

***Concientización:***  
**A Journal of Chican@ & Latin@ Experience and Thought**  
Volume 8, Nos. 1 & 2, Winter 2012-Spring 2013

*Concientización* is a student journal dedicated to promoting the study of Chican@ & Latin@ experience and thought. We are committed to creating alliances across boundaries of nation, race, ethnicity, gender class, and sexuality. In the spirit, we incorporate in our mission the study of Latin@s and Chican@s in diaspora; the study of racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and gender identities; and the study of community and nation building.

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## **Editor's Note to Reader**

This volume provides the reader with a variety of topics from undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students whose scholarship focuses on issues of identity, spirituality, media, and education informed by an analysis of Chican@ & Latin@ experience in the U.S. The scholarly submissions can be read as fitting into an array of topic areas: (1) Claiming Space; (2) Espiritualidad; (3) Querer es poder: The role of a professional conference in finding one's voice and place in Latina/o psychology; (4) Latina/os in the media; and (5) Telenovelas. A broad theme that emerges from all the scholarly work is the understanding of how lived experiences help shape an empowering identity.

This year, we have the pleasure of including special sections that include spirituality reflections from the Latin@ Spirituality course and movie reviews from CLS 419: Latina/os and U.S. Entertainment Media. Also, submissions from students who experienced attending the National Latino Psychological Association Conference in New Jersey, offer critical reviews of their participation and representation among professionals in the field of counseling psychology.

The journal's cover is a painting by Steve R. Pereira. The photo was chosen to reflect this year's spirituality submissions. The title of the art piece is "Refugio de la Soledad," (Refuge of Solitude) and reflects the artist's inner feelings during his struggles in higher education. We hope these essays and reviews are another avenue toward learning about the central questions, topics, and applications that have emerged in Chican@ and Latin@ Studies.

## Section One

### Claiming Space

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#### **This Ain't No Boarding School, Professor: The Story of an Indigenous Student Becoming a Teacher in Gender and Women's Studies**

si dāko'ta alcantara-camacho

#### **Abstract**

From June 30, 1946, to August 18, 1958 sixty-seven nuclear tests were detonated in the Marshall Islands as a part of the United States Cold War Operations. According to the Blue Ribbon Panel Committee Action Report, the nuclear fallout traveled up the Jet Stream into the Marianas. Additionally, the vessels and equipment participating in the tests were washed in the harbor of my ancestors. The Navy assigned radiologists determined the drinking water unsafe to drink, yet did not inform the local people. During these years, my family lived in the Marianas. Both my grandparents died of cancers, likely connected to these nuclear tests.

#### **Prologue: How I Became a Teacher as a Gender & Women's Studies Student**

I came to this institution bright-eyed and ready to challenge domination. I had been schooled in feminism first-hand by social workers, queers, working class people, living in the ghetto, living in rural America and many places in between. I already understood the world needs change makers, movement shakers, and risk takers and I was ready.

I am blessed to be a part of a scholarship program that challenged me to pick a major early. At first, I chose to be an English education major, and then dropped when I realized I would almost exclusively be reading white authors. I was going to be sociology major, until I realized I would mostly be reading theories about people of color written by white researchers. When I discussed with my advisor what I really wanted to do with my life, and with my studies, they assured me graduate school would fulfill my desires, and I would be able to accomplish my goals when I pursued more advanced degrees. I felt exploited, tricked, conned. Why would a social justice scholarship program send me here to this institution if I can't learn how to bring change to my communities? Why are dead white men the baseline of my education? If the communities I come from barely have any resources, why are studies about and for us considered "advanced"?

Then I decided I would be a trailblazer. I would create a major that blends the pedagogies of the oppressed, the aesthetics of hip hop, and the need to take actions in

under-served, under-represented communities. I was met with one bureaucratic roadblock after the next. I needed three professors who would agree to be a part of my committee, I would need to create a list of classes that would accomplish the goals of my major, and I needed to accomplish this within the next semester, so I could have a chance of getting it approved. All of this was on top of an eighteen-credit course load, and participating in an artistic ensemble writing and producing a play. With such little time to work on planning my future, I spent weeks of my breaks researching classes and professors that I thought would be helpful, reading their research, writing email after email, only to find professors wanted me to take a class with them first, or get to know me better; all processes that take time. Time I didn't have. And considering there is yet to be a singular department frontloaded with radical professors doing deconstructionists, de-colonial, pro-peace work – my transcript started to look like a failed diversity initiative. Failing to complete the independent major requirements, I was forced to pick a pre-determined major. I needed a major that would be revitalizing, that would push my militant analysis, would enable me with the tools and knowledge to organize in my communities. Some faith grew inside me that I could find this support in Gender and Women's Studies.

I enrolled. I started taking classes. I found myself registered for classes taught by the few professors of color, most of which are cross-listed. I walked into classrooms full of white women, ready to embrace diversity. I was ready to have hard conversations. I was ready to be one of the few people of color. I was ready to be one of the few people of color who spoke up. Was this the feminist space my ancestors fought for? I quickly realized, racism, settler colonialism pervades even in spaces where people claim to be about the liberation of all peoples.

I took a year abroad, perfectly timed with my own internal alarm clock. Some rooster crowing inside me, screamed: "WHO ARE YOU?! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?! WHY DO YOU GIVE SO MUCH OF YOURSELF TO PEOPLE WHO GIVE YOU SO LITTLE?!" I needed a way out of the homogenized milk-fat whiteness of Wisconsin. I found a way home. I braced myself for culture shock, for difference. I landed in Guåhan, and almost immediately found family. All my of "gotta create a safe space for queer people" politics that I learned in the classroom went out the window, because my family knows how to take a joke, and love unconditionally. I found new values that centered family and respect and harmony. I wandered through the jungles praying at nunu trees; I walked over nuclear weapons stored next to my ancestors' bones; I learned how to chant in tongues the academy still tries to tell me are dead. I became alive, and rooted in the ground. When I came back to the continental United States, I knew every day would feel like sixty-seven nuclear weapons going off inside me. I deepened my connection to practices that ground me: prayer, breath work, yoga, chanting, and creativity.

