RACE AND REPRESENTATION ON TV: THE INFLUENCE OF TV STATUS ON

LATINO IDENTITES

A Thesis

by

JESUS AUGUSTO GONZALEZ

Submitted to Texas A&M International University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2017

Major Subject: Communication

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my friends, family, and colleagues that always gave small, and sometimes big and meaningful, words of encouragement. I'd also like to include Dr. Davis as a powerful force behind my determination to finish my thesis; Davis, you're easily the best professor I've had. Thank you for always believing in me. This is also dedicated to all of my students from United South High School that asked why I looked so stressed out or tired, and upon hearing my explanation, replied with admiring awe and gave me compliments like, "That's so cool, sir." Those compliments provided me with motivation to keep going on. Lastly, I'd like to dedicate this to Adolfo Mora, my good friend, who one day while waiting for a movie to start in a theater, asked me, "If TAMIU ever opens up a master's program for communication, would you be interesting in joining?" I said yes, a year later the program opened up, and I registered like I said I would. Thank you, all!

ABSTRACT

Race and Representation on TV: The Influence of TV Status on Latino Identities
(May 2017)

Jesus Augusto Gonzalez, Texas A&M International University;

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It has been observed that most American TV media has taken on a format that seems to concern itself primarily with White, middle to high-income family situations. Even though the United States of America has a Latino population that reaches 17% (approximately 55 million Latinos—with Mexican Americans making up 63% of that number) and growing (Krogstad 2016), we still see a tremendous lack of Latino characters in American television. This leaves millions of Americans with no substantial representations that they can relate to, or form an identity off of. Instead, Latinos are forced into believing they are not important enough to merit TV roles and perhaps not really be American at all. This research was a content analysis of 79 scripted shows that aired through 2011-2015 to determine how often Latinos came out and how they were portrayed. Results showed that they appeared an average of six minutes on screen and they were generally depicted as criminals. Additionally, four focus group interviews were conducted, and participants also responded that shows tend to stereotype minorities while they showed White characters as authority figures. Both content analysis and focus group interviews found that Latinos lack strong representation in American television.

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Thanks also go to my friends and colleagues, especially Victoria Mancha for helping me in conducting those focus group interviews—it seems like a dream to me know, being in a small room with several students while we asked questions about Latino representation on TV. Thank you, also, to the department faculty and staff for making my time at Texas A&M International University a great experience. I also want to extend my gratitude to the Office of Graduate

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Finally, thanks to my mother and father for their encouragement. You have probably heard me complain more than I would like to admit; thank you for always supporting my education.

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INTRODUCTION

In American television, we see White faces and we hear White viewpoints or perspectives. You flip the channel to one network and you see White middle to upper class characters. After turning to another network you see the same thing. After searching for some time, you finally come cross a program that features a Latino character. You sit and watch only to have that Latino character disappear as their minute of airtime comes to an end. When you are about to give up, you strike gold when another Latino character appears that seems to be important. But as you begin to pay closer attention to the show, you realize that the Latino on TV is actually a drug lord that just happens to be the target of a CIA group composed of an almost all White team. You feel defeated as a member of the Latino community in America that prefers English-speaking programming when faced with the very limited set of choices. While this may seem innocuous to some, it cannot be denied that such TV representations perhaps have, while not necessarily harmful repercussions, subconscious effects that make Latinos distance themselves from their own culture and racial identity in order to pursue and construct another identity that consists of White characteristics disguised in the form of American traits—all while a conceptualization of Latinos being insignificant, poor, and often criminal is perpetuated.

While American television will be the main focus of this research project, it is also worth mentioning that this type of pattern is seen not only in TV but also in films and print news. Rarely one will find an American film that centers on a Latino character or one that does not represent them as villainous or as sexual objects. In American news, it is strikingly similar in that all stories show White people and focus on them; there are no stories about Latinos (about their

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This thesis follows the model of *Latino representation in primetime television: A content analysis.*

plights, accomplishments, or anything) except about crimes committed about Latinos and issues surrounding illegal immigration. Something else that is troubling is that this kind of bias preference for Whites and middle to high-income families is also seeping into Latin America itself.

This has become their target audience because perhaps this is what an American is seen to be, White and having a moderate to high flow of income. This very same pattern can be seen when it comes to American programming with sitcoms, drama series, or even animated cartoons. There is a persistence to neglect characters of color or of distinct backgrounds from the norm (which has been White since the genesis of television broadcasting in the 1950s). Even when it comes to shows that cater to a specific racial group or minority group (e.g. "narrowcasting"), there is a disconnect from the target audience and an underlining message that preserving one's ethnic identity while living in the United States is often difficult since people of uncommon backgrounds (not White, heterosexual, or middle to high income) need to compromise their identities in order to blend into the "American" (White, middle class lifestyle) way of life. It is this underrepresentation and unwillingness of letting go, even some part, of our ethnic identity that causes internal conflict within those Americans that do not match up with the mainstream norm.

In order to begin to understand this dilemma of under representation in American television, we must take into account several key theoretical concepts. In-group theory, the first of these concepts, states that people tend to want to side with the "in group," the popular group, because it is the biggest and likely the most favorable for the members. Similarly, social identity theory states that our identities are constructed and affected by how our social groups (Latino, Black, Asian, lower income, gay, etc.) are portrayed and viewed by others, as much as how we

portray them and understand them. Furthermore, moral development theory, states that we cannot form accurate and morally correct judgments on others unless we can real knowledge and experience with the other group. Lastly, cultivation theory argues that people take what they see or hear in media and accept it as truth. If something is presented in a certain format over an extended period of time, people come to believe it and operate under those concepts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Underrepresentation of Latinos within Television Programming: A Critical History

Beginning with the work of filmmaker and audience researcher Frances Negron-Muntaner, I would like to point out a contradiction that undergirds this entire research project: despite the Latino population skyrocketing in the United States we still do not see a proportionate percentage of representation in English speaking shows (Negron-Muntaner, 2006). Negron-Muntaner argues that although Latinos have Spanish speaking channels, this are not a consolation for the exclusion from mainstream English media (Negron-Muntaner, 2006). Additionally, she mentions that even when Latinos do appear on television or on film, those roles are generally stereotypical and inclined to be more negative, i.e. criminals, as concluded from several studies. This underrepresentation is even seen in the news where Latinos are almost never the anchors in English speaking news shows (Negron-Muntaner, 2006).

Negron-Muntaner claims that a lack of representation in the workforce within the TV industry is responsible for the skewed proportions of Latinos on-screen. She argues that for many years Latinos made up less than 5% of the workers in the industry—including writers, directors, and producers (Negron-Muntaner, 2006). It is interesting to also note that Latinos make up a large portion of American media consumers, yet they do not have a stronghold on the industry because of the lack of Latinos that might be able to help represent their population in English speaking mainstream media (Negron-Muntaner, 2006)

An example of potential cultural impacts of underrepresentation of minorities in American TV can be found in a study by Megan Strom, which focuses on the social hierarchies in print media. In this piece, she tackles race representation in news, stating that it is important to consider minorities [those unrepresented] because of their potential to reach audiences (Strom,

2014). She continues by mentioning that in the United States, the majority has asserted itself the dominant group by representing not only themselves, but also minorities--Latinos, Blacks, Asians, etc. (Strom, p.26, 2014). As a result, news works for the dominant group and plays down information regarding that "other" because it's not White. Additionally, when information about the minority is provided, it's typically negative information used to reinforce the belief that non-White people are bad and should not get representation. Strom calls this modern colonial repression, alluding to colonial times where the White people either enslaved or edited out the Native Americans and Blacks (Strom, 2014, p. 233). In the end, we are left with the unequal ruler (Whites) and the unwilling subordinate (non-Whites); this unfair system of news reporting is now adopted by other countries-- Mexico is one of those countries.

Primetime television also repeats similar patterns to print and television news. But does it really matter how often Latinos appear on TV shows, or how they are portrayed? As Dana Mastro and Bradley Greenberg have remarked in their own studies: "invisibility of minority characters on TV alongside alleged discriminatory practices at the networks have commissioned internal investigations…findings indicted that depictions of minorities were both infrequent and stereotypical" (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). For this study, they chose to find out how often minorities (with a concentration on Latinos) appeared on primetime American television (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). They created a content analysis that consisted of coding several variables (physical appearance, behavioral characteristics, appearance characteristics, and conversation characteristics) using a week long worth of shows from major U.S. TV networks like ABC, NBC, CBS, etc.—these networks combined held upwards of 60% of audience views at the time (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Their hope was that they would find a TV representation percentage that at least matches the Latino population of the United States (of the time, which

was 1996). Latinos made up 11% of the U.S. population back in 1996; however, after the research rendered results, it turned out that Latinos only made up 3% of the TV character representations (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Out of all the shows, Latinos rarely appeared at all. Mastro and Greenberg did find a potential silver lining to this; Latinos tended to have attractive physiques and most came from middle to high-income families. However, this phenomenon could be interpreted as a form of negligence to Latinos from other social classes and all types of physiques (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). African Americans, which had 16% representation in primetime television while only making up 12% of the U.S. population were still negatively portrayed compared to Whites and Latinos (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000).

These results raise the question of why Latinos would have such a low representation on primetime television. Mastro and Greenberg offer a few theories for this: first, some Latinos already identify with the Anglo/White characters in television, so there is no need to bring in characters that are Latinos. By keeping the White characters, they are bringing in White viewers as well as Latino viewers. Bringing in Latino characters could make networks lose White viewers, which make up the largest portion of the U.S. population. Secondly, the U.S. has Spanish language networks that have mostly, if not all, Latinos on their shows (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). Perhaps the need for Latino representation in American TV is not as important? This is contestable though, as those Spanish language networks do not necessarily bring forth American identity and it could be debated that they might even be causing a separation of sorts between non-Latinos and Latinos in America.

Mastro and Elizabeth Behm Morawitz conducted the same study, six years after the initial version. The purpose of the second version of the study was to determine if Latinos appeared with more frequency now that the Latino population had increased to the largest

minority in America. They replicated their content analysis, now with two weeks' worth of shows from the same networks, and again looked for similar characteristics (Mastro & Morawitz, 2005). Mastro and Morawitz draw upon *cultivation theory* and the implications it could have when Latinos are underrepresented and portrayed negatively (Mastro & Morawitz, 2005). Their results turned up that Latinos were still largely underrepresented in primetime American television— Latinos only made up 3.9% of the TV characters, less than one percent increase since 1996. White and Black characters were still dominating TV shows (Mastro & Morawitz, 2005). In addition to this, Mastro and Morawitz noticed that negative stereotypes among the Latino characters still persisted. This included "hot" Latina/os that sought sex and romance often during the show, as well as Latina/os that were uneducated and ignorant to the modern world they lived in and mostly had thick accents (Mastro & Morawitz, 2005). The researchers provided some opinions as to how these stereotypical characters still managed to survive after all these years, and that is that television provides *hegemonic representations of Latinos*, instead of letting the audience question them and form their own thoughts on it (Mastro & Morawitz, 2005). This is alarming if we take *cultivation theory* into consideration. *Social identity theory* could also shine light on this issue, as the dominate group (in-group) tends to attribute negative characteristics on the out-group, in this case Latinos. Fortunately, though, Mastro and Morawitz did find another silver lining— some shows challenged these negative stereotypes of Latinos by providing good role models for Latinos. *The George Lopez Show* was one of those shows.

As we start to take this in, the gravity of the issue begins to take hold and pull us towards an undiscussed reality: Latinos make up the second biggest racial group in the United States, yet they are unfairly represented by people who do not know or understand the lives of Latinos. This leaves the door open to possible biases and negligence to fully hear these news stories from

members of the minority groups before reporting on them. Unfortunately, this leads to the silencing of the thousands and millions of people that do not fit the race requirement for media representation. However, it could also be that this unequal representation is a product of American style of reporting that is being adopted purposely or coincidentally by White or wealthy populations in order to maintain a self-serving system that perpetuates its own interests.

Theoretical Models: In-Group Theory, Social Identity, and Cultivation

In a study on race and ethics in news production researcher Renita Coleman makes the observation that journalists tend to portray minorities, especially Blacks, in an overly harsh and negative light (Coleman, 2011). The reasoning for this is not easily understood as racism as there are many theories to take into consideration. Coleman focuses her discussion on *in-group theory*, a concept that says that people are constantly seeking to be part of the majority or the "best" group that will help them maintain or higher their status and self-esteem (Coleman, 2011). It could be that TV media works in this way by keeping the light on White issues, while also bashing or neglecting non-White situations and concerns. This theory also does its part in excusing the lack of minority representation by saying that everyone is simply seeking acceptance. Coleman could be right about the "powerful" creating a culture that allures others into wanting to be a part of it. Reporters cannot possibly join this powerful, and subsequently tempting group if they venture to report on minorities or poor populations. To do so would be a form of social suicide that could potentially hurt the reporter in the long run.

