, Ari responds to Dante's question by saying that they are Mexican because their grandparents are from there which is common for many Mexican immigrants. Throughout the story Dante comments that Ari is a real Mexican while Dante does not consider himself one. Even the choice of Ari's truck makes Ari more Mexican than Dante (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 245). These conversations about authentic heritage occur throughout the novel, as it is something that Dante struggles with, and it only becomes even more of a significant issue when Dante comes to terms with being gay.

Dante's issues of heritage seem to stem from his parents' choices of education and occupation;

"It's like my mom and dad created a whole new world for themselves. I live in their new world. But they understand the old world, the world they came from—and I don't. I don't belong anywhere" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 88).

Ari tries to dispute Dante's view by saying he belongs everywhere (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p.88), which seems to suggest Ari's insecurity when he is comparing himself to Dante.

According to Dante, his parents exchanged their Mexican heritage to their occupation; his mother Chloe (Soledad) "turned herself" unto a psychologist, and his dad Sam "turned himself" into an English professor (p. 87). pursued higher education even though her family did not agree with her to do so (p. 88). To Dante, this means that his parents gave up their Mexican heritage by having professions that were seen as unexpected to someone of Mexican heritage, and this automatically means that Dante is not Mexican either. Ari and Dante have both internalized views on what a Mexican person should be, what they should have as an occupation. Ari also notes that Dante's father's occupation is unusual for a Mexican person: "I'd never met a Mexican-American man who was an English professor. I didn't know they existed" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 24). These perceptions seem to reflect the notion that when one has internalized the idea of not being able to achieve certain things because their background, anything outside of the "norm" is not realistic.

Dante's character's personality and his quirks also become a discussion regarding Mexican heritage. As Dante does not like to wear shoes which his mother sees as an issue and even connects it to their Mexican heritage why not wearing shoes is problematic:

"I don't like them. That's it. That's all. There's not big secret here. I was born not liking them. There's nothing complicated about the whole thing. Well, except there's this thing called my mom. And she makes me wear them. She says there are laws. And then she talks about the diseases I could get. And then she says. People will think I'm just another poor Mexican. She says there are boys in Mexican villages who would die for a pair of shoes" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 45).

Alire Sáenz himself has shared his opinion on the matter;

Yes, there are many working poor Mexican Americans in this country. But there are millions of us who are educated and have integrated into American society. In creating Ari and Dante's parents, I wanted to represent a more realistic view of who we are (and not who outsiders think we are). (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 268)

While Chloe does not directly say that all Mexicans are poor, by making such comments over wearing shoes initiates that she does not want to be seen as a stereotypical Mexican. She wants to make sure she is seen as different from other Mexicans for her education and wealth. But, to Dante, it is not about being poor and being Mexican; he just does not like shoes.

Even though Dante insists that his parents are no longer Mexican, the author shows through conversations between Dante's parents that these characters do not agree with Dante's perspective. For example, Sam Quintana states "I'm Mexican, he said. I know all about hotwiring", in a casual conversation (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 279), showing that Mexican heritage is a part of the character's daily life. In this sentence, Sam's character equates being Mexican to a certain type of behaviour, while Dante equates lack of education to being Mexican. The author presents Ari's mother Lily as a highly educated person, which would contradict Dante's perspective on his own parents' portrayal of their Mexican heritage.

Language is also represented as an important part of Mexican heritage in this novel. Unlike Ari, Dante is not fluent in Spanish, which frustrates Dante (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 45), as according to him, it makes him even less Mexican. Ari has a solution for Dante, again; one can learn Spanish in school. To Dante, knowing the language and learning it at home rather than in school is a sign of authenticity (p. 87). As mentioned above, the Mexican American community are especially proud of having preserved Spanish as their language, so Dante's insecurity about not knowing the language is understandable. Ari teases Dante by calling him "a *pochó*" (authors italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 45), meaning "a half-assed Mexican". Dante admits to maybe being "a *pochó*" and suggests they should adopt another culture. This makes Ari laugh (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 45) but he changes the subject so that Dante will not continue disregarding his own heritage.

Though Dante is temporarily in a non-Mexican majority environment in Chicago, the question of identity remains. When Dante and his parents move to Chicago for nine months, Dante's struggles with identity come with him. According to Dante, there are Mexican Americans in Chicago as well because "Mexicans are everywhere. We're like sparrows" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 172). This slip to use the pronoun we while talking about being Mexican feels inauthentic to Dante so he instantly goes back to his usual questioning of his Mexican identity. He turns to Ari, once again to ask "what" he is (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 172). Ari does not answer to this letter, leaving Dante alone with his thoughts and worries.

When Dante returns to El Paso, he is certain about his identity; "Nah, I'll never be Mexican" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 245). He has decided that he is not, and will never be Mexican, even if factually it is his heritage. While this comment appears in the context of Ari having a specific truck that Dante does not, it goes deeper than that. The author tries to represent the intersectionality of being gay and Mexican and the internal issues that come with it through Dante; Dante had discovered that he likes boys, and subsequently he thinks this means he cannot be a real Mexican. Ari, once again, tries to reassure him; "I don't think liking boys is an American invention" (p. 273). Here Ari challenges the

idea that being gay is only allowed within white people, as white people have often been the face of the community, especially in the 1980s. Dante admits that Ari could be right. When Sam and Chloe share to Dante that they are expecting a baby, Dante is hopeful; maybe the child could be the Mexican, straight child that he could not be in his opinion (p. 252). While Dante agrees that possibly being gay and Mexican can be acceptable, Dante does not see himself as such. He would rather make sure his unborn sibling would be the societal expectation.

Being Mexican is important to Ari's persona and he wants Dante to feel Mexican like he does; "Why did it matter so much to him? But it mattered to me too" (p. 245). While it may be frustrating to go over the same questions of identity repeatedly, Ari understands where Dante is coming from; the feeling of belonging is presented as important to both of them. Dante shows it more openly through consistently asking Ari what would make him "a real" Mexican, while Ari is adamant in wanting to be alone. If being Mexican was represented as unimportant to Dante, the character would not constantly ask questions or have conversations regarding the topic.

5.4 Ari's parents' perspective

As mentioned above, Alire Sáenz himself wanted to present a diverse, realistic picture of Mexican American people's education and background in the novel. This perspective is very apparent in Ari's parents as well. Lily, Ari's mother, is a teacher and Ari's father Jaime is a mailman and a Vietnam war veteran. Alire Sáenz's novel represents reality of different Mexican American people's lives, rather than a stereotype in a Hollywood film. And even though Dante views Ari's background as more acceptable, stereotypical Mexican, it does not mean that any of them are the stereotypical definition of a Mexican person.

Ari's mother Lily (Liliana) is represented as someone who is confident in her heritage. She cooks Mexican food at home, listens to Mexican music, goes to Catholic church (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 7); being Mexican is an important aspect of Lily's character. During a conversation about Ari starting a job, Lily notes that he is in "transition" and does not need look for a serious job. Ari is surprised by his mother; "Transition? What kind of a Mexican mother are you?" (p. 237). In this exchange, Ari is shown to apply Dante's logic of his mother exchanging her heritage to her persona and profession, assuming that his mother should not be as relaxed about Ari working a part-time job considering that she is Mexican. To this, Lily responds with "I am an educated woman. That doesn't un-Mexicanize me, Ari" (p. 237). Ari sees anger in his mother when she says this and appreciates it as he sees his

mother's confidence in herself. This additionally shows to Ari that he has options in the world, despite his Mexican heritage.

Lily shares that her family supports her education (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 90), which was not the case for Chloe (p. 87), which shows the difference of attitudes towards higher education within two different Mexican families. Lily is especially amazed by Dante's father for being a professor and what it means for a Mexican American to be in a prestigious position, which she did not see at her time in university;

"I didn't know you liked poetry."

"It's Dante's book. His father has poetry books all over the house."

"It's a wonderful thing, what his father does."

"You mean being a professor?"

"Yes. How wonderful."

"I guess so," I said.

"When I went to the university, I never had one Mexican-American professor. Not one." There was a look on her face, almost anger. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 99).

This lack of Mexican American presence in the U.S. education system is emphasised by Samora: "the educational history of Mexican Americans in this country has been, unfortunately, one of neglect and misunderstanding" (2019, p. 162). The commentary of "almost anger" by the narrator, Ari, could suggest that Lily has faced animosity for her heritage.

Ari's father, Jaime (Santiago) is represented as more discreet about his heritage. Perhaps serving in the Vietnam war has impacted how he views his Mexican heritage as was common among Mexican Americans. According to Jimenez (2015), serving in the war was about the question of loyalty to the United States and being seen as an American, not just an immigrant (p. 4). Because Mexican American communities were poorer at the time than their white counterparts, and they did not have the same opportunities for education, they were seen as an easy target for military draft; being in the army could have provided better chances for them (Jimenez, 2015, p. 7).