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It is my last two semesters of college, and I am determined to finish my degree. I have a few more major requirements left, including the introductory level classes, which have been some of the hardest classes to enroll in; these classes are always full, and enrolling in them means agreeing to the millions of micro-aggressions hurled at people of color, gender-non-conforming, and especially indigenous people. As I enrolled in Gender and Women's Studies 101, I knew I would encounter many learning experiences. I knew I would face the challenge of approaching students who have barely, if ever, interfaced with feminism. I knew I would have to struggle with a room mostly filled with white students, as they tried their hardest to wrap their heads around institutional racism, heterosexism, and all forms of exploitation. I knew my challenges in the class would be largely different from my classmates, but I did not know I would also be met with so much ignorance and misunderstanding by the professor. I was surprised, hurt, and disappointed to find the introductory course to my field regarded non-white feminism as "advanced." Multiple times throughout the semester, I expressed my frustration to my professor and teaching team, only to be told I was "too advanced" or that my critique could maybe be taken into account next semester. Both responses completely ignored my lived experience as a feminist of color. And when I continued to point out the ways the class structurally invisibilized me, I was sent to the dean's office. Why is a feminist department using a system of power to marginalize, minimalize, and shame indigenous feminists?

During one of my meetings with the professor, I tried to explain how invisibilizing indigenous feminisms damages everyone's learning experience, especially white students. In response, the professor pulled out the one journal in her office that spoke to indigenous feminism, as if to say, "I understand where you're coming from, I've read this journal about it." This paper is my response to this ignorance perpetuated by academics. This paper intends to show how studying feminism as a movement that occurs, and not a movement we can all participate in, disempowers students, and completely misses the point. This paper intends to shed light on ways to turn feminism into a verb, to structure a class into a feminist experience instead of a class about feminism. It does not matter how many books, articles, or research projects you have read or conducted; if you aren't constantly and consistently integrating feminism into all aspects of your life, your research and your pedagogy, your feminism is irrelevant.

## **The Process**

The first essay assignment for this class was to relate one of the readings to my personal experience. I chose a poem written by one of my personal heroes, Chrystos (1988), and I wrote an essay detailing my strategy for addressing the marginalization of my experience as an indigenous feminist in a "feminist" classroom. My essay quoted the reading and then responded to the quote with antidotes from my life and the lives of my

grandparents. For example, one of the lines from the reading is, “Im blessed with life while so many I know are dead,” I then wrote about the death I am familiar with: death of traditions, uncles, aunties, grandparents, language. I spoke to the death my grandparents experienced, and how their survival of World War II made them come into contact with kamikazes and watching Japanese soldiers torture their family members. I spoke to how this death directly impacted my life through intergenerational trauma. I wrote about how textbooks and school teach me about World War II as if the war was never part of my experience, when in fact, it continues to shape me. Another line I responded to, “sandpaper between two cultures which tear one another apart,” which I then used to talk about the struggle of not identifying as an American, although being born in America and living an “American” life. I spoke to how the culture here in the United States often requires me to give up whole aspects of my identity such as speech, my land, and my spirituality. Another quote: “I don’t think your attempts to understand us are going to work so I’d rather you left us in whatever peace we can still scramble up after all you continue to do,” which I then used to talk about how academics rarely understand the realities of genocide. I spoke to how academics sterilize history and remove the real life impacts of globalization and how westerners have been killing off my people, my land, and my culture and how arrogant it is to pretend to have the solutions. I ended the essay by again addressing how “I am blessed with life, while so many I know are dead,” by clarifying the legacy of my people. I come from a line of warriors, people who literally killed missionaries. I spoke to how I am blessed because I no longer have to defend my people in that way. While my ancestors, my dead ancestors, had to murder others for our self-defense, I am blessed with a war of *words*.

While the rest of the class received grades on their papers, I was asked to wait until my classmates left to discuss my grade. When everyone left, my teaching assistant pathologized me, assumed I was depressed and angry, and I needed some kind of emotional support the class could not offer. I was not ready for this kind of disrespect. And, I was told my essay had been deferred to the professor for a grade. Later that night, I received an essay explaining I would receive a “C” on the assignment because my essay “did not answer the prompt, which was to relate my personal experience to a reading.” I literally broke down in tears. I threw my head against the wall, blaming myself for not conforming to some kind of essay format that would be legible to the teaching staff. Wouldn’t my grade be better if I just left out my personal experience and instead filled the paper with a bunch of trigger words the teachers understood? Why was I being punished because a middle-class white woman does not understand the realities of being indigenous?

I called my sister wailing and hyperventilating unable to explain my distress. Eventually, she was able to calm me down back into my integrity, away from self-harming behavior. This cycle continued for months until I was granted “permission” for another option.



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The first place I learned about feminism was from my sister. At the age of 24, my sister and her partner took on the responsibility of two fifteen year olds trying to find escape from an abusive mother. Her community organizing responsibilities flowed into and through our lives, teaching us about international solidarity work, how global capitalism and domestic violence are connected, how state violence and interpersonal violence work together to hurt the most marginalized in our society. My sister and her community, which quickly became mine as well, taught me feminism is a daily practice of building healthy loving community, critically resisting disciplining institutions. From the beginning of my feminist education, I learned the most dynamic, useful, and creative solutions to global/local problems come from community-based responses. So when the people who read and write the research asked me to solve the problems they get paid to research in a little less than three weeks, I turned to my community. Wildly opposite of what I am taught in the academy, I stand by the thousand-plus-year long traditions of indigenous tradition that says like food, knowledge comes from the ground up, from the hands of the many that work the land. I stand by the traditions of community organizers who know sustainable changes come when groups of people have tools and skills to support each other in making healthy and loving choices. So, when asked to create the solution to the problems I outlined, I turned to my community.