Coleman also mentions *moral development theory*, which simply states that people usually make decisions that benefit themselves, and that it is only once someone is intellectually and socially aware of their actions and consequences that they make high moral decisions (Coleman, 2011). Those high moral decisions are the ones that would potentially give notice to

non-Whites and lower income communities. Combining the two theories reveals that reporters and news stations only care to be seen well among the powerful because it could grant them entrance to that group's circle; because many reporters and news directors don't seem to think too much about their actions and consequences, low moral decisions are made. Latinos, Blacks, and all other minorities often go underrepresented.

Similar to Coleman's research, Mastro et al. (Mastro et al., 2009) set out to discover just how White audiences made decisions based on the news they watched that contained unfavorable elements (crime) conducted by both Whites and Blacks. Mastro hypothesized that Whites would be much harsher to the criminal when he/she was Black and more lenient when the criminal was White (both having committed the same crime) (Mastro et al., 2009). Mastro blames the news media for fueling this thought process by stating that the news has, over the years, presented Blacks as much more menacing and aggressive than White criminals— additionally, Mastro mentions that White women tend to judge Blacks much more harshly since they are female and do not have a commonality (having the same sex) with the Black criminals and most presented on the news are male (Mastro et al., 2009).

By forming separate groups of White males and females and using research deception (they were told that the research had to do with memory and recall about issues in the news), Mastro and colleagues found that although White women assigned the same amount of guilt to both the White criminal and Black criminal, White women felt that the Black criminal deserved a tougher prison sentence than those White women that were presented the stories of the White criminals. When the news reported that the criminal had committed crimes before, the women felt the Black person was guiltier than the White criminal (Mastro et al., 2009). White men, interestingly, assigned more guilt (but not a significant amount) to the White criminal; however,

they were much harsher with the prison sentence, feeling that the Black criminal deserved a way longer sentence than the White criminal that committed the same crime (Mastro et al., 2009).

All participants were debriefed on the experiment, and Mastro reflects on the need for the deception as participants might have lied and said that they would judge both criminals (Black or White) the same. However, through deception, participants answered more sincerely (Mastro et al., 2009). These are the effects of media portraying minorities in such a way that they become hateful and fearful to White people. Minorities have become so misrepresented that Whites now believe all the negativity that has been cast upon the people of color in the United States.

The idea of Blacks being judged more harshly by White audience members is not something new, however. In Thomas Ford's 1997 research on Black portrayals in American TV shows, he discovered that stereotypically Black characters tended to bring out more critical judgment on behalf of White viewers (Ford, 1997). Ford's research, which also concludes that minorities (in his research Black Americans) are depicted in humorously stereotypical or negative roles, set out to determine how television portrayals of Blacks had an effect on the perceptions of White audiences. This was methodized by forming two groups of White participants. One watched a comedy show that depicted Black characters as stereotypes the other watched a comedy show that did not depict Black characters as stereotypes (instead offering a neutral depiction). After watching the shows, both groups were told about an attack between roommates, one Black and the other White, when asked about their thoughts, those who viewed the stereotypical Black characters were quick to assume the attacker was the Black and judged the attacker more harshly. Those that saw the neutral depictions of the Black characters did not have harsh judgment to pass nor did they jump to conclusions about the attacker (Ford, 1997).

Ford's research hints at the *cultivation theory* as a possible reason for why White audiences became more harsh and critical after viewing stereotypically depicted Black characters on television. Since those participants saw Black people on TV as loud, boisterous, even obnoxious, it had an influence on how they thought about Black people (Ford, 1997). Perhaps those participants were not even aware of how they were influenced to think negatively about Black people because of that show, but nevertheless, it shaped their perception of Black people for the worse. Angelini et al. (Angelini et al., 2014) explores the deficiency of reporting on minorities in his research on the 2012 London Summer Olympics. In this study, over 6, 200 comments on athletes from the entirety of NBC's London Olympics coverage were coded into categories ranging from who it was directed at (which athletes—White, Black, Latino, etc.), what the comments mentioned (courage, power, intelligence, attractiveness, family background, etc.), to what they said when those athletes failed (Angelini et al., 2014). His results show a stark contrast between reports on White athletes and those on athletes of color. Angelini remarks that even when Black athletes outperform White athletes, there is a greater attention put on the latter (Angelini et al., 2014). Additionally, Angelini brings attention to the actual words that are being used to describe both the White athletes and the Black athletes, showing that White athletes generally get commended on their superior form and strength, but minorities (specifically Blacks) are simply called experienced or in some cases even "lucky" rendering the colored athletes as fortunate instead of talented (Angelini et al., 2014).

His results showed that indeed there was a larger percentage of comments being made on the White athletes (57% of comments were about a White athlete)—25% of comments were about Black athletes, 6% on Latino athletes, 1% on Middle Eastern athletes, and 1% for mixed race athletes. It is important to note that all the athletes involved in this study are American, and

only the Asian American athletes got the representation they justly deserved—approximately 11% of American athletes competing in the 2012 London Summer Olympics were Asian American, and approximately 11% of NBC comments focused on those 11% of Asian American athletes. In these Olympics, Black Americans and White Americans had approximately the same number of athletes competing (Angelini et al., 2014).

He also observes that there was more praise for White athlete's abilities and strength whenever they were successful in their events, but when it came to Black athletes and other minorities, their experience was attributed for their success, leading audiences to assume that they were successful only because of many years of practice versus actual talent and excellent ability (Angelini et al., 2014). Interestingly, when athletes failed in their endeavors, their lack of ability was blamed. This was true for all athletes of all races (Angelini et al., 2014). Although this study focuses on sports, it is still making a valid example on the underrepresentation of minorities and the less than flattering comments that are made on them.

Journalism researcher Don Heider makes similar observations in a study he conducted. Once a reporter himself, Heider sought to find out why states and cities with primarily non-White populations still reported and even used White anchors in their newsrooms (Heider, 2000). Heider focused intently on Hawaii, a state in which he was a reporter, and realized something that had never really occurred to him: almost everyone in TV journalism was and still is White even though Hawaii isn't. Through qualitative research and searching up previous information on the matter, Heider found what he felt was the answer. The news is owned by Whites who hire other Whites and only occasionally hire a minority to play the part of the anchor, even then the minority is usually mixed with White and/or is handsome/beautiful (Heider, 2000). Heider mentions that this is going to continue unless someone breaks the paradigm and allows a high

moral decision making minority be a director or manager of a news station. He also urged for the education of these matters in order to bring awareness to younger people who might begin to feel neglected and misunderstood by TV news and related forms of media (Heider, 2000).

More and more people are being led to think that the 21st century U.S. is a "post racial" one that no longer takes race into consideration (Khanna & Harris, 2015). Researchers Khanna and Harris have started a movement to educate young adults in media literacy because it will help them better understand what is going on in their nation. The idea that the United States is over racism and that we truly are all equal is a very noxious concept that in actuality hurts minorities more than ever before (Khanna & Harris, 2000). This leads minorities to a dormant state in regards to TV media that does not allow them to see that they are still largely underrepresented. In their education programs, Khanna and Harris show different TV media to college students and have them spot what is wrong, for example crimes involving minorities that only have Whites giving information, or sitcoms that have an all-White cast despite the fact that the show is set in cities that are heavily populated by non-Whites (Los Angeles, New York, etc.) (Khanna & Harris, 2000). These researchers feel that this represents a form of continued White dominance that helps keep the nation looking White while completely negating non-Whites and their needs.

Mastro et al. continued their examination of the impact of social identity theory by testing how White audiences reacted to reading TV pilot scripts for an upcoming show. These scripts created by the researchers for the sake of the experiment, consisted of either a Latino character that was negatively depicted (lazy, stupid, corrupt, etc.) or a White character that was negatively depicted with the same bad attributes (Mastro et al., 2008). Mastro et al. hypothesized that Whites will judge the script with the negative depictions of Whites harshly but approve of the

script with the negative depictions of Latinos. Additionally, she believed that Whites would feel a blow to their self-esteem after reading the script that represents them badly However, they will feel a rise in their self-esteem after reading the script that represents Latinos in that negative light (Mastro et al., 2008). In her second study for the same research, Mastro hypothesized that White participants would focus more on the White characters of the show than the non-White characters—therefore showing that Whites have a preference for their own race over other races (Mastro et al., 2008).

Both hypotheses proved correct, as results of surveys given to Whites after reading the fake TV script showed that Whites focused more on the White characters and how they—the participants themselves—fit into the whole story or narrative (Mastro et al., 2008). Furthermore, White participants did demonstrate lower levels of self-esteem when they read the script that portrayed them with negative qualities, while participants in the group that read the script that targeted Latinos as negative characters, reported feeling better about themselves (Mastro et al., 2008). Mastro mentions that when your ethnic group, your in-group, is represented well in comparison to other races or ethnic groups, you tend to feel better about yourself by default (Mastro et al., 2008).

As this study demonstrates, it can have a detrimental effect on viewers to see their own racial group be seen as the constant fool or villainous tyrant in a world of television programming that does not seem to be incorporating changing demographics. We look to television to find ourselves and to help us form or strengthen our identity, but all American TV does to the Latino viewer is hurt them and force them to find connections that are either subpar or out of our own race— having to identity with White characters in order to build up our identity and self-worth.

Looking further into the power of *social identity theory* and *in-group theory*, researcher Christopher McKinley, along with Dana Mastro and Katie Warber, set out to test the influences of both (McKinley et al., 2014). He asserts that watching one dominant group on television— which would be the in-group, White people—can make minorities, non-Whites, feel left not. Meanwhile, Whites develop stronger self-esteem by seeing themselves being represented as smart or brave or anything else that can be considered wholesome (McKinley et al., 2014). The possibility of an out-group member choosing to identify with the in-group (Whites) exists, but it is much more likely that the out-group members will seek more positive depictions of themselves; interestingly enough, White in-groupers do not develop negative attitudes towards non-Whites because they focus more on themselves and feeling good about themselves affects their judgment, making Whites more kind in their opinions of others (McKinley et al., 2014).

In his study, McKinley sought to determine if positive exposure of out-groupers (Latinos) had an effect on Whites when determining which they preferred better among professional athletes (McKinley et al., 2014). White participants were told about the talents of the Latino athletes, but in the end, they still chose the White athletes as the superior ones in their own opinion. Meanwhile, a group of Latina participants were told and affirmed of the talents of Latin musical performers, and when asked to determine who was better between the Latina performers and the White performers, they chose the Latinas (McKinley et al., 2014). This helps to prove that media exposure and positivity has an effect on Latinos but not on Whites who still preferred their own group even after being told of the good attributes of the Latin athletes. Interestingly, during a pilot run of his experiment, McKinley had a group of twenty Latinas judge and rank Whites and Latinos on traits like intelligence, athletic ability, musical talent, etc. (with no media exposure or affirming of one's talents over the other beforehand). He discovered that the Latinas

ranked both their own group and the Whites as equal— there was no significant differences (McKinley et al., 2014).

While there is no one solid reason as to why Whites still considered/ranked themselves higher than Latinos in athletics, even after being told that Latinos were talented in baseball, we can theorize that because media has traditionally favored Whites, they still sustain a strong self-esteem and feeling of importance. It is this unbalanced media representation that perhaps renders minorities unbiased when it comes to attributes and talents but makes Whites biased as they have always dominated media: TV, movies, radio, etc.

In another study that focused on the social influence, specifically *in-group theory*, researchers Uri Hertz et al. wanted to determine how strongly the influence of a group is on the individual opinion (Hertz et al., 2015). Hertz theorizes that individual opinions (those created alone without any outside stimuli) are typically more accurate than group influenced opinions since group influenced opinions are warped to benefit the group itself and is therefore biased (Hertz et al., 2015). In his experiment, Hertz et al. formed two groups—controlled and experimental—to determine if those in the influenced group (controlled) would follow popular opinion even when they suspected it was wrong versus those in the individual minded groups (experimental) (Hertz et al., 2015). After the visual oddball search task was completed, it resulted that those in the individual groups made far more accurate assessments than those that were influenced incorrectly (Hertz et al., 2015).

Looking at television depictions of Latinos from this perspective, we can see that television representations of Latinos and their little and negative depictions; people slowly start to accept that Latinos are not a part of our American culture, or worse, they are inferior to Whites and Blacks, which invalidates the U.S.'s second biggest ethnic group. Thanks to TV's large

influence over people, people are not always allowed the chance to formulate and create their own opinion on Latinos based on their own life experiences, something commonly called moral development, which occurs with time and exposure to other people other than our own race or ethnic group.