What the reader is told about Jaime is that he is a mailman (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 18) and he had studied art before joining the Marines (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 37). Whether he graduated or not is ambiguous, as Ari recounts "Sometime after three children and trying to finish college, my father

joined the Marines” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 14). The focus in the story is him being a veteran rather than his educational background, unlike for other parent characters in the novel. This ambiguity could suggest that Jaime did not get to finish his education due to being drafted, and after the war he was too traumatized to return to education. Being a mailman is not as highly educated job as of a teacher, professor, or a psychologist like the other parents in the novel have. This could mean that Jaime joined the military due to his living conditions that were common among the Mexican American communities. Ari’s view of his father as someone who would not understand Mexican Art is clear as well due to his occupation; “I’d never thought of my father as the kind of man who understood art. I guess I saw him as an ex-Marine who became a mailman after he came home from Vietnam” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 36).

According to Jimenez (2015), Mexican American servicemen are overlooked in history (p. 4). Additionally, Mexican Americans were categorized as white in military records, therefore their participation fades into the mass instead of being appreciated as their own (Jimenez, 2015, p. 5). But due to the mental impacts of war in the character, Jaime is quiet and does not talk much at all therefore the reader can only imagine the struggles of being Mexican American and serving the United States. It is when he finally shares a story with Ari from his time in Vietnam some of his thoughts regarding how Jaime feels about his citizenship in the U.S. as a Mexican American person are seen:

I don’t know if I believed in the war or not, Ari. I don’t think I did. I think about it a lot. But I signed up. And I don’t know what I felt about this country. I do know that the only country I had were the men that fought side by side. They were my country, Ari. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 347)

Here, Jaime attributes that instead of thinking he was in Vietnam to defend the United States of America, he is there for the people.

A glimpse of Jaime’s appreciation towards Mexican culture is brought up when Dante brings over a gift from his father to Jaime; a book about Mexican art.

Dante shook my dad’s hand—then handed him a book. “I brought you a gift”, he said.

I stood there and watched him. I’d seen the book on a coffee table in his house. It was an art book filled with the work of Mexican painters...My dad smiled as he studied the book—but then said, “Dante, this is really very generous—but I don’t know if I can accept this.” My dad held the book carefully, afraid to damage it - - ”It’s about Mexican art” Dante said. “So you *have* to take it.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 32–33).

Jaime is so taken aback by this kind gesture he thinks he is not worth receiving it and cannot accept it (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 32). The emphasis on the word *have* further shows that Dante sees that Jaime is a person who appreciates Mexican art and would want to learn more about art of his heritage. Jaime smiles and is visibly happy—something that did not happen often, according to Ari (p. 33). Thanks to this gift, Jaime actually shares with Ari that he used to study art; something Ari did not know at all. A gift that was related to his heritage and his previous interests got him to share information about his life before war with his son, who did not know much about his father (more in chapter seven). Jaime happily goes through the book; he appreciates this nod to his Mexican heritage and getting back what little he had before the war (p. 36).

5.5 Conclusion of the Representation of Mexican Heritage in the novel

Throughout the novel, Ari is presented as content and confident in his heritage; he is just as Mexican as he is American. Ari's parents (mostly mother) are seen to share this sentiment; Lily has discussions with Ari about what it means to be Mexican and is presented to see herself as Mexican even if she has higher education, even though dismissing attitudes towards Mexican people with higher education is present in the novel through Dante's family's background. While Jaime is not seen to share specific thoughts regarding his heritage, the reader can see his appreciation for his background in small details of his character. Jaime is presented as unsure about his feelings towards living in the United States, but ultimately the novel presents that the character does think that his time in Vietnam was to help the people.

Dante's issues with his heritage that are represented in the novel that do not resolve by the end of it. He is described to have a fairer skin tone, he is presented to think that his parents having highly esteemed job, eliminates their Mexican heritage and especially after discovering his sexuality in the novel makes him feel inadequate to qualify as Mexican. Dante's struggles are presented to impact Ari's view of being Mexican as well; Ari tries his best to reassure Dante in his heritage, but he cannot get through to him. Dante's shadow regarding heritage remains as he does not want to share this struggle with his parents, who are secure in their heritage despite their background in education and occupations.

6 Love and Sexuality

Being LGBT+ in the 1980s in the United States was more dangerous than it is currently. At the time, with Ronald Reagan as the president, the AIDS epidemic was raging, and it did not help that his administration ignored the issue (Riemer and Brown, 2019, p. 246). While in New York City, the city council “adopted an antidiscrimination law protecting gays, lesbians and bisexuals from certain types of public discrimination” (Riemer and Brown, 2019, p. 248), just few months later, the U.S. Supreme Court voted to uphold “the constitutionality of state antisodomy laws by a vote of 5 to 4 and pushing the queer community to its breaking point” (Riemer and Brown, 2019, p. 251), meaning essentially that being LGBT+ was still illegal. This led to protests across the country.

As discussed on chapter four, Ari as a fifteen-year-old is sad and miserable and quite cannot place why it is. One reason for it could be internalized homophobia, as Meyer and Dean (1998) write:

Internalized homophobia, the most insidious of the minority stress processes, is the gay person’s direction of negative social attitudes toward the self, leading to a devaluation of the self and resultant internal conflicts and poor self-regard (p. 161).

But Ari’s self-hatred is not because he knows he is gay and is ashamed of it, but rather something that he thought was a part of his personality.

As Ari and Dante discuss questions of life, they also discuss sexuality, as is common for teenagers. Sexuality as a whole is an awkward topic to Ari, as will be discussed. He does not even think beyond being straight and liking girls. For Dante, it is different; he realises he is gay and tells Ari. Ari, who seemingly had not thought about being anything but straight, struggles with it while simultaneously tries to be supportive of Dante. Because Dante is more open, he often leads the conversation, tries to get Ari to tell him his thoughts. And Ari has a lot of them but prefers not to say anything. In this section, This chapter will examine how Ari feels about love and sexuality, how he unknowingly tries to qualify as a heterosexual teenage boy, and what happens eventually when Ari frees himself to love Dante.

6.1 First confessions

The theme of sexuality is introduced for the first time in the novel as Ari and Dante first discuss sex in the context of being “nice boys”. Dante lists qualities that make “a bad boy”, such as being in a gang, doing drugs:

“Our parents turned us into nice boys. I hate that.”

“I don’t think I’m so nice”

...

“Do you have sex?”

“Sex?”

“Sex, Ari.”

“No, never had sex, Dante. But I’d like to.”

“Me too. See what I mean? We’re nice.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 104–105).

Here, Dante is shown to be the one taking initiative in the conversation, asking Ari questions Ari did not expect. This would show that the author has decided Dante to be the character who is excited to explore his sexuality, while Ari is the opposite. While Ari is taken aback by Dante’s question, they laugh afterwards, not showing signs of uncertainty.

Before Dante moves to Chicago, he confesses his feelings towards Ari. This is the first time Ari encounters someone gay, and first time someone has feelings for him:

“I love swimming”, he said again. He was quiet for a little while. And then he said, “I love swimming—*and you.*”

I didn’t say anything. “Swimming and you, Ari. Those are the things I love the most.

“You shouldn’t say that”, I said.

“It’s true.”

“I didn’t say it wasn’t true. I just said you shouldn’t say it.”

“Why not?”

Dante, I don’t—”

“You don’t have to say anything. I know that we’re different. We’re not the same.”

“No, we are not the same” (author’s italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 150–151).

Ari points out that Dante can feel this way but should not share it out loud to him. This is what often is said in homophobic environments, especially in church; hate the sin, not the sinner. Knowing that Ari will realise he is gay and in love with Dante, Ari's reaction is common among gay people who have not realised their sexuality yet: "long before they begin to realize their own homosexuality, homosexually oriented people internalize societal antihomosexual attitudes to varying degrees" (Meyer and Dean, 1998, p. 162). While Ari may not be actively shown to think this way, it is clearly something he had been told and he has accepted as the truth. The author here shows through Ari's thinking and words towards Dante that Ari has internalized thoughts he has heard from the community or society. His confusion regarding sexuality is apparent when Dante asks Ari if they are still friends after his confession, which Ari reassures. With the word *different*, Dante implies that Ari is straight while he is gay, but it also refers to all the ways they are different; Dante talks more, Ari is the "more Mexican", Dante is more curious while Ari tries to reason.

When Dante moves away, he writes Ari that he talked to a girl at a party, and they kissed. Dante is presented clearly confused by his feelings towards Ari, being gay, and thinks he should try kissing a girl before "deciding" he is gay. Ari is also confused by Dante's letter; "I tried to imagine him kissing a girl. Dante was complicated" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 177). Dante confessed his feelings towards Ari and only few weeks later, he shares with Ari that Dante kissed a girl. Ari is already presented being uncomfortable with the topic of sexuality, and Dante's behaviour adds to it. Ari's discomfort with sexuality could initiate that it is a part of Ari's shadow. Ari is presented as not wanting to think about it, but through Dante, he starts to have the candid, uncomfortable thoughts that are needed in development.