First, I asked everyone I knew to send me recommended readings and books that they would include in a Gender and Women's Studies 101 syllabus. I was flooded with emails. My community, in a little under a week, generated a twenty-five page reading list. I knew it would be impossible to read all of these books, articles, and poems and compile a concise syllabus. So, as per the recommendation of a few different community members, I organized a community conversation to collectively envision a feminist classroom. We used Google+ technology to produce a dialogue that included feminist voices from Texas, to Wisconsin, to Washington to Guåhan, across racial identities (Indigenous, Chicana, Black, Korean, White, Chamoru), class backgrounds, gender identities (women, genderfierce warriors), and job status (workers, professors, undergraduate and graduate students). We called this conversation a Skypher, drawing from hip-hop culture. A Cypher is a circle of energy, moved through by dancers, rappers, and creators. In the cypher, everyone has space to tell their story through whatever medium they would like. Everyone else becomes a part of the story through witnessing the exchange. The cypher can be seen as an extension of indigenous cultural practices of the talking circle, of mutual harmony, of chanting. We called the conversation a skypher, because of the cultural association between chatting online and "skyping." So although we were not using Skype we called the online conversation and circle of idea generators a Skypher. The following sections include recommendations, thoughts, and ideas from this group of people who are no strangers to activating feminism in their daily life.

## **The Problems with Solutions**

When I was asked to solve the problems I outlined my first reaction was “of course! Somebody has got to figure this out.” And when I started telling my friends and family about the task I had in front of me, people responded, “that’s a great opportunity, but isn’t it kind of messed up they are asking you to come up with their solution?” Audre Lorde (1984) says, “it is the members of the oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our lives and the consciousness of the oppressor” (p. 114). And, throughout the entire semester I felt the truth of this statement weighing down on me. Let me take a second to ask you to acknowledge the power dynamics of telling an indigenous person who is paying to for their educational experience, to come up with solutions for faculty. Your faculty gets paid to research and respond to these problems. I am paying for an experience in which I am being marginalized, and then being asked in my own time to come up with a solution. The faculty is being paid to educate me, not marginalize me. I need this class to graduate. They need this class to get a paycheck. I want to ask my professor: do you care more about your paycheck or your students?

One of the problems with being asked to write the paper is the unacknowledged constant drain of energy on marginalized students. And, the fact that solutions don’t just come in papers. Solutions come with making institutional changes that reflect the needs and experiences of the most marginalized. Solutions come with integrating a really intersectional analysis into hiring practices, curriculums, and major requirements. Solutions come with work put in from the department. Solutions come with the people in power being self-reflective and responding to those reflections by working towards transforming ignorance, prejudice, and power relations. While I hope this paper works as a guiding document towards re-shaping the Gender and Women’s Studies 101 course, I also hope this paper encourages the department to critically ask yourselves if every aspect of the work you are doing challenges and transforms the institutions of oppression we are all a part of. I also hope this paper encourages the department to implement a departmental process for self-reflection, so “solutions” don’t just come when an indigenous or otherwise marginalized person does the work of pointing out that a function of your department is hurting people. Because we are already constantly drained, we are already doing transformative work, and surviving one hell of a racist institution.

## **Recommendations**

First I would like to highlight the suggestions made by individuals. In the skypher, consensus was inevitable. The people involved in the call all feel feminism deep within us, and as we heard each other speak from our experience, and generate ideas to strengthen the Gender and Women’s Studies Department, we became excited. As we

began asking ourselves, what does it mean to truly value the voices of all marginalized people, we moved to ask ourselves a different question: what should the objectives of a Gender and Women's Studies 101 course be? I hope you feel the potential, the hope, and the opportunity in the voices of these visionaries.

Karma says, "Ensure lives of Women of Color are represented, teach that the U.S. is not the home of feminism, and feminism is transgenerational."

Mollie excitedly adds, "I wouldn't have desks with everyone staring at the front, I'd like to see interactive activities! Not just lectures. The class should prioritize comfort of queer, trans, people of color, indigenous and marginalized students instead of making sure others who don't know/live the stuff you're learning about are comfortable. Students should learn about PGPs (preferred gender pronouns) and discuss safer space first."

Elinor encourages us to remember, "Feminism isn't about hating everything. The class should address the issue of self-harm or addiction, and how women are shaming each other, reinforcing gender stereotypes expectations."

Michelle believes students should learn, "an overview of where we get our ideas on gender and what it means in our everyday life, in terms of race, class, geographical location," and that the classroom can be "an opportunity to engage a feminist pedagogy and people in the class and really engage and learn from each other."

Santera would like to center "how to intervene in complicated and oppressive situations. Teaching people how to confront situations where people replicate, and mutate oppressive behavior and using these situations as a place to refigure interpersonal relationships."

Moneka wants to see classes include, "what women face in other places around the world and how they're overcoming it. What's happening worldwide to improve the lives of women," and she wants the classroom to take a "a proactive stance, from local to global issues."

## **Institutional Challenges**

One of the first obstacles outlined in the feminist skypher was the reality of university regulations on the content and knowledge production style of courses. We are fully aware of the ways in which Gender and Women's Studies departments are targeted by administrations. However, if the goal of the department is to "expand the sense of possible future alternatives" we have to be forward thinking. We have to be on the cutting edge of pedagogical methodology, and pushing our peers to do the same.