In the end, though, there still needs to be way more attention being put on the Latino community when it comes to television representations and portrayals. There are so little shows dealing with Hispanics while there are many about the Black community, which is no longer the largest minority group. Alexis Tan from Texas Tech University offers some insight as to why there hasn't been a major change. In a quantitative study, which consisted of calling and asking specific questions to Black adults and Mexican American adults (average age 40 years old), Tan discovered that more Blacks were dissatisfied at the lack of positive portrayals of Black characters than the Latino participants were for the Latino characters (Tan, 1978). Tan also reveals that there was a correlation between lack of education (no high school diploma or college education) and acceptance on what was on television; more Latinos lacked an education in comparison to their Black counterparts (Tan, 1978). Although this study is old, it still shines light on areas that need to be discussed; education is most definitely an important role in other concerns, and media rejection and acceptance is not the exception. Education does play a part in our exposure to other races and culture, which allows for good moral development as the theory dictates.

In an attempt to escape all the negative and limited appearances of minorities on television, some people have decided to turn to the internet—specifically the website YouTube, which allows users to create their own videos and upload them to be seen by all. However, researchers Lei Guo and Summer Harlow (Guo & Harlow, 2012) investigated the content on

YouTube by completing a content analysis on 150 of the most viewed videos—containing minorities and Whites—on the site and discovered that stereotypes were still perpetuated by the users. Interestingly, these videos are self-made by the users, meaning that Latinos, Blacks, and Asian-Americans are all reinforcing their own negative stereotypes for entertainment purposes and to get more viewers (Guo & Harlow, 2012).

This research showed shocking results: the majority of the videos with minorities as the protagonists (the users) contained negative stereotypes—just the Latino videos alone showed that 99% of them contained some form of negative stereotypes (Latinos jokingly speaking poor English, talking about drugs and making other criminal references, joking about being illegal immigrants, or Latinas presenting themselves as over-sexualized) (Guo & Harlow, 2012). The videos with Black and Asian Americans were not much better, showing Blacks as thugs that only listened to rap music and Asians as very techy nerds that did not possess good social skills (Guo & Harlow, 2012). Guo also discovered that only a small percentage of those most viewed videos actually attempted to challenge stereotypes of minorities (Guo & Harlow, 2012). Unsurprisingly, the videos with the negative stereotypes received the most views and "likes" (viewers can "like" a video by pressing a thumbs up to show the video maker that they enjoy/agree with the video); videos that tried to challenge minority stereotypes received fewer views in general (Guo & Harlow, 2012).

Guo's research shines a light on audiences' want to see minorities as caricatures instead of real people that do not fit into the stereotypes society has created for them. Even minorities themselves have begun to reinforce their own negative stereotypes for the sake of attention and recognition. While these minority users might be doing their videos with entertainment in mind, they neglect to notice that they are presenting self-defeating images of themselves to the world—

this can make it easier for members of other races to also believe and expect those stereotypes. Lei Guo mentions that it cannot be certain if viewers of these videos fully believe what they see or if they fully understand that it is a joke, but regardless, it is being watched and considered good compared to videos that challenged those negative depictions (Guo & Harlow, 2012).

Shifts in Latino-Oriented Programming

A recent study by John Markert also examined the representations of Latinos in American television, particularly the way in which negative stereotypes could be shaping peoples' opinions on Latinos. This study stresses the effects of what he called "subtle stereotypes" that tend to be overlooked but have a significant impact on how people think about other people; for example, never showing a Latino working a job in a show could lead viewers to think Latinos do not like to work or cannot find jobs. Markert set out to assess Latino depictions by analyzing *The George Lopez Show*, a show that at the time held approximately 7 million viewers every week (Markert, 2007). His qualitative study, which consisted of watching episodes with university students and asking questions afterwards, rendered interesting results.

To start off with, *The George Lopez Show* makes a clear statement to name the Hispanic characters as either Mexicans or Cubans (the two Latino groups that primarily appear in the show). Hence the show never generalizes the Latino experience (Markert, 2007). However, Markert reveals that the show was riddled with stereotypes, some negative, but it cleverly uses this as comedic relief in order to not offend. Additionally, all the stereotypical commentary came from the Latino characters themselves (Markert, 2007). Markert mentions that this practice is meant to disarm these negative stereotypes in order to move above them. An example from the show would be George Lopez calling his mother a "lazy Mexican." Latino viewers will laugh because this is something often used by other races to describe Latinos, and in this case, the

mother character is shown to actually be hard working proving the stereotype a lie. Looking at the study in more depth, we see some potential issues.

Specifically, the question of language provided a lacunae in Market's analysis. Characters in *The George Lopez Show* rarely spoke Spanish, and when they did speak Spanish, their Spanish was usually broken or said in a sudden outburst of anger (Markert, 2007). Markert attributes this to the show attempting to prove that Latinos *can* speak English; however, it leaves us wondering what exactly is being lost in order to fit into American society. In another instance, George Lopez opts to hire a couple of immigrants from Mexico to fix his house. The two men sported tattoos, dressed poorly, and spoke in broken English. George asks for their price, and they answer, "Ten cases of beer…that's where the money is gonna go anyway" (Markert, 2007). Here we see a rather bleaker portrayal of non-American Latinos while also clearly drawing a line between them and American Latinos (Markert, 2007). Markert praised *The George Lopez Show* for fighting back against negative stereotypes for Latinos, but it is quite evident that the show caters to only a particular group within the Latino community.

Guillermo Avila-Saavedra's critical analysis (Avila-Saavedra, 2010) of the television show *Ugly Betty* offers a useful rejoinder to Markert's research by centering on the struggle of Latino characters to play the part of an American while also playing the part of a Latino that's tied to their Latino identity (Avila-Saavedra, 2010). Betty Suarez, the show's titular character, is a Mexican American living in New York, NY who is trying desperately to create a sustainable career in the fashion industry, however, she quickly finds it difficult when others (non-Hispanic) refuse to accept her because of what she is—"a fish out of water" (Avila-Saavedra, 2010). Avila-Saavedra continues to explain that Betty has strong ties to her Mexican family, their food, music, traditions, and religion. As a result, this Hispanic-ness envelopes her and makes it difficult for

others to see anything else. An example of this is the first episode where Betty is wearing a poncho with bright colors in a Mexican style with the word Guadalajara stitched across it. After receiving ugly looks and insulting remarks, Betty begins to learn that being a proud Latina can have its drawbacks in America (Avila-Saavedra, 2010). She even hesitates to bring non-Hispanic friends over to her house, in later episodes, because she is afraid of what they'd think of her Mexican family and home.

Avila-Saavedra does not provide a resolution to this issue encountered in the show, but instead poses the question of whether it is possible for Latinos to remain loyal to their background and Latino identity while also being loyal to their American identity. If the show proves anything, it is that it is possible to be both, but one has to keep and maintain a delicate balance between being Latino and also American.

In the last few years, there has been a marked increase in TV networks that cater to newer generations of Latinos that do not quite identify as American but also do not quite identify as Latino. In his investigation on the matter, researcher Christopher Chavez examines in detail one of these networks: Mun2, a music and lifestyle network that blends English and Spanish (Chavez, 2015). Chavez wondered just what these networks seek from their Latino viewers: money through views, or perhaps a way to transition young Latinos into other networks that own Mun2-- more American networks (Chavez, 2015).

Chavez begins by explaining that the network's origins were based on the idea of helping American Latinos not become "too gringo." It was meant to help Latinos keep in touch with their culture and identity; however, Chavez's investigation of the network showed that the network was owned by Telemundo, which is owned by NBC and Comcast (Chavez, 2015). These networks were urged to create something for the Latinos of American, something that made use

of the Spanish language and revolved around Mexican culture- Mexican culture because over 63 percent of the Latinos in the U.S. are of Mexican descent (Chavez, 2015). The network, which airs both American shows that can be found in Mun2's parent network and Spanish shows, became a huge hit. Chavez concludes that money was behind the movement and not actually to help Latinos find a place for themselves; he also concludes that these networks could be helping or hurting viewers as it neither promotes culture nor demotes it (Chavez, 2015).

It would seem that the need for Latino viewers is well understood by TV executives, but they only end up helping themselves by masquerading shows and even entire networks as for Latinos, but it's all a concoction of mixed messages and no sustenance for real culture and identity.

So then, what happens in the viewers' minds that makes them accept these stereotypes and underwhelming representations? This is the other important factor that needs to be taken into consideration in this research—what makes the Latino audiences indifferent to their own ethnic representation on American TV? Researcher David Morley, along with his many academic influences, argues that audiences do not solely receive TV messages and accept them as truth; most of the time there is a negotiation in the viewers' minds that helps them understand and either accept or reject the ideas—and subsequently ethnic representations on TV media (Morley, 1980). In his study, Morley theorizes that audience members do one of three things when they watch television: accept it, oppose it, or negotiate its content. Morley used focus groups that consisted of a diverse group of people: Black, White, conservative, liberal, middle income, low income, educated, no education, etc. By doing so, Morley was able to find patterns and correlations between acceptance, opposition, negotiations of messages and demographics (Morley, 1980).

With the help of a news program, *Nationwide*, Morley observed and discovered that viewers that were not college educated, White, and identified as conservative tended to accept and agree with everything that was being shown to them, even when they did not particularly like what they saw (Morley, 1980). Black audiences, most of which were immigrants, were quick to reject what they saw in the news program, citing that that show was not for them because it did not mention Black people. It is important to note that although the Black participants rejected most ideas in the show, they did pay closer attention to one news package that focused on a part of town that they were from (Morley, 1980). Lastly, Morley observed that White participants with college education, and who mostly identified as liberal, tended to negotiate the information being presented to them. They were the most critical about the presenters, the news package itself, and how it was being delivered. Even though they rejected some parts of what they saw, they were able to accept what they felt was accurately presented (Morley, 1980).

Drawing on this approach, we can begin to theorize what is happening to Latinos watching American television. Perhaps it is those with no college education and with conservative ties that simply accept the negative representations of their own Latino people. On the other hand, Latinos with stronger ties to their own culture and origins reject English speaking American television and therefore do not have qualms about underrepresentation of Latinos or negative portrayals of Latinos. Going further into this particular group, it could be possible that they prefer Spanish speaking American programming (since they cannot understand or identify with English speaking Latinos) where Latino underrepresentation is not going to be a problem. That leaves the college educated Latinos as the only ones that might recognize an unfairness for Latinos in English speaking American television. However, this is a small group of people—only 15% of Hispanics in the United States have a bachelor's degree or higher (PewResearchCenter,

Krogstad, 2016). If 85% of Latinos are either indifferent or accepting of underrepresentation and negative stereotypes of Latinos, then this could potentially shine light as to why American TV has neglected to share the flattering spotlight with American Latinos.

Theoretical Justification for Research Questions

Looking back on the literature, a few theories become important for understanding the impact of media representations on underrepresented or stereotyped populations on audiences. This section will expand briefly on a few of these theories in order to draw out salient elements. *In-group theory*, which as mentioned earlier, states that people tend to want to be part of a group—usually the biggest/most popular group—since people find it easier and safer to follow popular ideas rather than create their own. Consequently, when people don't fit into or join in with the in-group, they are considered the out-group and are often shunned or antagonized for not sharing the same ideals as the in-group. Applied to this research, the in-group would be represented by the White representation on television as it is the biggest and most popular. Those that watch television will develop and begin to share the same ideals as the White characters in the shows, and because there is very few Latino characters, they will constitute the unpopular out-group. Even though the out-group is seen as the odd one out, they too, have a place in American TV; similarly, the Whites should not represent all of the in-group.

In similar vein to *in-group theory, social identity theory* will also be looked into and used for this research and its purposes. *Social identity theory* states that an individual's identity is based on how their social group (race, social-class, sexual orientation, level of education, etc.) is portrayed and perceived by society. When a group is portrayed positively, we can create positive identities, but when our social group is frequently targeted as ignorant, violent, or simply inferior to others, it can cause stress on that social group and hurt the development of an individual's own

identity. As it was mentioned in Mastro's et al. study on racism and social identity, sometimes members of that frequently targeted social group (for example, Latinos) might want to identity with another group (often Whites as they are seen as the in-group) in order to avoid that stress and low self-esteem that commonly comes with being portrayed as inferior to others (Mastro et al., 2008).