6.2 Ileana

Ari does not see sexuality as feeling attraction towards someone, but rather as taking action. He writes in his diary, "*What would it be like to kiss a girl? Specifically, Ileana. She wouldn't taste like cigarettes. What does a girl taste like when you kiss her?*" (author's italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 177). He confidently decides that he will kiss Ileana, making the quest part of his persona. He does not say a specific reason, but rather something he must perform. He does not know her that well, he hardly sees her at school (p. 178). It would seem his attraction to Ileana is presented as merely superficial, as something he should do in order to fit in with his peers.

Ari tries to find reasons to like Ileana and therefore justify wanting to kiss her;

“She would smile at me and I was falling a little bit in love with her smile. Not that I knew a damn thing about love.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 198).

Ari attends a New Year’s Party and surprisingly, despite feeling lonely before, he has a good time. And Ari and Ileana end up kissing:

“I kissed a girl. No, she kissed me. Ileana. She was there. Ileana. She just walked up to me and said, “It’s New Year’s. So Happy New Year.” And then she just leaned into me and kissed me.

We kissed. For a long time. And then she whispered, “You’re the best kisser in the world.” “No,” I said, “I’m not.”

“Don’t argue with me. I know about these things.”

“Okay,” I said. “I won’t argue with you.” And then we kissed again.

And then she said, “I gotta go.” And then she just left.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 216–217)

By having the character pause his thinking through punctuation, the author shows that Ari seems overwhelmed and happy to have kissed a girl. Yes, he mentions being kissed by Ileana, whom he seemingly liked, it seems more that to him, it was about ticking off the box of being a teenage boy and kissing a girl, as his first reaction is “I kissed a girl”, rather than focusing on Ileana. It is only later, after initial reactions, that the character uses the pronoun “we”, suggesting that the author wanted the emphasis on the act that Ari’s character had decided to do, rather than this scene being about emotional connection. This would mean that Ari has fulfilled the role that he is expected to be as a teenage boy. As Butler (2009) remarks of said role as gender performativity,

“The theory of gender performativity presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all, and that when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but still in relation to norms that precede us and exceed us.” (xi)

Ari has successfully performed the role of a heterosexual teenage boy which Butler describes above. He acted on the norms of society on sexuality by kissing a girl and he happily celebrates it. Additionally, he is seen as a loner outcast at his school, therefore he has also proved to his peers that he can be someone who goes to parties and kisses girls. As Butler mentions that norms can appear in a new, unexpected way, while Ari had decided himself that he would kiss a girl, it was not for certain as the plot originally does not present whether Ileana was interested in Ari as well. Additionally,

everything related to love and sexuality was represented uncomfortable to Ari, therefore Ari being happy after he succeed was unexpected.

However, bliss with Ileana does not last long. She is pulled out of school due to pregnancy. This remarks the end of Ari's successful performance as a teenage heterosexual boy, so Ari is saddened by this. He also decides that whatever he felt for Ileana didn't matter after all; "Kissing didn't meant a damn thing" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 224). Here, Ari is presented to try to convince himself that he does not feel hurt, but one would usually not go to such extreme conclusions after one person turns out not to be what they wanted them to be. However, as the novel has first person narrator, it is difficult to place what are Ari's emotions and what is what actually happened between Ari and Ileana.

6.3 Discomfort, internalized homophobia, heteronormativity

As described in chapter five, Ari is visited by Charlie Escobedo who insults Ari and questions if he is a real Mexican because he refuses to do heroin with him. In the heat of the moment, Charlie and Ari have a spat:

"You're gay, *vato*, you know that?"

What the hell was the guy talking about? I was gay because I didn't want to shoot up heroin?

And then I said: "Yeah, I'm gay and I want to kiss you."

And then he got this really disgusted look on his face and said: "I ought to kick your ass."

And I said: "Go ahead." (author's italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 205–206)

Charlie's commentary on sexuality could suggest that Charlie and his peers have decided Ari's sexuality for him, as they had also decided that he is a foreigner, not a real Mexican. This is shown through Charlie telling Ari that nobody likes Ari (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 205) initiating that Charlie and his peers had talked about Ari without him knowing, which is discussed in chapter five as well. When Ari is not insulted by this and instead Ari fights back with the same sentiment, Charlie is uncomfortable with this and threatens him with violence if Ari were to kiss him. Charlie may be presented with this type of reaction due to not expecting Ari to respond confidently, especially considering the homophobic atmosphere in the 1980s United States. Ari does not seem insulted by Charlie's comment but rather confused by his sudden conclusion.

While Dante is away in Chicago, Dante writes Ari letters often. Dante sends Ari more letters than Ari sends to him, and he talks about personal thoughts in those letters. Ari writes back less, as he is presented to not know what to write to Dante. However, after Dante has lived in Chicago for a while, Ari actively decides that he is not responding a letter from Dante, who writes to Ari about masturbation:

Ari,

Do you masturbate? I'm thinking you think that's a funny question. But it's a very serious question. I mean, you're pretty normal. At least, you're more normal than me.

So maybe you masturbate or maybe you don't. Maybe I'm a little obsessed with this topic lately. Maybe it's just a phase. But, Ari, if you do masturbate, what do you think about?

I know I should ask my dad about this, but I don't feel like it. I love my dad—but do I have to tell him everything?

Sixteen-year-olds masturbate, right? How many times a week is normal?

Your friend,

Dante (author's italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 219).

Ari does not know how to react to Dante's letter, so he resorts to embarrassment and awkwardness; he expresses anger towards Dante for sending that letter (p. 220), specifying that he is not mad that Dante has these thoughts, but rather that he shared them with Ari, which the character did also when Dante confessed his feelings towards Ari. Because Ari presented as uncomfortable in his own sexuality, he judges Dante for being so open about it by thinking, "What the hell was wrong with that guy?" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 220). By referring to Dante as 'that guy', as if he is a stranger, Ari distances himself from Dante. This emotional distancing is emphasised when Ari does not respond to this letter further emphasises his discomfort with the topic.

Dante sends another letter to Ari where he discusses how the girl Dante had been spending time with in Chicago discovered Dante being gay, and how Dante plans to come out to his parents (pp. 225–228);

The thing is I love my dad. My mom too. And I keep wondering what they're going to say when I tell them that someday I want to marry a boy. I wonder how that's going to go over? I'm the only son. What's going to happen with the grandchildren thing? I hate that I'm going to disappoint them, Ari. I know I have disappointed you too (author's italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 227).

According to Mato's (2019) study on historical accuracies in Alire Sáenz's novel, dreaming of marriage as a gay person in the 1980s is not historically accurately represented (p. 37), and as mentioned earlier, the rights of the LGBT+ community were practically non-existent in the United

States. At the time, according to Mato (2019) the idea of marriage and family was something that was unavailable for the LGBT+ community so Dante's thinking, in Mato's perspective, does not align with historical accuracy (p. 36). However, this is not the whole truth; Klarman (2013) shares that in the 1980s, "several same-sex couples filed lawsuits demanding marriage licenses" This would show that Dante's dream of "marrying a boy" is not so far-fetched after all. Nevertheless, Dante is presented as an idealistic, curious, optimistic teenager, and romantic ideals are important to him as well, whether they are historically accurate or not. As Ari does not respond to Dante's comments about marrying a boy, Ari's thoughts on the topic are not available for the reader.

Even though Ari does not respond to this letter either, when Dante moves back, Ari reassures him of their friendship (p. 241). Dante needs more than that; he explains:

"Someday, someone will walk up to you and say: 'Why are you hanging out with that queer?' If you can't stick by me as a friend, Ari, if you can't do that, then maybe it's better that you just, you know—it would kill me." (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 248)

Once again, Ari shifts away from the topic of sexuality and rather jokes about Dante's worries; "Then it's a question of loyalty" (p. 248). When the topic of coming out to Dante's parents comes up, Ari asks Dante, "But what if you fall in love with a girl?" (p. 252), still suggesting Dante is not actually gay but confused, reinforcing heteronormativity on his friend as Ari is presented not to know anything else. The heteronormativity of Ari's thinking is no surprise considering that the novel takes place in the 1980s. Dante, understandably, disagrees with Ari. After offering a heteronormative perspective to help Dante and then reassuring Dante that his parents would always love him (p. 252) and it not succeeding, Ari realises that there is not much he can do: "He didn't say anything. So I just let him cry. There was nothing I could do. Except listen to his pain. I could do that. I could hardly stand it. But I could do that. Just listen to his pain" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 252). Perhaps due to Ari bringing up a heteronormative perspective, Dante shares that he has disappointed Ari. To Dante's relief, Ari says he is not (p. 253). While the topic of sexuality is presented as difficult and uncomfortable to Ari, he still chooses to be a supportive friend to Dante.