## **Notions to Challenge and Notions to Promote**

As we read more women of color, our understandings of feminism explode. By and large, feminists of color have retold their family stories to illustrate the feminist

realities of our everyday lives. Our mothers, our sisters, and even our fathers and brothers, often live life with feminist values, not even naming themselves mere progressives. The classroom must be de-centered as the space where feminism happens. The classroom can be a space for feminism; however it is not the only space feminism happens. Indigenous people have been practicing feminism for thousands of years. Chamorus in particular have deep reverence for women because of our matrilineage, however disrupted by Spanish and American patriarchal values. In *Sisters In Spirit*, Wagner (2001) quotes many early feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joselyn Gage, and Lucretia Mott to reveal where the early ideals of the feminist movement came from, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) society. We need to continue tell the stories of the Suffragists, but we have to tell the whole story. We have to stop pretending white women invented feminism. The early writings of these suffragists reveal how Iroquois society inspired early feminists by showing them another world is possible, and working. Gage, in reference to the Haudenosaunee, wrote, “Under their women, the science of government reached the highest form known to the world” (cited in Wagner, p. 94). By re-centering the contributions of indigenous women to the feminist movement, we can see feminism is as old as many indigenous nations.

We must also undo the ideology that feminism happens chronologically. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) points out in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, the separation between time and space works to colonize indigenous ways of knowing. Viewing time in a western way, allows the foreigner to demarcate between the time the indigenous people lived on the land (the natives who are now presumably dead, or reserved), and the time the white people came to own the land. Another example, locating feminism as occurring at this specific space and time, in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, owes no explanation to the indigenous societies who have lived in a feminist way for thousands of years. Thus, continuing to decolonize the curriculum requires viewing feminism from a different perspective. Might we instead organize the curriculum by topic; grassroots feminist movements have certainly been occurring since long before the witch hunts of medieval society, and continue to this day, inside and outside of the so-called Third Wave. Grassroots feminist movements also occurred when Spaniards began setting up missions in Guåhan, and circles of women gathered to subvert the church, by hiding elements of our culture in Catholicism. Women saved our language.

Indigenous ways of knowing must become validated by academic institutions. The Gender and Women’s Studies Department cannot afford to teach classes as if the only valuable form of learning comes from sitting in desks and taking notes. Students can learn from dancing, cooking, talking to grandmothers, storytelling, weaving, beadwork, attending a pow-wow, family fiesta, or ceremonial service. Localizing the knowledge production can also help students learn. If the class focuses on Wisconsin examples of feminist organizing, students from rural areas can begin to see themselves reflected in the literature, rather than seeing feminism as belonging to a special class of women, or so

called “privileged” minority groups. When I sat through my discussion sections, I could feel the anxiety of my fellow students as they struggled to name examples of our keywords in their life. Students need to be literally exposed to real world examples of people organizing themselves in intentionally autonomous and non-hierarchical ways. On campus, the department can build strong connections with places like the Audre Lorde Co-operative, where students work together to live in a feminist way; and, in MEChA, students engage with each other in a horizontal form of organizing where no one person has authority, rather collective decision-making is practiced. Gender and Women’s Studies can also support local community based projects such as Drumlin Farms and Freedom Inc. Visits to community organizations, as well as student interviews with organizers and community members can open student’s eyes to the possibility of other forms of organizing. Feminism no longer exclusively belongs to names by a thousand different theories; students can name real-world examples of “intersectionality” and “ideology.”

As students begin to see feminism enacted in the real world, learning how society actively privileges certain identities becomes more realistic. When white students have rarely heard real life stories of police brutality, racial profiling, and unfair labor practices, white privilege becomes an even less believable idea. Further, when students see the positive impacts of collective organizing, students start to believe in the potential of transformation. Hegemonic culture becomes less viable, and students can start to see how oppression has impacted them in positive and negative ways. Imagine how disempowering it must be to hear five-months of lecture on how pretty much everyone subjugates each other, without being taught the tools to transform these conditions. Feminism should be about teaching students to believe in possibility. We have to teach students they have the power to change the world, by changing themselves. By channeling self-awareness as a major goal of a feminist classroom, the conversation completely changes. We no longer have to cause huge power shifts between men, whose political spheres exclude majority of the classroom in hyper-unique and specific ways. We begin to see ourselves as the agents of change.

### **Holistic Teaching, Holistic Healing**

I have spent so many hours in therapy throughout college. I have on a few occasions asked my therapist to write me a note explaining my depression was so bad that I was unable to complete my assignments on time. And, I have on many more occasions, been embarrassed, or afraid my story would be seen as a cop-out, avoided talking to my professor about my depression, and settled with the point deductions. And, when I do reach out, I’m often told something like, “Well, you’re going to deal with these problems your whole life, so you’re going to have to learn how to deal,” which makes me even more angry with professors.

We spend so much time talking about all the problems in the world, we barely, if ever talk about solutions. I have learned so many names for all the different kinds of oppression. But, I have only been in a handful of classes that integrate learning how I as an individual can take action to transform the conditions of oppression. It is unacceptable and disempowering to spend three-class periods talking about how the media perpetuates rape culture, and then spend no time talking about how to support a friend when they are sexually assaulted. As we come into our feminist consciousness, we cannot afford to think of problems as existing out there somewhere in the public sphere. We have to start learning how we are being impacted. We have to unlearn all of these nasty things about ourselves; we have to learn how to really believe in ourselves. We have to learn how deeply we as individuals have been impacted by all the oppressions. And, we have to learn how to take care of ourselves. We are not invincible. We are taking learning to a deep place inside of our bodies and souls. We are learning how we are hurting, and damnit, it hurts. It's unfair for somebody that's already spent years going through this process to tell somebody just starting to go find their own way to deal with it. This is not easy work. People in the skypher recommended using our bodies as a resource to tell us how we are hurting and how to heal. Professors can incorporate breathing and meditation practices at the beginning and/or end of classes to encourage a holistic approach to learning. Professors can have classes sing songs together, to be able to hear the collective power of our voices, the power we have to heal ourselves.