In order to help work these first two theories together, I will turn to discussing *moral development theory* that argues that people cannot develop an accurate sense of morality, especially for other social groups, until that person has become autonomous and experiences things on their own—meaning that that person does not follow the mindset and ideals of an in-group that could potentially influence the individual to think and perceive incorrectly (Elliott, 1991). Additionally, that autonomous individual needs to become familiar with the other in order to develop sophisticated opinions that accurately represent the other; Elliott gives an example of a man who does not play tennis, he can easily accept any opinion on this because he does not know anything about it—positive or negative. However, if the same man begins to so much as pick up a tennis racquet and begins to perhaps play or interact with tennis players, he'll become knowledgeable and able to develop higher moral opinions on tennis. Furthermore, now that he knows more (first hand because he is autonomous and chooses to make himself experienced) he will be able to negotiate others' opinions on tennis far better (Elliott, 1991).

Just like the example about the man who does not play tennis, people who do not know or interact with members of the Latino community can easily accept inaccurate representations of Latinos that they find on television. Also, since it can be presumed that TV writers and producers do not know Latinos enough to represent them accurately and numerically proportionately to the rest of the U.S. population, they will continue to portray them as ignorant or criminal or not at

all. Until we have Latino TV writers and producers or Whites that personally know and work with members of the Latino community, we will not see a positive change.

Lastly, and most important to this research, will be the *cultivation theory* that theorizes that the more people watch television, the more they believe what is on it. For people that do not get out much or know things from personal experiences, they gather their knowledge from what they see on TV. If it is something along the lines of Latinos being gang bangers that typically push drugs or act defiantly towards authority figures, then people will come to believe that this is true because it has come out often enough on television, and they do not personally know any Latinos that might help them negotiate these representations.

This theory will be the main focus for the research as it will help bring urgency to the lack and negative depictions of Latinos on American TV. All media has power, especially on those that do not have the experience with certain social groups and topics. Now that Latinos are the second biggest ethnic group in the U.S. (and growing), it is vital to get them the accurate representations they deserve, the same ones that Whites have had since the beginning of the media imperialism. To neglect or mistreat one social group that is American, is to mistreat any and all Americans—one must keep in mind that we are only as strong as our weakest members.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The initial inquiry that prompted this research was to determine how often Latinos appear in American television as of now, 2015. Additionally, how those Latinos that do appear on television are portrayed—positively (kind, smart, brave, etc.), negatively (ignorant, angry, abusive, etc.) or not given enough air time to fully form an opinion on. While a content analysis of American television can determine this, there is also the concern of how these depictions, or lack thereof, influence Latino viewers and whom they focus on in order to find identity.

Some of the things that this thesis intends to find out include how Latinos react to American television that does not include them in the programming. Do they reject shows that don't include Latino characters like David Morley observed in his research with the English Television news and the Black audience that stated they do not watch programming that does not involve their people or country (Morley, 1980)? Or do they adopt other characters of different races as their own and find no fault in lack of—or negative—representation of Latinos as Alexis Tan has observed in his research? The following are five research questions this thesis intends to answer. The first two will be answered via a content analysis and the other two will be answered through the focus group interviews.

RQ1: How often do Latinos appear in American television?

Through the analysis of TV programming, time will be measured to determine how long Latin characters stay on screen for air time. A timer was used to take into account the time in seconds and minutes that Latin characters stay active on screen.

RQ2: Of those times Latinos appear, how often are they portrayed positively or negatively?

Aside from the analyses of frequency and time, each Latino character will be evaluated based on criteria such as nationality, race (skin color), role, sex, age, education, occupation, etc. Positivity

is determined by having a higher education, a higher paying job, and a generally more pleasant (kind, friendly, helpful) disposition. Negativity is determined by having lower education (only high school diploma, no high school diploma), lower paying job or member of a criminal organization, and generally having an unpleasant (easily angered, dishonest, highly sexualized/seductive) disposition. Each criteria will be coded with its own significant code for easier statistic calculating.

RQ3: Who do Latinos identify with most when watching American television?

After watching a TV show that has Latino characters, focused group interviews that will consist of 6-10 Latino undergraduate students (aged 18 and over) will be asked who they most felt a connection with. Observations will made on who they identified with most, and this will lead to further questioning on their choices—if they chose the Latino character, why? Or if they choose a non-Latino character, why?

RQ4: How do Latinos feel about the representation of Latinos in American television?

After watching the TV show, the focus group will be asked about how they feel about the way the Latino characters were portrayed. Time on screen, roles, education, age, will be discussed and taken into account for this portion. Participants will be allowed to express their opinion on the depictions as either disagreeable or justified and why.

RQ5: Does education, generation, social status affect how Latinos feel about American television?

All student participants will be asked to fill out surveys to determine their education level (freshman, senior, etc.), generational status (1st generation Latino to be living in the U.S., etc.), social status (lower income, middle, high, etc.) will also be taken into account. All these

identifiers will be taken into consideration and paired with responses to find if a correlation exits between certain statuses and certain responses.

METHODS

For the content analysis portion of this research, exactly 79 shows (one show was cut from the bunch since it did not depict any Latino characters), all English speaking American television shows that had aired during the years 2011 through 2015, were analyzed and observed for several content: air time for Latin characters, age, nationality, occupation, education, role, etc. Shows were all found and watched from television websites and applications like Hulu, HBO Go, Netflix, Amazon, etc. Only one coder was used for this content analysis. These shows all appeared on television, cable and/or local network, at some point. All shows were watched from beginning to end to ensure that all seconds and minutes were recorded and accounted for. Some characters were Hispanic American and some were non-American Hispanics that still appeared on the programs; all were analyzed and accounted for. For the sake of this research, no sports programming or news programming was taken into consideration for the content analysis—only shows with scripted narratives were considered, this included animated shows. Additionally, absolutely no Spanish speaking shows were considered.

As part of the content analysis, a coding book was created for the purposes of encoding the information gathered from the television shows. Numbers were assigned to represent ideas and concepts like skin color, nationality, or TV role. Time was also recorded for the purpose of knowing how long the Latino characters appeared on screen.

For the date collecting on the shows, several online sites were utilized in order to watch and analyze the program for the appearance of Latino characters. Because the sites allow for playback and user control over the show, a thorough viewing and analysis was able to be carried out—when certain characters presented doubt on their national origin or occupation, the researcher reviewed the show again. Throughout the course of two months, all 79 shows (ranging

from sitcoms, dramas, to animated shows) were watched, and coded using a coding book that

assigned numbers to different variables—age, national origin, occupation, role, etc.—those codes

were arranged on SPSS, and each variable rendered statistical information.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The results for the content analysis revealed the following information. Based on all 79 shows that were taken into consideration for this analysis, and because those shows were American shows aired between the years 2011 and 2015, Latinos appeared an average of 337 seconds per show. That is roughly 6 minutes per show. Additionally, the average is curved since some shows had central Latino characters that took up more than 20 minutes of air time. Nevertheless, 6 minutes is the average time a Latino character gets in programming—not enough to fully develop the character and make a lasting impression on viewers.

In regards to genders for the Latinos characters, it showed that although there appears to be a little bit more male representation (57% of Latino characters were men), women were not far off with 43% representation. Nevertheless, this shows a male preference when it comes to Latino characters, something that has been echoed throughout television, as it seems that men have always had more of a presence in TV than women.

Table 1

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	41	51.9	56.9	56.9
	Female	31	39.2	43.1	100.0
	Total	72	91.1	100.0	
Missing	System	7	8.9		
Total		79	100.0		

Source: SPSS Frequencies Gender of Latino Characters

Now, when it came to the nationalities of the Latin characters, there was a large amount—38%-- of characters that, although undeniably Latino (spoke Spanish, dressed in a

typically non-American fashion, etc.), there was never a clear indication as to of what origin they were from. All these characters were labeled as unidentified Latinos or ambiguous Latinos—cliché characters that seemed to be fulfilling the role of a Latino without being fulling fleshed out. Normally, these characters were on screen for less than a minute (incidental characters as they were called for the purpose of this research). The second biggest Latino group represented were the Mexicans with 25% of Latino appearances being of Mexican origin. After this group, the number of other Latino characters dwindled to 7% and less for Latinos of Puerto Rican, Cuban, and South American descent.

Table 2

Nationality

	Nationalities	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unidentified	26	32.9	37.7	37.7
	Mexico	17	21.5	24.6	62.3
	Argentina	5	6.3	7.2	69.6
	Venezuela	5	6.3	7.2	76.8
	Cuba	4	5.1	5.8	82.6
	Colombia	4	5.1	5.8	88.4
	Puerto Rico	2	2.5	2.9	91.3
	El Salvador	2	2.5	2.9	94.2
	Brazil	2	2.5	2.9	97.1
	Barbados	1	1.3	1.4	98.6
	Chile	1	1.3	1.4	100.0
	Total	69	87.3	100.0	
Missing	System	10	12.7		
Total		79	100.0		

Source: SPSS Frequencies for Latino Nationalities

While it is good that Mexican Americans are getting a large portion of the Latino representation, it is also disheartening to see that so many other Latino groups are not getting the screen time and are being left out—sending an implicit message that perhaps they aren't as important or the ideal image of what a Latino might be. This can be the case for Puerto Ricans and Cubans, who make up quite a bit of the population in such areas as Florida and New York, yet they are heavily underrepresented in American television.

When looking at the age of the characters, one can see a significant percentage of them were middle aged (70%), with 27% having to be shared between the young adult group, mature adults, and teenagers. Children made up only 3% of all Latino appearances. This reveals a strong erasure of the younger Latino population (and older) leaving little representation for them. Not all Latino viewers that seek identity confirmation or validation are in the middle age group, it could even be argued that younger Latinos are much more likely to watch television that their middle age counterparts.

Table 3

Age		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Middle Aged Adult	48	60.8	69.6	69.6
	Young Adult	10	12.7	14.5	84.1
	Mature Adult	6	7.6	8.7	92.8
	Teenager	3	3.8	4.3	97.1
	Child	2	2.5	2.9	100.0
	Total	69	87.3	100.0	
Missing	System	10	12.7		
Total		79	100.0		

Source: SPSS Frequencies for Latino Ages

Results were a little more ambiguous and obscure when attempting to analyze education

levels: almost all of the Latino characters were not shown to be working in a job that might tell

of their educational background (high school graduate, college graduate, or post-graduate).

Additionally, there was never a moment when these characters discussed their level of education.

For the sake of not misjudging or assuming that the characters did not have an education, these

characters were coded as education unidentified. The following are the rest of the results.

Table 4

Education

Education		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unidentified	56	70.9	81.2	81.2
	College Education	6	7.6	8.7	89.9
	Some Secondary Education (Middle School/High School)	2	2.5	2.9	92.8
	Some College	2	2.5	2.9	95.7
	Post Graduate Education	2	2.5	2.9	98.6
	Secondary Education (High School)	1	1.3	1.4	100.0
	Total	69	87.3	100.0	
Missing	System	10	12.7		
Total		79	100.0		

Source: SPSS Frequencies for Latino Education

9% of Latino characters had jobs such as doctors, therapists, and lawyers that revealed

college education and post-graduate education. However, the results were still largely obscure.

This lack of confirmation leaves Latinos without the opportunity to reflect themselves, their

educational aspirations or accomplishments. Subsequently, this can lead to not only an inaccurate

portrayal of Latino people in the U.S. but to audiences believing this misinformation—including Latinos themselves. It is important to note that again, much like the ambiguity of the Latino characters' nationality, not having enough screen time—time to flesh out the characters— contributed to the inability to determine education for the Latin characters.

Connected to education levels, occupations for Latino characters were also analyzed. While there were a large number of characters unable to be identified in relation to their job (perhaps because most Latino characters were underdeveloped and lasted on screen for a very small about of time), a substantial percentage of Latinos were characterized as criminals; 34%. The following shows the percentages for all occupations.

Table 5

Occupations

Occupations		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Criminal	24	30.4	34.3	34.3
	Unidentified	18	22.8	25.7	60.0
	White Collar Worker (Professional Laborer)	14	17.7	20.0	80.0
	Blue Collar Worker (Manual Laborer)	8	10.1	11.4	91.4
	Housewife	3	3.8	4.3	95.7
	Unemployed	2	2.5	2.9	98.6
	Pink Collar Worker (Entertainment Laborer)	1	1.3	1.4	100.0
	Total	70	88.6	100.0	
Missing	System	9	11.4		
Total		79	100.0		

Source: SPSS Frequencies for Latino Occupations

After criminal and unidentifiable, White-collar worker came in at 20%; significantly higher than the 11% for blue-collar worker. Nevertheless, there still seems to be a big contrast between Latinos being depicted as criminals or not given enough time to even be given an occupational background story and Latinos being depicted in White and blue collar jobs. This marks another interesting difference, and that is that for the time, the largest percentage does not belong to the obscure unidentifiable category—it belongs to a negative category. It appears that if Latinos are not given enough airtime, they are being shown as the enemy/villain. Typically, that criminal Latino character is pitted against a White authority/hero character. These implicit ideas and images, when watched frequently on TV, can lead White audiences to perceive the Latino as the enemy, the criminal, while also making Latinos feel that they are destined for a darker path compared to their White counterparts. Additionally, this variable also makes it possible for Latinos to attempt to identify with White characters more since they do not identify, or wish to identify with the Latino (criminal) characters.