Dante is curious and continues questioning Ari regarding sexuality. He asks Ari; "I mean, how do you know that you don't like kissing boys if you've never kissed one?". Because Dante himself has never kissed a boy, Ari responds with another heteronormative imposition; "Well, maybe you don't really like kissing guys. Maybe you just think you do" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 254-255). It is clear here that Ari is not comfortable with talking about this topic with Dante. However, Dante's behaviour is common among gay and bi men, as Meyer and Dean (1998) say:

When, as adolescents or adults, they recognize their own same-sex attraction, they begin to question their presumed heterosexuality and apply the label homosexual or gay to themselves. Such self-labeling often occurs before any interpersonal disclosure of their homosexual longings or behavior. (p. 162)

Meyer and Dean suggest that a gay person does not need to have kissed a same-sex person to realise they are gay, which is something that Dante is presented to have done. Once again, Ari is seen to equal sexuality with action, Dante knows that it is not about action but attraction. Dante does not give in; he suggests that him and Ari kiss, so that they know. Dante being in love with Ari adds another layer of reasoning why Dante wants to kiss him. Ari hesitates at first but proceeds:

I don't know why I did it, but I did it. I stood up.

And then he stood right in front of me.

"Close your eyes," he said.

So I closed my eyes.

And he kissed me. And I kissed him back.

And then he started really kissing me. And I pulled away.

"Well?" he said.

"Didn't work for me," I said.

"Nothing?"

"Nope."

"Okay. It sure worked for me."

"Yeah, I think I get that, Dante." (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 255–256)

Ari's feelings are not represented in the narrative, as the character only describes the action of it, rather than how it felt. We see him saying that it was not for him, which could be his true feelings or him being overwhelmed and quickly thinking in a heteronormative way. When Dante asks, if Ari is mad at him, and Ari responds, "A little", but later continues, "I'm more mad at myself - - I always let you talk me into things. It's not your fault" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 256). Often, Ari reacts with "I don't know" when it comes to Dante, as exemplified above. He didn't know why he saved his life, he didn't know why he sought revenge on his behalf after the homophobic attack, he didn't know why he agreed to kiss him.

Dante's insecurity regarding his Mexican heritage is heightened after coming out to Ari. Dante asks;

"Do real Mexicans like to kiss boys?"

"I don't think liking boys is an American invention."

"You could be right."

“Yeah, I could be.” I shot him a look. He hated when I was right. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 273–274).

This is one of the few first times that Ari reassures Dante about his sexuality and heritage without making a joke, without bringing up a heteronormative perspective. Ari acknowledges that being Mexican and sexuality do not exclude each other but can coexist peacefully, even if it is not the common thought within the community.

While Ari comes to this conclusion presented above and therefore reassures Dante about his identity, it is not the whole truth of what the queer, Mexican experience can be. According to Asiel Adan Sanchez, the experience of being queer and a person of colour differs from their white counterparts:

Coming out requires a certain safety in visibility, in our families, in our jobs, in our cultures and in our homes. Many queer people of colour don't have access to those privileges. When the closet is portrayed as a place of self-hatred, pride becomes an insidious reminder that, in order to be part of the queer community, you have to be visible, out and open. We are so often made to choose between our self and our safety. (7.7.2017)

While Alire Sáenz presents the story of being accepted by family members after their son comes out to them even though they are Mexican, Dante and Ari's stories are positive exceptions to the majority. However, as mentioned before, this novel only presents select few ways to be Mexican, to be gay and the family's reaction to their child being gay.

Ari's opinion is strengthened about Mexican people also being able to be gay when he learns that his aunt Ophelia, who passes away in the novel, was a lesbian who lived with her partner, Franny. Ophelia was not accepted by their other relatives, but as a surprise to Ari, his parents accepted her;

My father had a strange look on his face, as if he was trying to hold back his anger. I think I knew that his anger was aimed at my mother's family, and I also think he knew that his anger was useless. “If it had mattered to us, do you think we'd have let you come and stay with her?” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 286).

Unbeknownst to him, his parents accepted his sexuality and love for Dante before he himself even knew of it. Ari sees the anger his father has towards homophobic people and does not judge him for it. But he also acknowledges that because times are hard for the LGBT+ community, Jaime's anger does not do much to help. Still, being an ally at a time when being LGBT+ was seen as an illness, is a brave stance and extremely rare.

While having a conversation with his mother about the accident and whether the rain reminds him of it and if him and Dante talk about the accident (p. 298), Ari returns to his thoughts about sexuality and why it is so uncomfortable to him. He compares himself to Dante, who likes to kiss others (Ari's dog, Dante's parents, boys, girls..) as an act of appreciation (p. 298). Because Ari does not like to do this, which he is not sure why he does not, he concludes that he is not human (p. 298). When earlier after reading Dante's letter about masturbation, Ari strictly thought how he does not want to think about it, he now concludes that "I thought masturbating was embarrassing. I didn't even know why. It just was" (p. 298), making sexuality a part of his shadow. As seen before, he once again concludes he does not know why he feels this way. He continues to think about how he feels about sex;

"God, I feel stupid just thinking about these things. Some guys talked about sex all the time. I heard them at school. Why were they so happy when they talked about sex? It made me feel miserable. Inadequate. There was that word again." (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 299)

Ari then realises he does not even know why he started to think about sexuality while talking to his mother (p. 299). However, it is evident here that the author decided to present Ari's mind made the connection of Dante to how he feels about sexuality, even if the protagonist is not presented to realise this connection.

6.4 "Did he tell you?", Dante being a victim of a hate crime

Ari's, his parents' and Dante's parents' thoughts about homosexuality come to light especially when Dante becomes a victim of a hate crime. Dante had been seeing his co-worker, Daniel, and was attacked by a group of boys for kissing him. Daniel ran away, while Dante stayed, until a person passing by called help. Dante's parents did not know why it had happened and only through the accident they realised that he is gay and confirm it from Ari (p. 302–303).

As homosexuality was considered a taboo at the time when the novel's story takes place, Dante's parents need to be consoled by Ari, a teenager who himself is not sure about his stance on homosexuality. When Dante's father questions himself why Dante could not tell him, Ari says; "He didn't want to disappoint you" and "Talking to dads isn't that easy. Even you, Sam" (p. 303). To reassure Sam of Dante's love for him, Ari tells him how happy Dante was that his mother is pregnant and can have a straight child who gives them grandchildren which he could not do. Instantly, Sam reacts with "I don't care about grandchildren. I care about Dante." (p. 303). Sam also states that he had a feeling Dante is in love with Ari, as well. Ari, once again, is shown that a parent can be accepting

of their gay child. Sam and Chloe accept his son very quickly, perhaps due to Dante being hospitalized and their parental worry and instincts being present.

Dante's mother is defensive when it comes to Dante and him being gay; she asks Ari whether he will always be Dante's friend, to which Ari responds with "Always" (p. 305). When Chloe talks to Ari about Dante being gay, he comments "There are worse things in the world than a boy who likes to kiss other boys" (p. 306). Here, Ari describes attraction and sexuality once again as an action, 'likes kissing', rather than using verbs such as like or love. However, instead of trying to reassure Dante's parents with heteronormative thoughts, he fully supports Dante. Chloe, additionally, notes that Dante may be in love with Ari, which Ari already knows (p. 306).

6.5 Ari "comes out", or does he?

When Dante still meets with Daniel after the accident, Ari is presented as annoyed. He explains his feeling as Daniel did not stay with Dante in the attack (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 334). Dante does not want to be with Daniel, as he confesses to Ari, "In my head, I was kissing you" (p. 334). Ari jokes as a response that Dante should get a new head, instead of imagining them together.

It is finally when Jaime confronts Ari about his feelings towards Dante that Ari's eyes finally open. Jaime shares an anecdote from his time in Vietnam that still haunted him. He was not able to help a fellow soldier and ran to safety instead of helping him. Through this, Jaime tells Ari, "It's time you stopped running" (p. 347) and later tells, "Ari, the problem isn't just that Dante's in love with you. The real problem—for you, anyway—is that you're in love with him" (p. 348). Ari is confused and does not want to agree with him: "I'm not sure, I mean, I don't think that's true. I mean, I just don't think so. I mean—" (p. 348). Being in love with Dante does not match with his persona. Ari hesitates as he does not want to let go of heteronormative ideals. Even here, he uses logic by saying "I don't think so" rather than talk about his feelings. Throughout the novel, Ari's character has not been presented as someone who would have consciously even entertained the idea that he might be in love with Dante; rather, he would shrug off his reaction to different occasions with Dante with not knowing. Jaime does not give up on helping his son:

Ari, I know what I see. You saved his life. Why do you suppose you did that? Why do you suppose that, in an instant, without even thinking, you dove across the street and shoved Dante out of the way of a moving car? You think that just happened? I think you couldn't stand the

the thought of losing him. You just couldn't. Why would you risk your own life to save Dante if you didn't love him? (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 348).