### ***Dealing with Administrative Roadblocks***

Karma Chavez shared her experience working as a masters student in Gender and Women's Studies. At the time, her department decided a fundamental feminist idea was to eliminate test taking as an assessment of student learning. The administration almost cut the program completely. While the department decided to re-add exams, individuals in the skypher agreed as feminists, we should see these administrative roadblocks as places to forge creative solutions. If the administration mandates exams, how can the department re-imagine an exam in a way that empowers students with knowledge they can act from? Rather than testing students on facts and author names they have to memorize. Another way to test students on their knowledge on a topic is to assign each student a day for them to facilitate a class, discussion or workshop on a pre-determined topic or a topic of their choosing that relates to the course content. This assignment empowers students by showing them they can also be the teachers; they have the power to teach the material.

During the skypher we spent some time talking about assignments we think we should see in a feminist classroom. Karma spoke to the value of including a journaling component in the syllabus. Journaling allows students space to process their own emotions around the material as well as personal experiences related to the course

material. Journaling also allows the professor to see how deeply individual students are engaging with the material and whether or not the readings are being completed. Journaling can also become a foundation for other assignments throughout the course. The assignment empowers students by giving them the space to critique, question, and create their own viewpoints, enabling students to feel more confident when addressing sexism and other forms of oppression in everyday life.

Another assignment draws from a contribution by Elinor; she spoke to a study she had read about the importance of grandmothers in matrilineal societies. From this someone suggested interviewing your own grandmother or somebody else's grandmother and writing a paper about intergenerational feminism. This assignment allows students to look at their own families, or someone they are close to, and identify them as feminists, rather than isolating feminism as an activity that happens in the academy and within our own generation. The assignment empowers students by showing them feminism is often something their family members are already doing.

There was a general consensus that assessments would better serve the students if they were forced to interact with the material and show how they personally engaged with the material such as, making a zine or a blog that draws from course material, popular magazines, personal journals, poems, writings, reflections, drawings, and more. There could be specific requirements, such as at least ten-percent personal contributions, at least fifty percent course-material, and twenty-percent of the zine drawing from popular culture, and twenty-percent from other feminist sources. In this format, the assignment encourages students to do personal research, as well as draw from their experience and class content to make feminist commentary on issues particular to the student. The zine assignment could also be coupled on a short unity, or lecture on the historical importance of zines in feminist and other grassroots movement. In Gender and Women's Studies 103, during our unit on advertising we were each handed a black sharpie and an advertisement from a Women's magazine. We were asked to change the advertisement to represent a feminist view. A similar strategy could be deployed in the zine assignment. The zines could be produced as a group or individual project. Eventually, the department would collect a zine library with positive representations of women, and other people with oppressed identities, which would become a resource for struggling students. Also, the zine project shows a clear form of action individual people can take to inform their community about an issue they think is important, and how to begin to shape and change the media.

A major suggestion for teaching style involves incorporating the whole body in the teaching and learning experience. Paulo Freire's work on popular theatre shows us the power of acting as an empowering experience. By asking students to imagine a scenario where they would have to take action, and then act out what were to happen if they organize a protest, rally, or sit-in, students would be able to feel the emotions and power involved in organizing. Students can also begin to learn how they feel when encountering

challenging situations. Students can model for each other ways they have successfully dealt with hard conversations and micro-aggressions.

Also, incorporating course material relevant to the current generation can help keep the attention of the class as well as make clearer how feminism impacts our daily life. By using spoken word, hip hop music, and YouTube videos the class can feel like feminism is a part of their generation, and isn't always named "feminist." Also, this can be a place where students can work with the teacher to provide suggestions for the syllabus, continuing in the tradition of co-creating the course.

## Conclusion

I know there are many other students who have felt similar to me in the past, and I know there will only be more if the recommendations in this paper are overlooked. Many of us come to this department knowing full well what feminism looks like, feels like, tastes like, though we may not have had the words to name it before. If we are expected to raise each other's aspirations, opportunities, and capabilities we have to be willing to learn from each other. We have to learn to understand everyone as a teacher and a learner. I have been blessed by feminism in so many forms and places; I see it as my work to share what I have learned, because we have to be in this movement together. We have to open our hearts to each other and seriously consider the pains we come to the room with. When we see each other for the generations of hurt we live with, we can also begin to share our stories of resiliency, strength, and joy. I can tell you about my ancestors and how they have overcome rape and cultural genocide. But, I cannot leave out the hurt, especially not for the comfort of students and professors unwilling to confront the complex history of their own identities. I write to you in the traditions of my ancestors to share with you the tools and knowledge I have. The central value of Chamoru culture is *inafa'maolek*, literally, the thing that makes the community move in a good way, practice mutual respect, and sharing. I share with you my experience, my pain, and my story of resilience, in hopes your department can move towards producing respect for all narratives of history. I can only pray the department takes this paper seriously.

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## **Section Two**

### **Espiritualidad**

Section two contains photographs from CLS students who had the opportunity to enroll in the first Latin@ Spirituality course offered at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in Fall 2012. The Latin@ Spirituality course brought to light an emerging area of interest in the mental health field. This class highlighted various healing frameworks of curanderia, Santeria, and espiritismo. Chican@ & Latin@ students were provided with a basic understanding of the ways Latin@ spirituality can inform mental health notions and treatment in Western context.

Through an array of photographs, students in the Latin@ spirituality course were able to showcase how they integrate spirituality into their daily life. Whether it is through religion, objects, and meditation, students gained a personal understanding of how spirituality can help maintain a healthy mind, body, and soul.

## **The Scapular**

Christian Hernandez

I carry this blessing with me every day. My father described it to me as having an internal aura called “*la magnifica*.” It is an aura that is meant to protect you from all bad things—spiritual or physical. The aura is similar to the aura you get in the morning when you do the sign of the cross. You have the feeling that everything is good and nothing bad will happen to you during the day.

I feel as though I always have a spiritual shield with me--guiding and protecting me. My dad's, mother gave one to him when she felt he was ready, and then my father passed another one down to me when he thought I was mature enough for it. The scapular is like a pledge saying that you are agreeing to live your life a certain way, my way being through Catholicism.