When it came to the actual roles that Latino characters get, things were a lot clearer, the results were much more noticeable. To put it simply, Latinos do not get assigned starring roles. 71% of roles for Latino characters are either incidental (roles where Latinos appear but only once in the show) or occasional (roles where Latinos occasionally appear—typically Latino characters that are special guests or side characters that appear sporadically depending on the episode and if they're needed). Very few of the characters had permanent parts as either protagonists or antagonists, although there some supporting Latino characters. These were rare and not the normal standard for television shows. In the case of being the main character of a TV series, it was the worst with only 4% of American shows having a Latino protagonist. The rest of the results are as follows.

Table 6

Roles

TV Roles		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Incidental Character	25	31.6	36.2	36.2
	Occasional Character	24	30.4	34.8	71.0
	Supporting Character (Protagonist)	9	11.4	13.0	84.1
	Antagonist	4	5.1	5.8	89.9
	Supporting Character (Antagonist)	4	5.1	5.8	95.7
	Protagonist	3	3.8	4.3	100.0
	Total	69	87.3	100.0	
Missing	System	10	12.7		
Total		79	100.0		

Source: SPSS Frequencies for Latino Roles on Television

Results also showed Latinos rarely play the part of the reoccurring character, such as supporting characters or protagonists. Additionally, Latinos have a greater chance of being cast as a main antagonist before being cast as the protagonist. However, having 71% of Latino characters in either incidental or occasional roles still does not allow Latinos the chance to see themselves frequently in American television. Only a small chance exists of seeing Latino characters on TV if someone were to turn on their TV and flip through their favorite channels.

Body types were also explored in this study, as physical traits constitute a part of identity as well. Results showed that most Latinos that appeared on screen were of average weight, while others were fit or in good health. This correlates with Mastro's study in which she discovered that most Latinos did in fact have better physiques than other non-Latino characters. However, this also brings forth the question of what happens to Latinos that do not have average weight bodies? Latinos with extra weight or little weight—the option of thin was also available, but no

TV show revealed a Latino character that was thin—might be inclined to think that they must be of a fit or average physique in order to qualify as good enough to be represented on television. Mastro does hint that the reason behind more fit, average bodies is that they make Latinos seem more attractive. However, this can sometimes lead to said fit Latino characters to be sexualized for the sake of gaining more viewers.

Table 7

Body Types

Body Types		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Average	29	36.7	42.0	42.0
	Fit (Healthy)	22	27.8	31.9	73.9
	Overweight	18	22.8	26.1	100.0
	Total	69	87.3	100.0	
Missing	System	10	12.7		
Total		79	100.0		

Source: SPSS Frequencies for Latino Body Types

Lastly, skin color was also observed and coded as part of the content. A substantial percentage (62%) of Latino characters could be described as being olive skinned (light brown to moderately brown skin tone). Medium White to light brown registered at 26%, leaving 12% to be divided between White (fair), dark brown, very White (pale), very dark brown (Black). This is interesting since Latinos are the only racial group that does not fit one race alone—many Latinos are Black and White just as much as they are olive skinned or brown. However, television does not put any (or as little as possible) emphasis on Latinos that are not brown or tanned. It appears that American television puts importance in color for races and they tend to focus on brown and tan for the color of Latinos, even though this is not the only color of Latinos.

Table 8

Skin Color

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Olive Skinned, Moderate Brown	43	54.4	62.3	62.3
	Medium White, Light Brown	18	22.8	26.1	88.4
	White, Fair	3	3.8	4.3	92.8
	Brown, Dark Brown	2	2.5	2.9	95.7
	Very White, Pale	1	1.3	1.4	97.1
	Very Dark Brown, Black	1	1.3	1.4	98.6
	Unidentified	1	1.3	1.4	100.0
	Total	69	87.3	100.0	
Missing	System	10	12.7		
Total		79	100.0		

Source: SPSS Frequencies for Latino Skin Colors

  The two groups that got neglected the most were the Latinos with White skin and Black, two groups that do exist in the Latino community but are not identified as Latino since viewers (or Americans in general) have come to view people with White and Black skin tones as exclusively non-Latino. This erroneously promotes the idea that Latinos all look the same, at least in the aspect of their skin color (light to moderately brown) thereby excluding Latinos that are White and Latinos that are Black. Such projections from TV representations do not allow the unity of races within the Latino community. Additionally, Black and White Latinos have to find identity within characters that are not Latino.

QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

For the portion of the qualitative research, some of the shows used in the content analysis—some that contained a part played by a Latino character and other shows that did not have a Latino character—were shown to four different focus groups that consisted of 6-10 undergraduate students. Most student participants were of Latin descent (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South American, etc.) and over 18 years of age. Student participants were asked demographic information that asked about their generational status, their social class status, and with what ethnic group they most identify with (White, Latino/Hispanic, Black, etc.). For the qualitative section of this research, a questionnaire was created to assess the student participants' Latino identity with questions that asked how long they have lived in the United States, what American generation they are (how many years their family has lived in the United States), with what Latino culture/group they identify (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South American, etc.), how much they identify with their Latino identity (do they speak Spanish with friends and family, do they celebrate holidays exclusive to their culture, do they typically eat cuisine from their country of origin, etc.), how often they watch American television (scripted shows).

This information was used in assessing how each participant responds to the questions. Student participants then got to watch the programs, clips of American shows that ranged from 6 minutes to 3 minutes. After they saw the clips, the questioning process started and lasted an average of about 1 hour and 30 minutes. Students were asked questions related to their perceptions on the Latino characters, such as "How were the Latinos portrayed in their segment of the show? How did they interact with the non-Latino characters? Did you feel your Latino identity and/or culture was accurately depicted in the segment with the Latino character?" Discussions were conducted based on these questions. Once the quantitative portion of the

research was acquired and analyzed further for more information, research shifted to focus on the

qualitative aspect by interviewing people, mostly Latinos, and learning their thoughts and

opinions on Latino representation in American TV. Four focus group interviews were conducted,

each comprised of 6 to 10 undergraduate students (ages ranging from 18 to 46) from Texas

A&M International University. In total, there were twenty-seven participants. All students

received extra credit for their participation in the focus group interviews, and they all signed

consent forms giving researchers permission to use their responses for this investigation. The

sessions lasted approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, in which participants were asked

demographic questions about themselves, their social class, American generational status, and on

their Latino identity in relation to television representations. It is important to know that in two

of the four sessions, there were participants that were not of Latin descent; one of the participants

was White and the other Black. Additionally, with the exception of one participant who

identified as lower income, all participants mentioned being from middle income families. The

majority of the participants were first generation Americans.

Participants were asked about how Latinos and other races were depicted in American

programming, and then after watching six clips from different shows—three clips were

considered popular/most watched (*The Big Bang Theory, The Walking Dead, and Modern

Family*) and the other three were not as viewed or popular (*Jane the Virgin, Broad City, and

Orange is the New Black*)—they were asked similar questions on how races were portrayed but

having the clips as reference for their responses. All sessions were recorded using an audio

recorder, and researchers also took down notes on notepads. Participants' names were withheld

and substituted with numbers, i.e. participant one was called P1 and S1 if the participant was

from the first session, so on and so forth. All responses were later analyzed for common themes

and patterns that were shared among the participants. The following are some of the themes found in the focus group interviews.

Spanish Language as a Link to Latino Identity

One of the first themes that emerged from the focus group interviews was related to participants and their ties to their Latino identity. Participants were asked how close they felt to their Latino identity, and while many (with the exception of the two participants who were not Latino) said they felt strongly tied to their Mexican/Latino identity, some mentioned feeling disconnected from the culture and identity because of their inability to properly speak Spanish.

P5-S1: "I actually, for the most part, don't really connect with it [Mexican identity] that strongly, just because I don't speak Spanish that well anymore."

P3-S1: "The first language I spoke was English. Everyone else in my family spoke Spanish, but I was the only one that spoke English, and now, I'm barely learning Spanish."

P3-S2: "I would say moderately [identify with Latino identity], just because I don't speak Spanish…as much as others."

P6-S2: "I would say moderately [identify with Latino identity]. My parents raised me with, you know, they're all from Mexican descent, but they didn't exactly raise me with the holidays, culture, but of course, there's still the behavioral manners that come from having a Mexican family, and I say moderately because as I grow older I want to attach myself more to their culture, and I have a boyfriend that lives in Monterrey, so I'm more exposed to that more than ever, so I say more moderately."

P4-S3: "Well, I feel it's there [Latino identity], but I'm not fully tied to it because my parents didn't raise me to understand Spanish. So, like, English was my first language, and Spanish is very hard for me to this day. And, uh, I'm getting better at it, but I mean, I wish I knew it, like, more fluently. So, yeah, I would definitely say moderately [tied to Latino identity]."

P1-S4: "In my case, I uh, I went to school over there in Mexico for many years, from secundaria (high school) all the way to universidad (university). And, um, when I started school over there, I didn't speak Spanish, so I guess I went there as a Mexican-American. I would say that although I am very familiar with, I'm fluent in Spanish, you know, and I'm familiar with all the different customs and traditions from Mexico. I wouldn't say I identity with the culture strongly; I would say that I somewhat identify with it."

These participants felt that since they did not grow up speaking Spanish and still do not know Spanish, they could not and cannot fully understand Latinos. They all still mentioned identifying as Latino, but they said there was a disconnection between them and other Latinos that do speak Spanish fluently. These responses seem to point to there being a strong link between the spoken language of an ethnic group and the ability to fully identify with that ethnic group.

In addition to language being an important factor to identifying as Latino, some participants mentioned not strongly being tied to their Latino identity because they do not practice common Latino (in this case Mexican) traditions and customs.

P2-S3: "I would say I fall somewhere in the middle; I used to not be as tied to it but living out of town for so many years, and being surrounded by people from different cultures, it made me want to be more in touch with mine."

P1-S3: "I mean, I fall somewhere towards the middle, I guess. I mean, I embrace it, but I don't practice or, like, show it."

P5-S3: "I would say I'm seventy five percent [connected to Latin identity] because at a very young age, I used to go to Mexico. We had family there, and we would go to the cemetery to visit loved ones that had passed away. So, that was a big part of me growing up, and in high school I kind of stopped going, after it started getting very bad over there, of course. But, there are some holidays that I don't really, like, celebrate, that I know of them. I don't really immerse myself into it, but I do love to watch Telenovelas. I think language was a big part of it because my grandparents, they spoke Spanish—I love them."

P5-S4: "I'm also familiar with the Mexican culture, but I don't celebrate it as much. I mean, I had a quinceanera (debutant ball for girls turning 15 years old) because I was the oldest, so I had to, had to have a quinceanera, not because I wanted one, but because I had to. And, I mean, yes, I'm familiar with the Mexican culture or whatnot, but we don't celebrate them as a family. But I feel that if my grandparents were still alive, we would be celebrating the Mexican culture more. I mean, they grew up over there in Mexico and then came to the United States; if they were still alive, we would be practicing La Rosca (circular pastry eaten on the Three King's Day), and…I don't even know, other Mexican…los Matachines (Native American dancing ritual)! But since they're not alive anymore, my mom is just not into that. We celebrate certain things but not the entire…Cinco de Mayo, Septiembre 16 (Mexico's Independence Day)."

These participants said that not being a part of the traditions and the celebration, in some cases even just visiting Mexico and their families over there, affected them by creating a schism between them and their Latino identity. The longer the participants went without being a part of those activities that are common for Mexicans, the more they lost connection with their Latino identity or Latinidad.

In summary, both language and traditions helped participants feel more Latino. These two allowed for participants to feel more as one with the rest of the Latino community, at least in terms of identity. Those participants that mentioned not having that strong link to the identity did not mention identifying as anything else (although some participants did mention identifying as just American); they still mentioned being Latinos but not fully embracing of that particular title that they nevertheless still use to call themselves.

Personality and Traits for Character Identification

Another theme found through the focus group interviews was that of identification with characters. Almost all participants, with the exception of one, mentioned that race and ethnicity did not play a part in identifying with TV characters. Instead of looking for characters with the same race as the viewer, the viewer looks at characteristics and traits in order to relate and/or identify with one of the characters from the TV shows they watched.