Still not wanting to admit, Ari mutters about Dante being a friend. Jaime continues to share evidence about Ari having feelings towards Dante:

“And why would you go and beat the holy crap out of a guy who hurt him? Why would you do that? All of your instincts, Ari, all of them, tell me something. You love that boy.”

I kept staring down the table.

“I think you love him more than you can bear” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 349).

Ari rejects his father's thoughts out of shame, questions why his father would even say those things. The confrontation feels understandably overwhelming to Ari, especially considering how little Ari and his father have talked in the novel. But now Jaime talks, and he is being honest and Ari cannot handle it. Even though it feels painful to Ari, Jaime says he is doing so out of love (p. 349).

Heteronormative and even homophobic indoctrination still impacts Ari, as he says he is ashamed and “I'm a guy. He's a guy. It's not the way things are supposed to be. Mom—” (p. 349), showing that he considers same-sex love for himself as his shadow. Ari understands he loves Dante, and his first feeling is shame due to heteronormative thinking; the other time that Ari is presented to be ashamed in the novel is when he admits to his mother that he violently attacked one of the people who hurt Dante (p. 319). As Meyer and Dean write (1998): “Nevertheless, internalized antihomosexual attitudes pose potential threats to the coming-out process and often play an important role in the individual's psychic conflict around sexual identity” (p. 163). Ari did not want to accept his true feelings as society had taught him that they are wrong.

Jaime is a unique father character when it comes to queer YA novels, especially Latinx stories. As Mato (2019) states,

This instance is revolutionary. It is particularly groundbreaking in the context of Latinx YA literature not only because of its departure from historical patriarchal pressures, but also because of its subversion of tropes often found in queer Latinx YA literature. Here, the Latinx father figure disrupts patriarchal stereotypes by catalyzing and nurturing, rather than suppressing, his son's queerness. (p. 45)

The author has clearly chosen to have an accepting father-figure in his plot. This accepting father figure could be chosen due to the fact that Jaime's sister-in-law was a lesbian, so he would have been familiar with it. Earlier, Jaime would rather stay quiet and stay out of his son's way as his trauma from the war had paralyzed him from communication. But here, the reader sees that because his love

for his son is strong that he must confront him about something so trivial to Ari's life, even though society at the time and their relatives did not agree with.

By the end of the novel, Ari confesses his feelings to Dante by first asking, if he remembered the time they kissed (p. 357). Dante is angered by this as he assumes that Ari wants to embarrass him, continue to pursue his heteronormative thoughts on him. Ari quickly then tells that back then he had lied. This suggests that at the time, Ari already had enjoyed kissing Dante but did not realise it or did not want to realise it.

Meyers and Dean (1998) write that internalized homophobia can impact a gay person's mental health negatively; "Several studies have found internalized homophobia to be related to psychological distress, lowered self-esteem, and lower levels of community integration and social support" (p. 167). This could explain why the author decided to have Ari describe himself as miserable in the beginning of the novel and throughout, especially considering he did not even think being gay is a possibility to him, therefore he never even consider it as an option. Throughout the novel, Ari has been presented as not understanding why he was angry and hateful towards his loved ones, why he was sad all the time. Once he feels capable and free to say he loves Dante, he understands where the hate came from; his internalized homophobia, the struggle of self-acceptance and embracing his identity and feelings:

This was what was wrong with me. All this time I had been trying to figure out the secrets of the universe, the secrets of my own body, of my own heart. All of the answers had always been so close and yet I had always fought them without even knowing it. From the minute I'd met Dante, I had fallen in love with him. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 358)

To Ari, it's about loving Dante as the person he is: "How could I have ever been ashamed of loving Dante Quintana?" (p. 359) Notice that here, Ari does not describe kissing Dante as that he "likes kissing" Dante, implying that kissing in this instance was not about the activity but rather the feeling. Compared to Ileana, he had seen kissing and liking her as a task, as a role to fit in with others, while with Dante, it was natural.

In a way, Ari does not "come out", a 'ritual' within the LGBT+ community that one must share with others if they are not straight and/or cisgender. More so, through talking with his parents, he realises he is in love with Dante and through that, feels free.

7. Family

In the novel, the family relationships are presented as difficult from many perspectives, and this impacts Ari's character and how he presents his persona. Ari lives with his parents Lily and Jaime. The character is the youngest of four children; he has two older twin sisters, who according to Ari, "always make me feel like the baby" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 13). As they are much older and have children already, Ari feels distant from them as opposed to having a close sibling-bond. Bernardo, Ari's older brother, is in prison, and at the start of the novel he knows absolutely nothing about him. Ari acknowledges that this has impacted him negatively:

Who the hell likes to talk about older brothers who are in prison? Not my mom and dad, that was for sure. Not my sisters either. Maybe all that silence about my brother did something to me. I think it did. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 13-14)

Ari has a considerably big family, with three older siblings and parents. However, due to the age difference between the twin sisters, the novel mostly focuses on Ari and his relationship with his parents; the novel includes many conversations between Ari and his mother, whilst his father is distant. The absence of his brother and the lack of knowledge why he ended up in prison is also what causes Ari sadness, which will be further discussed in section 7.2.2.

As discussed in chapter five, the Mexican heritage of the family is represented as a key aspect of their daily life and their family dynamic. This chapter will look beyond that and examine how different family members and their relationship to Ari are represented in this novel and how the lack of them impact Ari's life. From the concept of persona, ego and shadow.

7.1 Parents

In a conversation between Ari and Dante, Ari shares that he has not figured out his parents yet, meaning he does not know how and who they are as people. It is later clarified with "I figured my mom out mostly", I said. "My dad. He's intractable, too." (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 28). Ari is presented as someone who knows his parents love him but still struggles with feeling inadequate to them.

Ari's bond with his mother is represented very differently from the bond he shares with his father. Ari and his mother Lily have several conversations throughout the novel, while for Ari and his father,

communication is a struggle. The following sub-sections will examine how these relationships work as separately and how they compare to each other.

7.1.1 Lily, Ari's mother

Lily's character's persona is presented as someone who is able to share certain details of her life, being a caring mother and being passionate about teaching. "My mom was soft. But she was also very strict" (p. 83) is how Ari is presented to see his mother. However, Lily does not know how to process the imprisonment of her oldest son, Bernardo, making it her shadow. This is what keeps the close bond that is presented between Lily and Ari, still distant. While the author has Lily present palatable details about her life to Ari, she leaves out her feelings about Bernardo's absence. Her ego, internal world, is revealed once she shares details about Bernardo's actions. All of this will be discussed in this sub-section.

Despite his quiet nature, Ari talks to his mother quite often. Lily is mostly open with Ari about her life before Ari; she tells Ari that she was pregnant with him while she was finishing her bachelor's degree, while her mother and aunts helped her to take care of the other children. Lily recounts that when Jaime came home from war, Ari was born. Lily's mother continued supporting her education to become a teacher while Jaime started working at the post office (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 89). Pursuing education was important to Lily, especially becoming a teacher, saying she always wanted to become one: "when I was growing up, we didn't have anything, but my mom understood how much school meant to me." (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 90).

Ari is shown to appreciate whenever Lily tells him about her life. After telling her life story to Ari, he is amazed: "That was the first time that I really saw my mother as a person. A person who was so much more than just my mother" (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 90). It can also be noted that achieving education may have been challenging to Lily due to having children; Ari mentions that Lily was 18 when she had his sisters (p. 86), therefore that would mean the character achieved her bachelor's degree much later than what is usually expected.

As described above, teaching is presented as a calling for Lily. In a discussion with Ari, she shares her fundamental values when it comes to teaching:

"I'll tell you a secret. I'm not responsible for whether my students care or don't care. That care has to come from them—not me."

“Where does that leave you?”

“No matter what, Ari, my job is to care.”

“Even when they don’t?”

“Even when they don’t.”

“No matter what?”

“No matter what.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 68).

Here, the character shares that it is her job to care about her students no matter what the circumstances, which is emphasised by the author with the repetition of Ari’s questions as her answers. However, in her personal life, this is not what she lives by, as she refuses to talk about Bernardo and be there for them, due to his imprisonment.

After the accident, it is clearer to Ari’s mother that her son is in agony and wants to help him. Earlier, Ari mentions how it is better for him to keep everything to himself so he does not worry others (p. 126). Although Ari did not share anything about his bottling feelings to his mother, she sees him through it;

It’s not good for you to keep everything inside. I know this is hard. And the next two or three months or so are going to be very difficult. Keeping everything bottled up inside you isn’t going to help you heal. (p. 134)

But he does not want to and demands them to talk about his imprisoned brother (p. 134), after which he will share what is going on in his mind; much of Ari’s worries come from not knowing what happened to his brother so this seems like a viable suggestion. This confrontation upsets Lily and presents how the whole family is not comfortable with talking about Bernardo. While Lily’s character’s persona is comfortable with sharing with certain parts of her life, the shadow of the character is Bernardo. However, because Ari has not told his mother anything about his feelings, she does not know how Ari’s emotions correlate with his brother’s absence.