## **The Rosary**

The rosary signifies deep prayer and communication with the three spirits. In other words, it is when various auras come together. When you pray to a rosary you get the feeling that nobody can do anything bad to you in a spiritual way—such as perform witchcraft on you. The item is significant because it satisfies me emotionally and also helps clear my mind whenever I feel like the balance inside my body is not where it should be—it helps reestablish it.

### **About the Author:**

Christian Hernandez is from Milwaukee, WI. He is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin - Madison working towards major in Phytopathology with a certificate in Chican@ and Latin@ Studies and a primary focus in Pre-Medicine. Through his involvement on campus he has demonstrated a desire to help create a more culturally competent medical field. As a first generation student he wishes to be the first in his family to have graduated at a four year institution and he knows that nothing is unattainable with discipline and dedication.

## **The Woman and the Moon**

Mari LaFore

The silver pendant that I wear symbolizes to me a woman, voluptuous and graceful. She holds above her head a tiny, round moonstone. The moonstone is characterized by its soft, opaque look. It has an enchanting way of playing with light and reflects any color close to it. The moonstone, like life itself, changes constantly. It has an enchanting appearance, is relaxing and comforting to look upon, and in earlier times people believed that they could recognize in it the crescent and waning phases of the moon. Some other ancient characteristics include, calming and balancing emotional situations, second sight, psychometry, and regressions.



The moonstone is found to open up psychic potential and also to assist in physical, emotional, and hormonal balance. The figure of the female holding this stone in my pendant represents the strength and courage of women everywhere and how they seem to hold the constantly changing world above themselves, in their hands and in their control if they choose to use their power. The moonstone that this woman holds high above her head symbolizes tranquility and peace. Her life is balanced. She has conquered the world and holds it up victoriously for all to see.

### **About the Author:**

Mari LaFore is a native of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. She and her family have made their home here in Madison, Wisconsin since 1988. Mari is a senior at U.W. Madison majoring in Theater and working toward her certificate in Chican@/Latin@ Studies. Mari works at Memorial Union, Union South, Wisconsin Union Theater, Farmers Insurance, and Kelley's Theater. To top off her

perfectly wonderful life she has an amazing son, Dustin, who lives in Baltimore, Maryland and works for Johns Hopkins University as a veterinary assistant, and a talented daughter, Shana, living right here in Madison and who is a designer, an artist, a loving wife, and a dedicated mother to a beautiful 12 month old daughter, Giulia. Last, but not least, Mari recently had her first book, *The Tale of Wisdom and Delight*, published. It is a true story and Mari wrote it for anyone who has ever loved a pet. Mari believes that it is never too late to follow your dreams whatever they may be!

### **Education**

Maria Huerta

Being spiritual, to me, means believing in myself and focusing on my family values. The faith they have in me to finish college and get my education is what drives me every day. My object is a pencil bag. Family members have given pencil bags as gifts throughout college. The bags are originally from Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru—where some of them have traveled to or know someone that has.

Every time I feel stressed and overwhelmed by school and the system—I take a minute, breathe, and remember that I am doing this for my family—to support them, financially, and set an example for my younger siblings. I carry my pencil bag everywhere, everyday, knowing that I have the power to learn and become successful.



**About the Author:**

Maria Huerta is Chican@ & Latin@ Studies recent alumni. During her undergraduate career, Huerta was involved in many organizations on campus and her main focus was to help better the Latino community through health perspectives. Huerta aspires to become a physician.

**Being Present**

Caroline Crehan

My object of spirituality is my yoga mat. I use my yoga mat when I stretch, practice tai chi, and meditate. I see my object of spirituality as a place where I can shed my stress and worry and focus on the important things in life, such as people I love and how I want to live my life and impact others. The habits I have formed while utilizing my object of spirituality have been incredibly beneficial. Some of these habits include “being present” in the here and now, learning to accept the past and what will happen in the future, and thinking about my place in the Universe.



## Connected

Nimrod Salgado

Every year for the holidays, my family and I traveled to Mexico to visit my only living grandparent and the rest of my extended family. During this time I remember feeling so immersed in my Catholic faith and my entire family, particularly to my older cousin, Diane. Hanging out with Diane was great; she was like an older sister to me. She would bring me treats and ask me for help on her English homework—she taught me how to pray in preparation for my



first communion.

I was so distraught when it came time to leave for the States again, especially when it came time to say goodbye to Diane. I remember being inconsolable, but to help reassure me that goodbye was only temporary; Diane offered me her favorite necklace. It was a wooden cross with a small dove inlaid in the center, hanging on a simple black string. Diane then said, *“Keep this with you to remind you of us, you’ll be back...swear to me you’ll never take this off, swear to God. I want to see you wearing it when you return.”*

The next year my father had taken a new job and we were unable to go to Mexico for the holidays—but still I wore the necklace. The following fall, however, the string keeping the necklace together broke. I was devastated. My mother tried explaining to me that it was not my fault that we could replace the string and I could still wear it. But it wasn’t the same. I broke my promise to Diane; I had sworn to God I’d never take it off.

When we finally were able to return to Mexico, nothing felt the same. This trip wasn’t the fun vacation I remembered taking every year. I could feel the distance between them and myself; on the outside looking in, detached from them almost. Diane had grown-up a lot as well. When I told her of what happened to her necklace she didn’t seem to care as much as I expected her to, and just seemed happy we were visiting. *“Its ok.”* she reassured me, *“...as long as you haven’t lost it and always hang on to it!”* I don’t think I quite believed her, and our relationship has never been quite the same since. I never wore the necklace again, although I’ve kept it close and still occasionally take it out, running my fingers over the small dove in the center. Remembering a time when I felt connected.

**About the Author:**

Rod Salgado is from Racine, Wisconsin. He is currently a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education Master's program. His interests include issues of inequity faced by Latino students, cultural barriers in access and resources, and disproportionality of Latinos in Special Education. As a second generation Mexican American, he hopes to continue to be an advocate for the Latino community and make meaningful contributions, specifically for Latino students with disabilities.