P5-S1: "For me, I love watching *Parks and Rec*, and I always identify with April. I have people literally tell me, 'You remind me of April.' Whenever I find my favorite character, I see myself in them and they do stuff that reminds me of myself, and I'll put myself in their shoes."

P6-S2: "For me, it's more personality. Like, I know a lot of people will see a Hispanic on TV and say, "That's me." Me first, I go for personality, so when someone is watching a show with me, they'll hear me say, "Me!" like twenty thousand times. I'll identify with the characteristics first."

P9-S2: "There's a character in a show called *Skam*, and his name is Isak, and I identify with him for the same reason P6 said. It's just his personality and the stuff he does, it reminds me of me so much, even though he's, like, a dude, and he's gay, it doesn't matter. I'm, like, 'I'm him!'"

P1-S2 "It's usually traits in situations. I'll be, like, I've been in that certain situation, you know? It's more like that."

P5-S3: "I'm sorry, but I'm a Kardashian fan. I am a die-hard fan; I've watched all of the seasons, like, over and over. And, uh, I guess [I identify with them] because of being outspoken, they're not afraid to be themselves. I like their style. I like Kourtney [Kardashian] because she's sassy."

P1-S3: "I don't know, I guess because I've been watching a lot of *Rupaul's Drag Race*, I consider myself like, um, Bianca Del Rio. She's outspoken, she's a bitch, but, like, she's the bitch you want to hate, but she's your mom. She's always there for you."

P5-S4: "Myself with *Grey's Anatomy*, Meredith. She has a hard time expressing her feelings, which is me. She'll only show her softer side to certain people she's close to. That's how I can relate to her. I don't really say, 'I love you' that much, only to certain people, so that's how I kind of relate to her because family is her main focus. And that's the reason…that's basically me right there."

Participants were quick to mention some of the characters or TV celebrities they most

identify with, and all of those were based exclusively on personality traits and not ethnicity. If

the viewer shared similar qualities as the TV character, then identification was established.

Regardless of race, it was possible to like and want to relate people on TV.

However, some participants did bring up an interesting perspective on race. They

mentioned how it became easier to relate to a character when and if they shared similar

personality traits and also shared the same race. For example, if you are a driven Latino, then it

will be easier to relate to and identify with a driven character that is also Latino on television.

P4-S3: "Well, like, *How to Get Away with Murder*, I can't remember her name, but she's, like, the only Mexican student that's in law school. Well, I like her because, I don't know, I like who she is. She comes from a Mexican background, and she's super smart, independent. I just, I can relate to that. And she's, like, pursuing her dreams without anyone stopping her; I like that."

P2-S4: "Well, like, when I was watching *Jane the Virgin*, I identified myself a lot with her because, not because she's pregnant or anything, but because of her culture. She was born in the United States, and she has family from…I don't know where they're from, but they're Hispanic. So I guess the things she did and being that she was a Hispanic, it made me feel like her."

P2-S4: "Well, I think in my case, I connect with Hispanic characters since I'm Hispanic. I've never connected with someone that's White or Anglo, or whatever."

On the other hand, there were those that also mentioned the problem with identifying with Latinos on TV, and the problem is the depictions themselves. One participant said it was difficult to relate to Latinos since they commonly come out as stereotypical and unflattering for viewers to proudly say they identify with them.

P5-S4: "Like with me, I can't relate to Hispanics because they're always making fun of Hispanics. So I'm just, like, 'No, that's not how all Hispanics act; we're not drug dealers, we're not house maids or anything like that'. So that's why I can't relate to them, but with *Grey's Anatomy*, I can relate to everybody—their struggle, the hard work, independency, I can relate towards that."

In almost all cases, no participant mentioned being like those Latinos portrayed on television; they also did not look at those Latino images to form identity or to relate to. Instead, everyone looked at personality and characters, never race or ethnicity. With the exception of one participant that said it was impossible for her to relate to non-Hispanic characters, all others did mention liking and identifying with TV characters of different races. Also worth mentioning again is that even though characteristics are what viewers look for to identify with others on TV, sharing the same race can help accelerate this process since there are more things in common between the audience member and the television character or celebrity. The more commonalities that the viewer finds between themselves and the television characters, the more likely they are to establish some connection that will help them form their identity or confirm their identity.

TV Influence on Our Perceptions of Others

The influential force of television was another theme found in the interviews as most participants had something to say about the power of television on our way of thinking and seeing the world around us. There was a lot of talk about hos TV helps us understand things and people we don't really know or regularly interact with. However, it was that same idea of helping

us understand that participants were quick to admit we cannot truly be sure this is how the real

world and its people are.

P6-S1: "I feel that to a certain extent it does. For example, for me, if they're talking or showing a Latino character, for example a Mexican American character, and I see the TV show, well you know that's not how we all are. Then again, if I see, for example, a British character, I'll be, like, 'Oh my god! They're like that.' And it's not like I know how they are because I'm not there [Britain]."

P3-S1: "Like when I went to England; all the England people when they knew I was from Texas, they were, like, 'Oh, do you ride horses and the cowboys and all that?'

P1-S2: "I think subconsciously, even if you don't think it does, it definitely does if you spend a lot of time watching television—I don't watch as much now as before. But, I think it could definitely have an impact on your world view, for sure."

P2-S2: "I think I'm aware enough to know, like, that it does have an effect in my life. And I see different things and people surrounding me, but I try to catch myself and not to judge them but getting to know them. Like, you find yourself relating real people to, like, characters you've seen on TV."

P6-S2: "I think it does have an effect, but, like, P2 and P1 were saying earlier, it does subconsciously affect the way you think. And for that moment, because when you watch something, you're projecting yourself in that reality. When you're watching *The Walking Dead*, you are in the apocalypse, so you're not thinking outside, you're taking that as the reality. And I feel once you're done, and you've checked out, you take it with a grain of salt. I feel, like, okay, this might be how they see whatever person or area, but that's not entirely the reality—you take it with a grain of salt."

P2-S3: "I think it plays a big role in how people perceive others, like perpetuating stereotypes. For people living in small towns that might not travel or come across different cultures, they might absorb that kind of thing. Not only that, but some more cosmopolitan people might absorb certain behaviors about other people and about other parts of the world."

Some participants also accused the news of abusing their influence over viewers by

framing certain stories or situations in such a way that participants will believe what the news

channel wants them to believe. Participants felt that if the news wants you to believe someone is

bad, they will focus on negative qualities of a person and deliver the story that way.

P6-S3: "It is important because a lot of people have negative feelings towards the media, and rightly so. They kind of portray people in the wrong way. A lot of the time, they are honest, but it's like fifty, fifty. It's just that in order to get people's attention you have to twist things and make it look more exaggerated than it actually is."

P5-S3: "I don't even like to watch the news. They love to exaggerate something and they focus on it, and they make it into this issue, and it's kind of, like, very small. I sometimes think it's misinformation or perhaps is biased to favor certain candidates or people."

P1-S4: "My perception or portrayal of other people has been somewhat influenced by the news."

P1-S4: "…I've been a firefighter for over twenty years, and I remember the days after 9/11, you know, of course, obviously there were many emotions, and it was very shortly after the incident, I mean, we all knew it was a terrorist attack and who Al-Qaeda was. And I remember, uh, seeing…a couple from Middle-Eastern descent in the streets, and I knew they meant well because of how they were dressed and looked, but I remember having a very negative emotion, which, you know, I was like, 'What?' In retrospective, I feel ashamed. Of course, I didn't say anything or…but, an emotion came out, I mean, it didn't come out, but I just felt it."

Regardless if the shows are news or scripted dramas and sitcoms, participants of the focus group interviews felt that television did have an influence over audiences, and in some cases, people come out leaving with wrong or negative information about certain people or situations when it is not like that in reality. Some participants also brought up negative stereotypes of minorities, especially Latinos, as an example of the kind of misinformation people are carrying away from these television shows. If people do not have prior knowledge that is firsthand, then their only knowledge comes from TV, and TV is not always honest or accurate in their perception of people, places, and things.

White Characters on the Television

When asked how White characters were represented, this after watching television clips that featured White characters, participants all seemed to be in agreeance that Whites were generally portrayed as the leaders, the authority. This was especially true for when a non-White character was on screen. The minority character was typically under the influence or control of

the authority figure, which was the White character. This brought up the theme of Whites being

depicted as powerful figures in comparison to non-White characters.

P6-S1: "It's something you don't notice because it's always White characters on TV. Whites tend to always be the main characters."

P6-S1: "For example, in the Sofia Vergara one, the husband has money. In *Jane the Virgin*, the doctor was White, and the one from *The Walking Dead*, he's White, and he's in charge. I guess they always, well, not always, tend to be superior to minority groups.

P6-S2: "They're know-it-alls, the dominant ones."

P2-S2: "The authority."

P5-S4: "Well, in *The Walking Dead*, Negan is a dictator, basically. And, in the *Modern Family*, rich. And then, well, Sheldon [from *The Big Bang Theory*] is, like, uh, very selfish. He doesn't think about others' feelings or that."

P1-S4: "In those three, I'd say they're all alpha males."

Only a few, two to be exact, of the participants mentioned not putting focus or attention

on the White characters because they did not seem to care or notice the difference between White

characters and non-White characters. However, one other participant made mention that the

reason behind not noticing White characters is because mostly all TV characters are White.

P3-S1: "I don't pay attention to that [race]. Like, I've seen *The Big Bang Theory*, and I don't think 'Oh, these are all White guys.' I had never noticed that until you [researcher] brought it up."

P6-S1: "It's something you don't notice because it's always White characters on TV. Whites tend to always be the main characters."

Latino Characters on Television

One of the final themes found had to do with Latinos on TV and how they were

represented. The unanimous consensus was that Latinos are simply too often stereotyped and

fitted to be criminals or background characters. Most participants mentioned how Latino

characters on television are exaggerated versions of themselves. For example, the tough-love

Latina mothers are blown out or proportion by being depicted as almost deranged and furiously

angry. Additionally, negative stereotypes like Latinos being in gangs is often used when a Latino

character does appear in a show. Very few participants felt there were any redeeming qualities to

the Latinos that appear on television. Unsurprisingly, participants opened up more when the

topic was about Latinos, and they gave many comments.

P5-S1: "When I think of that [Latino representation in American television] I think about *Modern Family*, and I think of Sofia Vergara, and how she's always angry and always yelling at everybody, but I mean, in a way she's also a very strong woman. I like that, but sometimes she comes off a little bit, and, they force her accent a lot, which bothers me."

P3-S1: "The sad thing is that I can't think of anyone [Latino representatives] besides Sofia Vergara."

P4-S1: "I think if anything, I think of maids. In TV shows, they're always Mexican, and they have a fake accent. I was watching a show, *Santa Clarita Diet*, or something like that… and there's, like, a maid with a super forced accent (participant imitates a stereotypical Mexican accent) 'Housekeeping!' And there's, like, a lot of shows that do that."

P5-S1: "Going back to what P4 said about maids, there's a show called *Devious Maids* that's literally all about maids, and I think…yeah, they're all Hispanic. Why is there no White women?"

P2-S1: "At the same time, you can't have this one person [Sofia Vergara in *Modern Family*] represent all the people in the country. Not everyone is the same."

P3-S1: "I think they just over dramatize things. They [TV producers] take something that's funny about us, and they exaggerate it too much."

P2-S2: "Sofia Vergara in *Modern Family*, I mean, I'm not Colombian, and I don't know a lot of Colombian people, but she's always depicted as very hot-headed. I mean, it's funny, it's a comedy, and I get it, I love the show, but I've seen other sides of Colombia and any other Latin country, and uh, we're not just that, we're not just, like, hot blooded, angry women all the time, and they're not always violent or fat, mustached men. Also, the majority of the time, if there's an American show, if they use any Latin descended actors or actresses, we're always maids, and the men own a tire shop or they fix things around the house."

P8-S2: "I believe he's Latino, or not, from *Flash*, Cisco? [Research assistant answers that he is] Oh, and I thought he wasn't. It's a little different the depiction because he's a really smart guy,

and I haven't seen too many episodes. I initially thought he was [Latino], but because I thought he was Mexican or Hispanic, I thought he might not be for that reason—Hispanics aren't generally depicted like that [smart]."

P6-S2: "They're [Latinos on TV] very heavily stereotyped, or it's just thrown in there, 'Oh, yeah, they're Latino.' But they [producers] don't define them, and it's just, like, in some shows that I've seen, 'Oh, they have the last name Sanchez' but they're very much like a White person. They don't celebrate it, they're not in touch with their roots, and so even if you were looking for someone to identify with, and you share similar heritage or culture, you can't because you might share the same last name, but they might as well not be a part of your culture. Or, um, a good example of a good depiction was a couple of years ago there was a show called *Cristela*, and it was actually written, produced and directed by Cristela…I can't remember her last name. She was working at a law firm, so it was based on her real life, I believe she's Mexican-American, and that show was her own work, and she depicted her family the way she saw it, and I can relate to that because it was very much like the family I could see at home. She celebrated her heritage and her culture, and it was a comedy show, and it highlighted the plights of work in the White environment, and then it was canceled!"