Ari notices that his mother does not bring up their conversation regarding Bernardo again (p. 135) and while he does not know how to feel about that, he appreciates not having to talk with her (p. 136).

After the car accident happens, Lily is shown to hover around Ari according to him (p. 136), as a way to present her as a caring mother. This behaviour results in Ari lashing out:

“Mom, you’re hovering. You’re going to make me say the ‘f’ word. You really are.”

“Don’t you dare say that word in front of me.”

“I swear I’m going to, Mom, if you don’t stop.”

“What is this wise guy role you’ve been playing?”

“It’s not a role, Mom. I’m not in a play.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 136)

This exemplifies how the car accident and not being able to walk frustrates Ari and he unravels it onto his family.

Despite small arguments and disagreements between Ari and his mother, the characters get along well and can speak in a relaxing manner. Ari does not need tiptoe around his mother in the same as he does around his father. In fact, their bond is presented as a common mother-son relationship during teenage years when discussing balancing work-free time as a teenager:

“Ari, do you know what an ecotone is?”

“It’s the terrain where two different ecosystems meet. In an ecotone, the landscape contains two different ecosystems. It’s like a natural borderlands.”

“Smart boy. In transition. I don’t have to say any more, do I?”

“No mom, you don’t. I live in an ecotone. Employment must coexist with goofing off. Responsibility must coexist with irresponsibility.”

“Something like that.”

“Do I get an A in Sonhood 101?”

“Don’t be mad at me, Ari.”

“I’m not.”

“Sure you are.”

“You’re such a school teacher.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 238)

This scene also presents a conversation between Ari and Lily that is not impacted by the family shadows but shows their own dynamic and relationship.

Lily is presented as a strong, determined mother but she also has her weak moments, her shadow, which she prefers not to discuss. This is triggered when Lily’s sister, Ophelia, passes away. It is Jaime

that shares how Lily acted after Bernardo's imprisonment, this being Lily's shadow. At the time, Ari was sent to Ophelia's for nine months as the family adjusted through Bernardo's crimes:

“She's so strong, your mother. But, I don't know, life isn't logical, Ari. It was like your brother had died. And your mother became a different person. I hardly recognized her. When they sentenced him, she just fell apart. She was inconsolable. You have no idea how much she loved your brother. - - When she came back to me, Ari, she seemed so fragile. And as the weeks and months went by, she became her old self again. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 283).

When Ari had required his mother to talk about Bernardo, the character is presented not to acknowledge how talking about Bernardo could impact Lily. Possibly, Ari may have seen Bernardo and his family not talking about him as a punishment for him, rather than as something too painful to talk about.

As Lily decides to share about Bernardo to Ari, there is some type of relief seen in the character; a secret that had taken over the family has been released (Alire Sáenz, 2012, pp. 320–322). This revealed a more truthful Lily is what could be argued as the character's ego; as Young-Eisendrath and Dawson describe ego as “that complex to which the sense of “I” is attached, at whose core is the archetype of the Self” (p. 316). Sharing the truth about Bernardo to Ari is how she connects her inner world with her outer world, as keeping the secret inside has been presented to weigh Lily down.

7.1.2 Jaime, Ari's father

The novel depicts Jaime as someone who was severely impacted by the Vietnam war that his shadow has taken over the whole character's persona is his shadow as he now does not talk much to his family, has nightmares about the war, has issues with showing affection to his family members. In addition to the shadow of the war experiences, his persona is being quiet and distant. It could be argued that because the impacts of the war have taken over Jaime's whole character, his shadow and persona have melted to each other; this will be discussed further in this sub-section. His ego is presented when he shares details of his time in the war, in order to help Ari to accept himself.

Ari's relationship with his father is initially presented through a childhood memory: “Once, when I was about six or seven, I was really mad at my father because I wanted him to play with me and he just seemed so far away. It was like I wasn't even there” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 11). Much of what Ari is presented to know about his father has come from their family members, but even then, the

information is scarce. Ari has had questions about his father and war since early childhood; he even overheard his mother and aunt discuss Jaime and how he will always live with the war inside of him (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 14). Ari asks his aunt Ophelia what this means:

“But why won’t the war leave my dad alone?”

“Because your father has a conscience”, she said.

“What happened to him in the war?”

“No one knows.”

“Why won’t he tell?”

“Because he can’t” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 14).

Through this exchange, the author shows how the idea of war and not knowing what it is, and why it impacted Ari’s father the way it did, is a lot to handle for an 8-year-old. Even though the character did not know the details of it, Ari knew that Jaime was living with sadness; “So I was the son of a man who had Vietnam living inside of him” (p. 14).

The author decides to show that Ari would like to be closer with his father by sharing Ari’s method of trying to learn more about his father:

I could have asked my father lots of questions. I could have. But there was something in his face and eyes and in his crooked smile that prevented me from asking. I guess I didn’t believe he wanted me to know who he was. So I collected the clues. - - Some day all the clues would come together. And I would solve the mystery of my father. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 37)

Ari watches his father from afar, as he does not think their bond is strong enough to actually talk to his father and ask him directly about him. The lack of relationship with his father affects Ari. Ari has attributed some of his moody and quiet nature he presents as to being like his father (p. 214).

Lily knows about Jaime’s personality prior to the war and more about him now than Ari does, so Ari turns to her: for example, Lily describes how Jaime does not agree with the president at the time, Reagan (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 68). Ari asks Lily about his father’s time in Vietnam but does not receive answers. Lily has not asked Jaime about the war because she believes it is not her place to know about Jaime’s shadows:

“Was he different? When he came back from the war?”

“Yes.”

“How was he different?”

“There’s a wound somewhere inside of him, Ari.”

“But what is it? The hurt? What is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“How can you not know, Mom?”

“Because it’s his. It’s just his, Ari.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 90).

This frustrates Ari as he feels Jaime cannot be the father Ari wishes he would be. It seems that Jaime is presented as having his shadow of being in the war has taken over the character’s life. However, Ari finds a little bit of hope: “Someday, I would understand my father. Someday he would tell me who he was. Someday. I hated that word” (p. 61). Ari’s shadow of being lonely and angry (which are also represented as Ari’s persona) have also taken over the character’s life, in a different manner, therefore the hopefulness of understanding his father one day is through the character’s own perspective of himself. Hope with stubbornness, that is.

The novel does not present the lack of relationship as Ari thinking his father does not care for him but rather that he feels out of reach. This was first shown in the childhood memory mentioned above and further throughout the novel. During a fever dream, Ari had been searching for his father. When Ari woke up, Jaime recalls:

“You were looking for me,” he said.

I looked at him.

“In your dream. You were looking for me.”

“I’m always looking for you,” I whispered. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 63)

It is not noted here whether Jaime heard Ari’s whisper or not. However, it shows that even when he is dreaming, Ari desires to have a connection with his father, instead of the silence that is presented in the novel. When Ari feels better, Jaime mentions Ari’s dreams, and apologizes for being “so far away” (p. 65). He may have not heard Ari’s whisper, but he knows that Ari is hurting in some way if he is looking for his father in a nightmare. Jaime then reveals to Ari that he also has nightmares. Ari does not pry more information of what kind, but he is happy to have learnt something new, something personal about his father (p. 66).

After the car accident, Jaime tries to be a more present father, and it makes Ari uncomfortable. While Ari is presented as someone who yearns for a bond with his father, when the chance comes to have one, it is not what he wants:

My dad visited me every evening. I wanted him to go away. He tried to talk to me but it wasn't working. He pretty much just sat there. That made me crazy. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 135)

The tension is released a little when Ari suggests they would read and sit in silence (p. 135). It is through reading that they manage to have conversations: "He asked me if I was still having dreams. "Yes", I said. "Now I'm looking for my legs." "You'll find them", he said". (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 135).

Ari's frustration with his father's silence almost reaches a boiling point. After Jaime points out that his son seems to me angrier lately (p. 259), Ari thinks to himself:

If I had been braver this is what I would have said: *Angry? What have I got to be angry about? You know something, Dad? I don't really care that you can't tell me about Vietnam. Even though I know that war owns you, I don't care if you don't want to talk about it. But I do care that you won't talk about my brother. Damn it to hell, Dad, I can't stand to live with all your silence.* (author's italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 260)

Ari continues to go through this imagined conversation back and forth in his mind, which ends up in tears. The imagined back-and-forth, which did not take place, impacted Ari as if it was real. When Jaime tries to reach out to him, Ari asks him not to touch him, as he was too upset (p. 260) by his imagination. The author has shown that Ari presents himself as an angry teenager but he mostly keeps it to himself, but in this instance, the author changes Ari's anger to be a part of his external presentation as well. This once again indicates that Ari's personality and moodiness is directly impacted by the lack of vocal support he receives from his father. While Ari and Jaime briefly discuss that they should talk more, it does not lead to communication at the time (p. 280).