**The Pendant**

Janel Herrera

This object is a symbol of my spirituality—it makes me look out for spiritual signs and believe in the presence of God. My spiritual journey has taken a drastic toll due to sudden tragedies I have been recently faced with. When I glare at the pendant my mother bought, especially for me, it reinforces my faith in God and guides me throughout my days. The fact that my mother bought it for me gives the pendant less of a literal meaning and reminds me who laid the foundation for my beliefs. Despite the major role she plays in my life, she has allowed me the freedom to explore my beliefs. This correlates with what goes on in my physical world—carrying the pendant to different environments and places I have yet to explore.



*El Credo*  
Rachel Hoogasian



This is a *Credo* bracelet made by women in a *colonia* of Nogales, MX, as part of fund raising efforts to build a local community center. It not only symbolizes the salvation story in which I believe, but also reminds me of the connection I have to my life's mission. Every time I wear this in my work as a therapist, teaching at the university, or in classes as a student, I am made aware of my calling to love and serve. When I run my fingers over the beads, it calms me and provides me with a sense of purpose and goal. I understand, more profoundly, how much I am loved and the extent to which I must channel that love toward others.

**About the Author:**

Rachel Ocampo Hoogasian is a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology department at UW-Madison. Her research interests include: Latin@ psychology, integrating Latin@ spirituality into psychotherapy, and psychotherapy with Latino/a youth and families. She has presented at several national and international conferences as well as developed and taught courses around Latino/a spirituality and mental health. She is currently lecturing CP650 Communication in Interviewing at UW-Madison.



## Milagros

Steve R. Pereira



Before beginning my journey into higher education, mi *abuelita* gave me a cristo with a picture of *El Angel de la Guardia* and many *milagros*. She told me that this would help me through rough times in school. "*Si tú necesitas un milagro en tus estudios, pídele a este angel y verás, con la bendición de dios, que tus sueños y metas serán cumplidos,*" said mi abuelita. To this day, I have always kept this cross in my room and continue to ask for *milagros* throughout graduate school.

### About the Author:

Steve R. Pereira is a master's student in the Counseling Psychology department at UW-Madison. Her research interests include: Latin@ psychology and advancing the use of Latin@ spirituality in higher education. He is currently the Chican@ & Latin@ Studies Project Assistant and is helping make an impact to all Latin@ students on campus through the weekly CLS community gatherings.

### Section Three

#### ***Querer es Poder: The role of a professional conference in finding one's voice and place in Latina/o psychology***

Alberta M. Gloria

In October 2012 several Latina/o undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison attended the National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA) biennial conference in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Having attended the premier conference for Latina/o psychological research and practice issues, the UW-students gained substantial insight into their educational processes and role and voice in advancing Latina/o psychology. The following articles are their conference experience narratives as they attended and presented at the NLPA conference entitled, "Recognizing our Difference and Promoting Unity: Diversity among Latinas/os."

To set the context, the NLPA has for many years brought together individuals who seek to generate and advance the psychological knowledge for the promotion and wellness of Latina/o communities and populations. In particular, the conference provides a venue to share culturally-meaningful scholarship and enhance unity among Latinas/os. The conference also specifically supports student scholarship as it encourages them to explore their role in Latina/o psychology through mentorship and networking with others with similar scholarly passions and interests. As a way to share the support received, the UW-Madison students are candid in their narratives as they describe their roles and place within Latina/o psychology having engaged and networked with scholars, practitioners, administrators, policy makers, educators, and other students.

This year the conference focused on the multiplicity of Latina/o identities and the lived intersections of these identities. The presentations and workshop discussions addressed identities such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, language abilities, disability and ability statuses, educational status, and religion and spiritual practices. As part of these identities, the narratives address the challenges and successes in managing their different identities as students, family members, and community participants as they pursue higher education.

Whether the students were presenting their research, attending a workshop, networking with other scholars, or recruiting Latina/o students to consider a graduate education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, they address how they were inspired by others scholarship and *ganas* to succeed. In particular, the students saw themselves in others and envisioned how they are part of a larger process to advance the educational and psychological wellness of Latinas/os. Scaffolding their vision was their families' support for their continued education, commitment to give back to their Latina/o communities, and sense of responsibility to bring others into the educational fold. The students' narratives underscore how professional development opportunities, such as attending a national conference, are critical to their cultural and professional development. Finally, as the students worked to develop their NLPA conference narratives they acknowledged the importance of sharing their stories of struggle and success as a means to support others educational journeys in return.

## **Navigating the Academic Pipeline: The Role of Mentorship**

Arellys Aguinaga

My name is Arellys Aguinaga and I am a first year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I recently completed my Master's of counseling degree where I completed a mixed-method thesis study exploring the effects of generational status on educational persistence decisions. Although I did not present my thesis research at the 2012 National Latina/a Psychological Association (NLPA) conference (I had already presented my study at the American Psychological Association Conference a few months earlier), I attended with the specific role and purpose of recruiting students to the Department of Counseling Psychology as an option for graduate training. I of course also had the opportunity to attend the conference and engage and network with individuals from around the country, all of whom had an expressed interest in Latina/o psychology.

Attending the NLPA conference was an incredible learning and eye-opening experience. Seeing so many psychologists convene in one location to share research was a powerful phenomenon to experience because it shows the field's dedication to improving the lives of Latina/o individuals with different and intersecting identities. I was able to learn more about the amazing research that is being conducted all over the country and it inspired me to continue with research as I progress through my educational career and beyond. In particular, I want to contribute something beneficial to the field regarding the Latina/o community because I feel that there has not been enough research conducted with this population. Latina/os are one of the fastest growing racial/ethnic minorities in this country and it is important for research to continue to be conducted to ensure that mental health professionals, educational personnel, employers, and others are working with them in a culturally competent manner.