P1-S2: "The shows I've watched, like, *Sons of Anarchy*, *Breaking Bad*, they project Mexican males as gang members a lot. That's what I'm thinking about; that's what I've noticed. Kind of, like, drug cartels, kind of like, the whole drug cartel thing."

P9-S2: "There's this show that's new, I think; it's called LA something, something like that [*East Los High*]. It's about a high school, and it's supposed to be all Mexican-American—and some Puerto Ricans, too. But, I watched it because I saw that the full on cast was Latino, but it's completely super dramatic. It's high school, and the girl just wants to get pregnant. It's all really, it's not, like, a good portrayal, especially for young Latinos, but, like, we're on there, but we're not like that."

P6-S2: "I personally don't like *Modern Family* based off the stuff that I've seen, so I don't like to watch it. I don't like Sofia Vergara as a representative of our culture since she makes jokes off of her own accent, which is fine and dandy. I know we all like to poke fun at ourselves and our culture, and what Hispanics be like, but when she does it in front of so many people, predominantly White people… I mean, I guess it's good in the sense that she's embracing her sexuality, but in the show it's kind of overbearing—the overbearing sexual Latina."
P1-S3: "There's always that stereotype."

P2-S3: "I always get annoyed when that token Hispanic lady is super loud and angry. She always, like, has this strong personality. I always get super annoyed. And it's always just one Mexican character, the token one, the token minority character."

P6-S3: "I think there is, but I think there's stereotypes for everyone. I kind of like it when they poke fun at those stereotypes. One of the things I like about *Family Guy* is that it pokes fun at those stereotypes, like with Consuela, they kind of poke fun at that, people's expectations. But, yeah, there's stereotypes for sure."

P1-S4: "It's underrepresented and misrepresented. For example, the stereotypical protagonist in any show is usually male, White of a certain age. When the show is scripted, for example, female oriented, it's the same thing, White females of a certain age. It should be reflective of what society…is. Where society is diverse, multicultural and, yes, with Hispanics in addition to others of different ethnicities. So, uh, what we see is not what is out there."

P3-S4: "I guess adding to that [P1's comments], like he said, Hispanics are misrepresented, or whatever. But, of all the shows you all named [the other participants when asked about their preferred shows], which show had a Hispanic lead role? And all of those were, like, *Narcos* and… I guess they just portray Hispanics, or Latinos as the drug dealers or…mob gangsters, or whatever."

P5-S4: "Especially women, like, Hispanic women. They always portray them as sexy and hot. Like, Rosita from *The Walking Dead*, she's always in a crop top and short shorts and the hoop earrings. Not all Hispanics or Mexicans wear hoop earrings, like, we get misrepresented in a bad way. And also, like, they treat us like the hot housekeeper, too. And it's just, like, no…*Family Guy*, with Consuela (proceeds to imitate Consuela from *Family Guy* with a thick Latin accent, 'No, Diabeto!')"

P3-S4: "I mean, even the White characters, I guess, are scattered all around and diverse, how in *Modern Family* there's the rich husband, or whatever, and the other dude [secondary White character] is kind of just setting up everything, that's kind of the working class. And in the other shows, there's a gang banger, or whatever. So, like, they show the criminal side of White people but not as much as…they don't make a big deal. It's just, like, 'Oh, he's a gang banger' but had it been a Latino character, 'Oh, you see, that's correct, that's correct!' Which is kind of what's wrong with the media and all that."

P3-S4: "There's a bigger market when it comes to lead roles, so it's, you know, and I mentioned it earlier because it's one of the things that bothers me, that all these people in these shows, they're never really positive when it comes to Hispanics. You know, because kind of how we don't want to accept the idea of Mexicans or Hispanics being drug dealers and criminals and all that, I feel that the White population might reject the entire idea that Mexicans could have a lead role in a show. So, I guess that would be my reasoning as to why there's not many shows with Hispanic people because of the market that there is."

Participants felt that there was an oversimplification of Latino characters not just to poke fun at but also to please audiences that have come to expect and believe those stereotypes. Some participants even felt that if Latinos were not depicted in humorous or criminal ways, non-Latino viewers would not like them because they have already come to expect those trite stereotypes. As mentioned in one of the pervious responses from the participants, there are not enough Latino characters to justify those negative representations. White characters can afford to have negative

representations because there are more positive White characters, but this is not afforded to the

Latinos on television—the few that appear are generally caricatures of what a real Latino is like.

Nevertheless, there were other participants that did feel there is a change coming. They

felt that more and more shows are beginning to show Latinos as they really are. These

participants said they could actually relate to the Latino characters and hoped to see more of

them in the near future. The show they primarily mentioned was Jane the Virgin, a show that is

originally from Venezuela.

P9-S2: "I think that recently, like, within five years ago, there's kind of been a push to put Latinos in different kinds of roles, instead of just being cleaners or gang members. You can kind of see that with *Jane the Virgin*; I don't watch it, but I've heard that it's really nice the way they portray the family and, like, she is having a kid, but she's going with her life and stuff."

P5-S2: "In some parts it [*Jane the Virgin*] is stereotypical, so, um, she's a virgin, so to that, um, in the Hispanic culture they teach you that your virginity for a woman is very important, and in the show they show how her [Jane] grandma makes her promise because it's important for her. So, I feel that in certain ways they do depict them as the classic Hispanic, where family values are important to you, but in certain ways I felt, like, they do portray her in a better way than most Hispanic roles."

QUANTITATIVE DISCUSSION

Amount of On-Screen Time

A closer look into the results from the content analysis reveals that for an average of six minutes, viewers get to see a typically generic Latino character with little or no information about their background—national origin, education, and occupation. Out of 79 shows, all the seconds were recorded and the average time was 337 sec. (or 6 mins.) of air time for the Latino characters—this included multiple Latino characters in the event that there were more than one in a show. This could possibly explain why it is that often Latino characters are not given enough time to be fully developed with some kind of background story. Additionally, of those six minutes, the Latino characters did not always speak or have memorable roles; those parts went to other characters in the show, typically White characters.

Aside from the content analysis yielding the average time a Latino character appears on television, it also gave us results that show a slight preference for male Latino characters versus female Latina characters. Although there was no major difference between the two (57% of the time it was a Latino; 43% of the time it was a Latina), this slight bias can be found in other races and other media besides television shows. It seems that male dominance is even present in the underrepresented Latino community of the TV world. During the focus group interviews, which were made of mostly Latinos, no one made mention of there being a big discrepancy between males and females when discussing the Latino representations. In fact, even before being shown the clips that contained Latino images, participants talked about almost all female Latinos in the shows they have watched. This shows that despite being slightly less likely to come out compared to a man, Latinas still had an influence over their viewers. However, this could also have been a byproduct of having focus groups that were mostly composed of female participants.

Additionally, the few male participants might have also been influenced by the female participants once they started discussing Latina characters.

Demographic Features of Latino Characters

In regards to nationality (being that not all Latinos are the same) there was a bigger dilemma because the most statistically significant number of Latinos on American television (38%) did not have an identifiable national origin; they were simply generic Latino characters used for certain parts, but never important enough to explain their stories. The second biggest group (27%) was Mexican—these characters did have some form of identifier in the show that proved the Latino was Mexican in origin; these included mentioning living in Mexico, having family from Mexico, or having the Latino character actually be a Mexican because the show's story involved visiting Mexico. After these two prominent groups, the rest of the national origins for characters dwindles down to Argentinian (7%), Venezuelan (7%), Cuban (6%), Puerto Rican (3%), etc. These groups grew harder to find and determine. It is interesting to note that Puerto Ricans and Cubans make a big portion of the Latinos in the United States, yet they are hard to find in U.S. shows. In the focus groups, participants even accidently called Latino characters Mexican; most of them amended the mistake, but it is clear now why this mistake is often made. Even the Latino characters of unknown origin got instantly labeled as Mexican even though there was no real substantial evidence to suggest this.

Another finding from then content analysis was that an overwhelming number of Latino characters landed in the middle age range (30-60 years). 70% of all the Latin characters being portrayed in American shows were middle-aged adults; only 15% were young adults (18-29 years) and 9% were mature/older adults (61 years and over). There were hardly ever any Latino teenagers, children, or toddlers. There was no distinct reason for why there was a concentration

of middle-aged adults except that most shows that contained Latinos were adult programming: shows with adult themes like working class, crime, prison, immigration. Since there was a preference to analyze more popular shows and those shows are for an older audience, this could explain why there were no younger representatives for Latinos. Nevertheless, in all those shows, the occasional child would appear, most of them belonging to a White character. The adult Latinos were seen childless, mostly alone or with other adult-aged Latino companions. While this seems mostly benign, it could also perpetuate the idea that Latinos are not family oriented, something synonymous with being wholesome. This is something that none of the participants in the focus group mentioned or discussed. It was apparently a none-issue.

When looking at education, however, the content analysis registered a high degree of obscurity. Approximately 81% of all the Latino characters that appeared on TV had seemingly no job that would reveal some type of educational credential. This could be explained with the fact that Latinos did not appear on screen long enough to learn about their careers or their schooling. Literally, the majority of Latino characters were on screen for an average of six minutes, nowhere near long enough to know what they did. Additionally, some of the Latino characters were criminals (some in organized criminal syndicates), this did not allow for the attaining of educational information. Other Latinos simply looked to be manual labor workers, but still there was no explaining on their education. 9% of Latino characters did appear to have college education as they were doctors and lawyers, albeit in small roles. Another 3% of characters did have high school educations, known because either the information was given or their jobs required the diploma.

This variable was difficult because while it sometimes appeared a Latin character had a job that required a higher education, as uninformed viewers, you could not be certain of this

being true. A large amount of participants in the focus groups also mentioned the depiction of Latinos as ignorant and uneducated (many referenced the fact that Latinos do not typically come out with professional jobs). At least one participant made mention the need to see Latinos as college students, as well.

Looking further into these variables, occupations for Latinos in television shows showed a darker reality as a substantial number of Latinos, 34%, were criminals of some type: robbers, assassins, drug dealers, etc. There is definitely a high probability of finding a Latin character as a criminal. Furthermore, and perhaps more interestingly, these roles for Latinos were the ones most likely to have more screen time. Another 26% goes, again, to characters who had unidentifiable occupations—these characters did not have enough time on screen to completely understand where they might be working. 20% went to White-collar jobs based on the appearance of the character, usually wearing dress shirts, shoes, pants/skirts, and a tie. However, it was not always addressed what job they had or if they even had a job to begin with. This same rule was applied to the 11% that made up the blue-collar workers; it had to be based on attire, which is not always accurate for knowing characters work.

Criminalized Representations

Besides the issue of not knowing Latin characters' education and occupations, the most important finding was that Latinos do in fact appear most often as criminals in American shows. This was labeled a negative stereotype by members of the focus groups who, without watching the TV clips, talked about the large number of Latino criminal depictions on television. Many participants discussed the idea in terms of viewer attraction and money-making; people have come to think that Latinos are criminals, so if they see it more often in television, they will want to watch. This is the cultivation theory at work, programing audiences to believe in what they see

on TV. The potentially dangerous effect of this is that more and more viewers—those without prior knowledge and relationships with Latinos—will trust this malicious image of Latinos in the United States (or out of the country, too). If viewers cannot develop their own opinions on Latinos through getting to know and interact with them (as the moral development theory suggests), TV will become their only source of information on this race.

Further addressing the problems with underrepresentation was the finding that Latinos mostly always play the part of an occasional character (35%). For example, a Latino character would play a special investigator in a drama or a family friend that infrequently appears on the show; or the Latino character would play the incidental character (36%), which is typically a maid, a thug/criminal, a mechanic, or a cook that appears as a background character that may or may not have a few lines exchanged with the main characters. Together those roles make up 71% for Latinos, meaning that Latinos have only a 29% chance of playing a more permanent role in an American television show. Latinos playing the part of a supporting character (for a protagonist) was 13%. The percentage of Latinos playing an antagonist or supporting character (for an antagonist) was 6% each. Lastly, Latinos only had a 4% chance of playing the part of the protagonist. This marginalization of Latinos not just underrepresents them, but it excludes them from the citizenry that makes up the United States.