As Ari's legs heal from the accident, Jaime becomes Ari's driver's instructor. This is what Ari hopes is to be a time for him and his father to finally bond like Ari imagines it to be throughout the novel. However, it is not really what Ari had hoped for, and Ari's disappointment is shared through his thoughts:

My dad and I got into a routine. We'd get up really early on Saturdays and Sundays for my driving lessons. I thought—I don't know what I thought. I guess I thought that maybe my dad

and I would talk about stuff. But we didn't. We talked about driving. It was all business. It was all about the learning-to-drive thing. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 199)

What is suggested here is that Ari had high expectations from communication with his father during driving lessons, as it would be some quality time between those two characters. However, in this instance, Jaime shows his care through teaching, even if Ari does not regard it as such. Still, Ari does not share to Jaime that he had hope him and Jaime could have conversations and bond through driving, further emphasising the distance Ari is presented to feel from his father.

It is within the final pages of the novel that Jaime finally tells Ari and Lily an anecdote of what happened in Vietnam and how it has impacted him:

There was shooting from all sides. - - There was this guy. A really good guy. God, he was so young. Nineteen years old. God, he was just a boy." My father shook his head. "His name was Louie. Cajun guy from Lafayette." - - "We weren't supposed to leave a man down. That was the rule. You don't leave a man down. You don't leave a man to die." I could see the look on my mother's face, her absolute refusal to cry. I remember running toward the chopper, Louie was right behind me, bullets flying everywhere. I thought I was a dead man. And then Louie went down. He yelled my name. I wanted to go back. I don't remember exactly, but the last thing I remember was Beckett pulling me onto the chopper. We left him there. Louie. We left him." (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 346)

Here, the author has presented Jaime connecting his experiences in the war to in order to help his son to realise his true identity, Jaime's character's ego becomes more apparent as the character uses his internalized world in order to help his son accept his identity as homosexual. The narrative of Jaime changes from a distant father to a caring, present father through Jaime sharing this story (pp. 345-347). As mentioned before, Jacoby writes that Jung's theory includes the goal of the human soul is reaching its full totality (1992, p. 66); by sharing his background, Jaime is inching closer to that. However, Jacoby does not share how shadow would be included in the said totality. Ari does not find out who his father is through the clues he has gathered, but rather through Jaime's own words. The depiction of a Vietnam War veteran changes here from what was the norm within the novel, as Jaime is now someone who can open about his feelings and experiences in the war. It is with the power from telling a war story that Jaime even confronts his son of his feelings towards Dante (pp. 348-350), as discussed in chapter six. This all leads to Ari concluding that he can finally understand his father, as he also understands him (p. 350). The mystery of his father that Ari wanted to solve is opening up little by little.

As the narrative is presented from Ari's perspective, the author does not give the detailed reason why exactly Jaime is distant from Ari. However, it can be speculated that it is a way to depict how deeply the war has impacted Jaime. It is when Jaime shares the story from the war in order to help Ari realise his own feelings, that it is seen that Jaime has actualized his role as Ari's father fully.

7.2 Ari's siblings

Ari's relationship(s) to his siblings are presented as quite difficult, almost non-existent. As mentioned before, all of his siblings are much older than him and therefore he felt distant from his twin sisters, whom Ari feels distant from due to the age difference. Ari does not feel connected to any of his siblings:

I think I was mad because I couldn't talk to my brother. And I was mad because I couldn't really talk to my sisters either. It's not that my sisters didn't care about me. It's just that they mostly treated me more like a son than a brother. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 83)

The distant relationships with his siblings are used as proof of Ari's moodiness as well, as seen above. It is not that Ari despises his siblings, but rather the lack of relationship with them that impacts Ari's personality. But as mentioned before, the story is told from Ari's perspective therefore the story does not include how the twin sisters and Bernardo truly feel about Ari, as they are not present in the story.

7.2.1 Ari's twin sisters

The reader is told about the siblings for the first time through a conversation between Ari and Dante, specifically about his twin sisters, Cecilia and Sylvia:

"How old are they, your sisters and brother?"

"My sisters are twins. They're not identical, but they look alike. They're twenty-seven. My mom had them when she was eighteen".

"Wow. Twenty-seven."

"Yeah. Wow."

"I'm fifteen and I have three nieces and four nephews."

"I think that's really cool, Ari."

“Trust me Dante, it’s not that cool. They don’t even call me Uncle Ari.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 86)

Here, Ari is seen to downplay his bond with his older sisters, which has happened throughout the novel with other family characters as well. As mentioned before, Ari does not think his twin sisters do not care about him, but rather that their age difference makes their relationship different to siblings closer in age. An additional way that Ari describes his relationship with his twin sisters is presented as Ari recalls the sisters referring to him as being born a little too late (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 82). Ari is shown to be disappointed and hurt by this, and he confronted his sisters about it:

I looked at my sister, Cecilia, and said: “You were born a little too early.” I smiled at her and shook my head. “Isn’t that sad? Isn’t that just too fucking sad?”

My other sister, Sylvia, lectured me. “I hate that word. Don’t talk that way. That’s so disrespectful.” Like they respected me. Yeah, sure they did. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 82)

Here, a connection to how his twin sisters is presented to how his mother treats Ari as well; Ari’s mother is also shown that she dislikes when Ari uses “language” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 82, p. 136). By using the word “language”, the sisters imply that they do not want Ari to behave disrespectfully; perhaps cursing is a reminiscent of Bernardo’s behaviour from before his imprisonment, and the twins and their mother do not want even the slightest reminder of that. This could mean that the twin sisters’ persona is similar, if not inherited, from their mother.

Ari’s bond with his twin sisters is not visited that often in the novel, further emphasising the lack of connection between them due to the age difference. When Ari gets hurt in the accident, his sisters are not presented to contact him or his parents. This shows that even when hospitalized, when it is expected family members to be there for others, the sisters are not present in the narrative.

7.2.2 Bernardo

Throughout the novel, the author presents Bernardo’s shadow only, and only from the perspective of his family member. As the narrative is told from Ari’s perspective, and considering Bernardo being away in prison, Bernardo’s character’s perspective is not presented through conversations, but his characteristics are described through other characters. Ari strongly wants to find out who his brother is, as it affects his personality. Eventually, by the end of the novel the author decides that the parents ought to share stories about Bernardo prior to his imprisonment and ultimately, what resulted him to

be imprisoned. However, because it is only within the last pages that Bernardo's story is introduced, most of his character is something that is presented out of reach for Ari.

Bernardo is not talked about in a detailed manner when Dante and Ari have a conversation about his siblings, Ari focuses to talk about his sisters, not mentioning his brother. Ari has been taught to feel a certain way about his brother due to his actions as he is not talked about in the family. The following conversation where Dante repeats his question exemplifies how Ari is presented to feel about his brother once someone outside of the family is told about him:

“So how old is your brother?”

“He's twenty-five.”

“I always wanted a brother.”

“Yeah, well I might as well not have one.”

“Why?”

“We don't talk about him. It's like he's dead.”

“Why?”

“He's in prison, Dante.” I'd never told anyone about my brother. I'd never said a word about him to another human being. I felt bad for talking about him.” (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 86)

Dante, however, is an idealistic and is amazed by Ari's family: “But you know, Ari, you have this really interesting life” (p. 87). However, this makes Ari uncomfortable; he does not see anything special in his life, and he cites that to the age difference with his siblings.

The author shows how Ari is impacted by Bernardo's absence through the lack of information that is presented of him throughout the novel, and through Ari missing Bernardo, even though the character knows practically anything about him; he does not even know who he misses, essentially. The character of Bernardo does not get a chance to present his persona as his character arc is only told by other characters. The story focuses on his shadow, his horrible actions that are presented only by the end of the novel. From Ari's perspective, he knows that Bernardo has done something wrong, but Ari does not know what. At first, he does not even know Bernardo's name, only comes across it when he finds one of Lily's envelopes. Ari sees dreams of him (p. 80), as unanswered questions keep bothering him. Ari writes down his worries about Bernardo in his journal, as he cannot bring up Bernardo to his parents or older siblings. Ari notes that there are pictures of every other family member in their house, except Bernardo:

It's worse than being dead. At least the dead get talked about and you get to hear stories. People smile when they tell those stories. And they even laugh.

--

My brother doesn't get any stories. He has been erased from our family history. It doesn't seem right. My brother is more than a word written on a chalkboard. (author's italics, Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 96).