When focus group members were asked about Latino representation, an overwhelming number echoed the resentment that it was hard to pick memorable Latinos from TV shows they have watched; some even admitted to not remembering any. Another interesting response from the participants was that they tended to remember the criminal portrayals of Latinos more than any of the benevolent ones. They strongly felt there was a concentration of those roles for Latinos. They knew that Latinos are not all bad, but they also discussed the influence it might

have on those viewers that are not Latino and do not have interactions with Latinos on an average day.

Body Types and Skin Color of Characters

One of the last findings from the content analysis was related to body types and skin color. 42% of Latinos were of average (not thin but not overweight), 32% were relatively fit (toned bodies), and 26% of Latinos were portrayed as overweight; there were no images of Latinos as skinny or underweight. This was something that none of the participants mentioned in their discussion of Latino depictions in American shows. In regards to skin colors, a vast majority of the Latinos were olive skinned or tanned as 62% of the depictions showed this. Very few of the portrayals were of White or Black Latinos, two groups that seemed to be consistently missing. This variable was mentioned briefly by only one member of the focus groups who lamented the absence of White Latinos, a group they felt they belonged in since their skin color was White. Even though skin color is an important factor since not all Latinos look the same, it was not an issue with Latino participants; however, it is important to note that most participants did have similar skin tones to the olive skinned Latinos on television. It is still something that renders these representations as marginal and exclusive of all types of Latinos.

QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION

Television Viewing, Language, and Belonging

Some of the major findings from the focus group interviews were that while most participants identified with their Latino identity (some citing the fact that they lived on the border with Mexico), others admitted to feeling a general disconnect from their Latino identity because they did not speak Spanish—at least not very well. These participants said they were raised to only speak and understand English and as a result do not readily identify as Hispanic. Some said they had difficulty communicating with family for this same reason. A few others also said they did not completely identify as Latino or Hispanic since they do not really celebrate any of the Mexican customs or traditions; some said they were not raised in a Mexican/Hispanic culture. This proves interesting as it seems that Spanish language acquisition is necessary in order to truly feel and identify as a Latino in the United States. Additionally, practicing cultural traditions also brings about a sense of identity. Those participants without these qualities still mentioned being connected to their Latino identity because they *are* Latino by birth and name. However, most of these participants that did not immediately identify as Latino still held critical and disapproving opinions on how Latinos were represented in American shows. Only one participant that did not completely identify as Latino reserved the thought that race was not important in media.

Identification with Personality Traits of Certain Characters

Another finding was that while almost all participants felt that they do identify with TV characters from time to time, they almost always expressed this identification through is the personality of the character and not his/her race or ethnicity of a character. One participant said that if she could see herself—the way she behaves and/or thinks—then she established identity

with that particular character. Other participants said they only occasionally identify with characters, and it is based on how they reacted to certain situations—if they feel they would have done the same thing in that situation, they established identity. This points to the direction that people do not openly seek race or ethnicity when shaping their own identity. Using the social identity theory, we can conclude that identity is created based on our personality traits (i.e. outgoing, cynical, brave, hardworking, etc.); we as people look for others, including in TV shows, like us to join our social circle and build or reinforce these traits to further solidify our identity.

The few participants that did mention the role of race and ethnicity in how they identify with characters also mentioned that they are capable of identifying with characters of different races, but it was easier to identify with characters that happened to be Latino and also shared personality traits with the participants. As one participant reflected, it was easy for her to like Jane from *Jane the Virgin* because she was Hispanic and very honest and hardworking despite growing up in a low socioeconomic status family. This also seems to indicate that while we look for personality for our identity, having characters of our own race/ethnicity and having the same qualities we hold highly makes us want to identify with them a lot quicker.

Untrustworthiness of Television Representations

When the participants were asked about television being important, all of them agreed it was based on the information that TV can provide the audience, such as with the news. Some others citied television being a window to the world allowing its viewers to learn about different things, cultures, countries, situations, etc., without having to leave their homes. However, it was that same statement that made several participants wary. For if people never learn things firsthand, they have to believe whatever is being presented on the TV. This opens the gates to

potential negative stereotyping of different racial groups, and people who have no prior knowledge or interactions with these people will come to trust on what little they have seen on TV. Some participants agreed that TV influences you to believe things at least on a subconscious level; one participant admitted that she had developed negative feelings towards other racial groups even though they had never met someone from that race—it was only later that they realized they had seen some things on the television that made them feel that way. This participant said they needed to catch themselves in order to amend their prejudices; however, they wondered how many people actually do the same.

All participants felt that television had an impact on people, and that sometimes it helped perpetuate negative ideas and concepts about groups of people and races. Some of them added that the viewer of the television show had the responsibility to get informed on certain people and situations before watching shows that did not accurately address how people really are. This exemplified the cultivation theory that suggests people come to believe what it is they see on television if it is constantly being shown or portrayed in a certain way. Subsequently, this is where the moral development theory should be discussed, as it will only be through firsthand experiences that we can understand and accurately form our own morality based on how those experiences played out—for example, if you get to know Latinos as caring and loving people in real life, you are more likely to reject depictions of Latinos as cruel and abusive people on television. Unfortunately, not everyone is willing to get to know other people, and so, television will dictate what these people will think about others.

On the topic of television being a reliable source of information, again there was a general consensus that TV was reliable neither for scripted shows nor for news. Many participants felt that news stories tend to be biased and in some cases blown out of proportion in

order to gain the audiences' interest and therefore get more ratings. This same thought was resonated for scripted shows, that TV producers intentionally hyperbolize stereotypes (typically negative stereotypes for Latinos) in order to satisfy audiences that have come to only know or expect those generalized ideas from different racial groups—Asians are socially awkward and smart, Blacks are thugs, or Latinos are angry and lazy. Participants pointed towards White people as the reason for these falsified concepts since White people have had dominance over television and cinema upon its inception. Taking this response into consideration, it would suggest that there is a majority and a minority, or as the in-group theory says, the in group (those in power) and the out-group (those rejected by the in-group). In this case, White people compose the in-group because they are in power and have control over what appears on television and movies, and all the racial minorities are by default in the out-group. It might also explain why perceptions of Latinos or other minorities are often misrepresented and underrepresented—they are not the main focus and because they are not taken into consideration, they are often rendered to highly cliché versions of themselves.

Responses to Stereotypical Representations of Latinos

Participants, upon being asked how Latinos are portrayed, said they felt most Latinos—when they do actually come out on TV since it's not often—were mostly all stereotypically, with heavy accents, playing the role of the maid or mechanic, and often as criminals, too. Participants felt only the negative or less flattering qualities of Latinos were commonly projected on television. Most participants felt it was impossible to relate to those exaggerated portrayals since hardly any real American Latino are the way they are shown on television; however, a few participants did feel that certain parts of Latino characters were real enough—Latina moms being extremely strict and almost threatening towards their children but still loving. This, as David

Morley would say, was a negotiation from the Latino viewers to extract things they found true and reject everything else. Nevertheless, despite some acceptable depictions, all members of the focus group interviews rejected the vast majority of their television portrayals.

Interestingly, even though there was a an agreeance that Latinos do not get enough representation on American TV, several participants also mentioned that there seems to be a change coming. They felt that most recently there has been an emergence of Latino characters on American TV shows. These few participants said that now you can find at least one Latino character in new shows. They also felt that apps like Netflix and Hulu are responsible for this change to include Latinos more often than network television.

Representation of White Characters in Television

On the topic of White characters and how they were represented compared to other racial groups, participants mentioned that Whites typically come out in control somehow—the leader of a rebel group, the do-it-yourself father, the doctor, or the knowledgeable friend that gives advice to those less knowing, usually colored characters. In most shows that participants recalled, and those from the clips, Whites did in fact come out in some authority role that had all other people (some of them were also White) as some form of subordinate. This continues to reinforce the in-group theory as Whites are commonly portrayed as powerful figures with racial minorities, including Latinos, as their underlings. At least one participant made mention of how this arrangement caused an air of repression for the Latino character or other minority; those Latinos in the shows had fewer lines or seemed somehow influenced by the White character when it was not a Latino oriented program (one where the protagonist is Latino).

Lastly, participants almost immediately said that they would never be influenced (at least not consciously) by depictions of Latinos they have deemed to be negative or inaccurate to their

culture and race. Participants seemed to be well informed on their own Latino culture to know not to accept images that are ultimately dishonest or comically exaggerated for the entertainment of the viewer. If and when something positive is portrayed, it still does not mean it will influence their own identities, but they will accept it as a more believable representation of who they are.

LIMITATIONS

Some of the things that might have led to these results are that some of the shows contained images of non-American Latinos (not U.S. citizens) and some of them were American. Generally, there was less time being spent on Latinos there were not American, and there was more time spent on Latinos that were American. However, it is also important to note that it was harder to find American Latino characters in different shows than it was to find non-American Latino characters. This, in a way, balanced out the longer but harder to find representations of American Latinos and the shorter but easier to find representations of Latinos of different countries. All these seconds on screen, regardless of American citizenship, still averaged out to an underwhelming six minutes.

Additionally, there was only was coder for the content; typically there are two coders in order to establish inter-coder reliability. A second coder would code the same shows in order to ensure that the results for the shows are the same. For this particular research, there was not enough time to acquire a second coder. All codes for the shows were coded by the researcher solely.

Another limitation that could have led to the results found in this study was that all participants were college educated—mostly juniors and seniors. These participants might be more aware of Latino representation, or the lack thereof, in television. Additionally, most of these participants came from middle-income families, families that worked to maintain a good quality of life for them. These experiences might have also led participants to find Latino depictions as inaccurate because they might not have been exposed to lower income life-styles—some of which appeared frequently in the shows with Latino characters. These factors could have had some impact on participants' responses.

CONCLUSION

This research project first sought to investigate how often Latinos appeared in American television, and just how they were portrayed. Content analysis revealed a bleak reality in TV; Latinos don't often appear on screen and their roles are marginalized extensively. Very little information can be attained as to education or even occupation, unless it is the frequently used criminal role that is given to Latinos. Additionally, most of the time, Latinos are created as generic (lacking a proper history or background story) and stereotypical characters to satisfy situations and audiences' expectations.

This kind of misrepresentation—and underrepresentation—points to their being an in-group in the United States and an out-group. The in-group, as the theory dictates, is the one with most of the popularity and subsequently the most power. In this case, having numerical superiority in the United States has helped the White race take dominance over media forms such as television and film. All minority groups therefore compose the out-group, the outsiders, which do not have power (at least not to the extent as the in-group). Being in the out-group puts Latinos in an interesting position, because they can choose to blend into the White in-group, but it would require some form of cultural identification sacrifice. In a sense, it would be to adopt the identity of a White American—this grants some illusionary power and perhaps even some real power as a member of the majority. However, some Latinos cannot easily blend into the White culture, some may simply choose not to give up their own culture, so they remain as background characters with the rest of the out-group America, sharing what little stage they have now to voice themselves.

Additionally, through the focus group interviews, it was determined that Latinos do not form their own identity merely by watching other Latinos on television. The same goes for White

characters shaping Latino identity by watching them on television. Instead, it is the personality of the characters that help viewers form and reinforce their own social identity constructs. Viewers are quick to reject images of themselves, other Latinos, when it does not fit what they deem as a part of who they are. Viewers do, however, build their identity by looking for qualities and personality traits they find compatible with their own identity—race played no factor in discouraging or encouraging viewers to accept or reject elements for their own identity. Nevertheless, one participant from the interviews did explicitly mention that it was easier to accept qualities for your identity when it came from a TV member of your own race. This indicates that social identity works both in real life and through TV; we form our own self-image based on the people (or characters) we see and choose to spend more time with (or watch).

Cultivation theory also proved to be accurate, at least on the subconscious level as a participant pointed out. Many members of the focus groups admitted that watching TV, and having no real-life experience with places, situations, or people of different races, could lead an audience member to accept and believe everything that they see. Some even admitted that they themselves felt negative emotions around Middle Eastern people after watching the events of September 11th, and watching many news packages that spoke of the Middle East in a harsh light. Since the participant had not really interacted with people from that part of the world, he came to accept the dark portrayal that was being aired through TV. Nevertheless, participants mention having to think about things, especially when it is about Latino characters, before accepting or rejecting them.

That very same process is reflected in moral development theory: the importance of getting to know others, in some cases within our own ethnic group, in order to build our own opinion on people of different races. Without exposure to different people and things, we cannot

negotiate television's depiction of them; we are left with no other choice but to accept it. Gaining real-life prior experience allows people to compare those authentic impressions to what television offers, and if TV depictions do not match with those real-life impressions, the viewer can and likely will reject them. If an individual cannot develop a better morality on others from their reluctance to engage others or from their real-life negative experiences, then they will accept those negative portrayals of Latinos and others on television.

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VITA

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