As presented in the examples in this section, Ari is seen repeatedly comparing Bernardo to being deceased. The author has chosen this imagery of death as the way to present Bernardo's place in the family. With death as the description of how Bernardo is viewed, it could initiate that the family members do not want to consider Bernardo existing at all: every time Bernardo is brought up, the family members are upset. As the family views Bernardo "dead", it is also how Ari has learnt to view the treatment of Bernardo in their family in this manner as well. (p. 283). By comparing Bernardo to being dead, the author shows that Bernardo's shadow and the result of his crimes are too big to even bring him into daily conversation. finds the erasing of Bernardo by his family ridiculous and is presented to question it in his mind, meaning that Ari would not want to view Bernardo as being dead. This ought to be because Ari is unaware of what Bernardo did, as no one would tell him.

Since no family member is willing to tell Ari about his brother, he decides to go searching from local archives for information (p. 195) but fails to find anything. This could be the author's choice as Ari should find out about his brother through his family, not a third party. It is only at home that Ari finds an envelope with Bernardo's name on it (p. 209) but decides not to go through it, and it is only later in the novel that Lily offers the envelope for Ari to open (p. 320). This shows that Ari still respects his family's decision to not talk about him. Ari manages to get the truth out of his mother and finally hears the story of Bernardo. He is in prison due to murdering two people at fifteen, one of them being a transgender sex worker (p. 331) and the other being a fellow inmate in the juvenile detention centre (p. 332). While Ari is shown to acknowledge that what Bernardo did was wrong, Ari is still happier with the fact that there are no secrets anymore with his parents rather than being horrified by Bernardo's past. Ari finally gets to look through photos of Bernardo:

My brother when he was a baby, my brother in my father's arms, my brother with my sisters. My brother sitting on the front steps of the house. My brother, a little boy, saluting my father in uniform. My brother, my brother" (p. 322).

Ari sees his brother as human, the person Bernardo was before everything, rather than his actions. Ari respects his mother even more after he understands the bravery it took her to share this information: "My mother watched me. It was true. *I had never loved her more*" (author's italics, Alire

Sáenz, 2012, p. 322). He still asks questions from his father (p. 324), as it was too much for his mother to answer.

With the freedom of the truth being out, Bernardo is now included on the photos of the wall, he is being talked about. However, when Ari mentions to his mother that he would like to write to his brother, Lily does not encourage it as Bernardo has not responded to any of her letters and has denied meeting (p. 343). While all the secrets are out, Ari's physical access to Bernardo is presented as an obstacle.

Throughout the novel, the author shares details of Jaime and Lily how they would describe each other; Jaime tells Ari about his mother's views, while Lily tells about Jaime, rather than they would directly share about themselves. However, this changes end of the novel, as according to Ari, "I think my mother and my father had decided that there were too many secrets in the world" (p. 291). As Ari says that he feels free after confessing his feelings towards Dante, knowing about what Bernardo had done and what he was like as a person also seem to have helped the character to find this freedom. He no longer feels that the shadow of his brother is heavy.

8. Discussion

As explored in the analysis, Ari's persona, ego and shadow are presented in the novel through his actions, thoughts and conversations with other characters. The author has chosen the persona of Ari to be someone who was miserable, to whom through accepting his sexuality, becomes a happier person. Ari's shadow and persona simultaneously are presented through Ari's loneliness; the character says he prefers loneliness, but the events of the novel suggest otherwise, especially through his relationship with Dante. Additionally, the shadow of the whole family, Bernardo, also impacts Ari's shadow. Ego, on the other hand, is presented when Ari realises his feelings towards Dante and the secrets of Bernardo are revealed.

After feeling that the name Aristotle brings him too much pressure, he feels freed and relieved to use it to identify himself. Ari's idea of his persona and how he presents himself has changed from being sad to being happy, another change for his character but this time, he is not violent.

The readership of this novel should be considered when it comes to the representation of different aspects of identity. In the 1980s United States, the AIDS epidemic was rampant, but the author chose not to include anything related to it. The author does mention President Reagan, but it is not in the context of the epidemic. Surely, since homosexuality is a key part of the novel, it would have been expected to be mentioned, but as the novel is for a youth/young adult audience, perhaps the author did not consider it fitting for the novel. After all, the focus in this novel is on two gay individuals, rather than the community and the fight for human rights. The author may have wanted to highlight have a story of gay characters that was not impacted by the AIDS epidemic to bring another perspective of being gay in the 1980s.

Additionally, as Mato (2019) notes that it is not common to have a Latino father character, who accepts his gay son immediately. Storylines with unaccepting parental figures of Latinx gay characters are common in the media targeted for the similar audience as Alire Sáenz's, novel. For example, *Glee* featured a story line of Santana Lopez, a lesbian Latina character, being disowned by her religious grandmother whilst being accepted by her parents (Hodgson, 2011), *One Day at a Time* had a storyline of Elena Alvarez, a lesbian Latina character being accepted by her mother (who, although, initially struggled with it) but not by her father (Mann and Sielaff, 2017) and the show *Love, Victor* featured a storyline of Victor Salazar, a gay Latino character, having a religious mother who could not accept her son's sexuality (Aptaker and Berger, 2021). All the parental figure character did come around to accept their homosexual family members over the course of the television shows.

Earlier in the novel, the author shares that Ari had a lesbian aunt Ophelia with whom he spent some time with; this would suggest that Jaime and Lily have learnt to accept homosexual family members as Lily recounts that Ophelia taught her a lot (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 349) just when Ari realises that he is gay. It is quite evident that for his novel, Alire Sáenz wanted to represent a story of accepting Latinx parents. According to Entman (2001), “the media can significantly and sometimes decisively influence and audience’s attitudes and preferences” (p. 738), therefore Alire Sáenz’s, choice was to have a positive influence on the novel’s audience. With the youth readership in mind, the author may have chosen having two supportive families in the story to give young LGBT+ readers a perspective of a happy family dynamic regarding being gay.

The different parts of Ari’s identity overlap with each other, as seen in the analysis. When Ari talks to Dante, they often discuss their families and Mexican heritage simultaneously. Later on, Ari and Dante discuss sexuality and being a real Mexican in context of each other. Asiel Adan Sanchez has explored the concept of coming out through the lens of whiteness:

Gay Latino men, on the other hand, didn’t experience their sexual identity in the same way. As ethnic minorities, gay Latino men already had a unique point of identity. By verbally coming out, they often risked alienating themselves from their ethnic communities. (7.7.2017)

However, in this story, it is ultimately Ari's family that are presented to bring all these parts of Ari's identity together. It is the parents who strengthen Ari's Mexican identity through socialization, a term coined by Galal (2012), they also help Ari to come to terms with his sexuality and feelings towards Dante, and eventually the parents share the truth about Bernardo. It is the truth about the aspects of Ari's identity that release Ari from the sadness that is presented throughout the novel. Through Ari’s family, specifically the parents, the character is presented to find happiness. The truth about Bernardo changes the dynamic of Ari and his parents. He sees them more clearly, as Ari describes his father very differently than before:

And I loved my father too, for the careful way he spoke. I came to understand that my father was a careful man. To be careful with people and with words was a rare and beautiful thing. (Alire Sáenz, 2012, p. 324)

Ari’s character no longer spends time on wondering why his father is the way he is, and why his mother will not share stories about Bernardo. While the author decided to have the parents keep Bernardo’s story as a secret from Ari, it is presented that knowledge about what happened offers more peace to Ari rather than protecting him from the truth. Ari’s character seems relieved, not as burdened as before.

Ari being the protagonist and the narrator offers an in-depth look into the character's thinking but due to this, other characters and their characteristics are only learnt through conversations that Ari has with the other characters. Additionally, the reader is only given Ari's perspective of himself as he is the narrator, and once again, the reader can only see Ari's characteristics that he does not embrace through the other characters. The author's decision to have Ari as the narrator shows emphasis on the story of the novel being one based on emotions, rather than an objective look into the life of a gay, Mexican American teenager living in Texas in the 1980s.

9. Conclusion

This thesis has investigated different parts of the protagonist, Ari, in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. This was done with the method of close reading, by looking at selected themes (personality, heritage, sexuality and family) presented in the novel and how they manifested in the character of Ari.

The release of the sequel in 2021 offers a possibility for further research on Ari's character development or the development of Ari and Dante's relationship; within Alire Sáenz's first novel, the characters are not seen in a relationship, meaning that there is a development from friendship to a romantic relationship. Additionally, one can investigate how the eight-year gap between the release of books impacts the story presented in the first novel.

Through the method of close reading with the support of Jungian theory of psyche, this thesis explores and concludes that Ari goes from a sad, moody teenager to a happier 17-year-old, who becomes more content with life within the time frame of the novel. As the character is 17 by the end of the novel, it cannot be said for certain that Ari ought to be happy for good, especially considering the sequel. Ari is presented to describe himself as happy and free by the end of the novel, and that is also where the analysis in this thesis ends on.

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