Attending the conference also made me excited and hopeful for the possibility of one day becoming a part of that group of professionals I highly admire. I am grateful I had the opportunity to attend an event where I heard about the experiences and research of such inspiring, hard-working, resilient, and successful Latina/o professionals. I am also thankful I had the opportunity to meet many of the people I have read about in class and on my own as well. Everyone was supportive, nurturing, and encouraging which gave me hope that it is possible for Latina/os, including myself, to succeed in higher education and attain a PhD degree. The most inspiring stories were from the students who received awards during our last dinner together. It was touching to hear about the struggles they and their family went through and everything they had overcome and achieved to get to where they are now. Hearing their stories also made me reflect on my path as I have made my way through the realm of higher education. I have overcome many obstacles to get to where I am today, in an institution of higher learning where I have just began my doctoral program. There were many challenges in my life that tested my ability, drive, and motivation to keep going, to keep persisting through it all and to continue through the educational pipeline. There were many times when it would have been easier to give up and settle for a high school education but I knew in my heart that I could do better. My

family's love and support throughout this journey also helped me persist to where I am today and I do not know where I would be today if it was not for them. I am fortunate to have made it this far through the pipeline, unfortunately, many Latina/os have a hard time staying in the pipeline long enough to graduate high school. This phenomenon both intrigues me and worries me because I want to see other Latina/os succeed educationally and have the training and experiences needed to make something of themselves in this country.

It is the sum of my experiences and my cultural identity as a Latina that have deeply motivated me to attain a higher education and to study the Latina/o culture and its people. Before the conference, I was less comfortable sharing my life experiences as a minority with my peers because I did not want them to pity me. I have learned to accept my minority status, the experiences that have accompanied it, and I have learned to accept my culture and who I am as a result of that. After attending this conference, I saw the strong impact an individual's life experiences can have on others and that has motivated me to be more willing to share my life experiences as well. It was reassuring, and validating, to hear about people's experiences in higher education that seem to echo my experiences and now I am making an effort to share mine because I could validate another individual who felt that they were alone in their feelings and/or thoughts. In a way, it made me feel better to know I am not the only one perceiving and/or receiving implicit messages from others that I do not belong in the arena of higher education because I am a Latina. I want to be able to do that for other Latina/os who have similar feelings and/or thoughts and provide them with the notion that we can do it, *si se puede!*

In addition the aforementioned experiences, I also got the opportunity to talk with other Latina/o students who want to continue their education and earn a doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology. It was an empowering and grounding experience to get to talk to other individuals about my process to get to where I am today and to answer their questions about that process as well. Doing so allowed me the opportunity to reflect on my path to higher education and helped me realize how much my hard work and dedication has paid off in order to get me to where I am today. Getting the opportunity to assist others in thinking about engaging in a graduate training program also allowed me to see the important role my mentors have played in getting me to where I am today. It was their support, guidance, and caring attitude that motivated me to continue on with my education because they were a reminder of how Latina/os can and do succeed in higher education.

When I attended my first NLPA conference in 2010, I was the one looking up to others who were further along in their educational process. This time, I was the one helping to guide the next generation of academics as I answered their questions and encouraged them that they could achieve a higher education. I would have never imagined myself doing so but I am grateful to have the opportunity for the life-changing experience. I realized that I am able to talk about my own process with others and that doing so can be an empowering experience for both the person listening to my story as well as for myself. It also increased my awareness about the strong and important role of mentorship and the powerful impact it can have on someone's academic journey. There was one student in particular with whom I shared my academic journey that was

particular poignant. We talked about how to find the balance between school and family, a highly regarded value in the Latino culture. I shared how the support I receive from my family is irreplaceable and that I would not have been able to make it this far [and continue to make it] if it was not for their continued, unconditional love and support. That is why I have always made it a priority to go back to my hometown not only to see my family, but to also remind myself from where I come. Seeing my family and returning to my hometown keeps me grounded and focused about why I am striving for a PhD degree. It also ties into the value I place on maintaining a balance between my personal and professional life. Throughout my graduate training, I have worked hard to not let school negatively affect my home and family life. As I progress through higher education, I have grown very conscious about the numerous changes I am going through and worry that I will be unable to connect with my family and friends back home. There are times I feel guilty for leaving and going to school to do something for myself when an emphasis has always been placed on the family unit (because of my Latino culture and upbringing). Sometimes I feel I am being selfish and that I am neglecting the parents who have helped get me to where I am today. At the same time, I have to remember that the reason I am here is because I am striving for something better for my family, my community, and myself. Attending an institution of higher education and all the experiences that come with that are inevitably going to lead to changes within myself and I should embrace them, not be ashamed and feel guilty because of them. The self-reflection process around my guilt for leaving my family has helped me become more comfortable with my decision to stay in school because it helped me realize that I am not only doing this for myself, but for my family as well. Being able to share this story with another student who was going through a similar process empowered us to know that we can and will make a difference for our families and communities.

In sum, attending the NLPA conference was a rewarding experience because it allowed me to connect with numerous individuals on varying levels. I was able to attend workshops and presentations, mentor future graduate students, as well as connect with other individuals who are also passionate about helping the Latino community to flourish and grow in this country. It also allowed me to further appreciate my academic journey, such that it reinforced the fact that attending graduate school and getting my PhD is the track on which I am supposed to be. Attending NLPA conferences are always a refreshing experience because they help motivate me to continue to work hard to advocate for the Latino community to which I belong.

## **Among the Inspiration**

Bianca Bello

Latinos in the United States are one of the youngest populations and fastest growing minority groups. Therefore it is essential to be prepared to provide effective services to the growing Latina/o population. This group of youth will become the future of this nation. My role in catering to this wave of individuals is to focus on families and adolescents. Countless studies and research informs us on the struggles, pressures, and conflicts that many Latino youth face today. If these adolescents are being drowned by these destructive realities they won't be equipped to be leaders for the future. Their parents or family members may also need guidance in understanding how to communicate or engage effectively with their teenager. I plan to provide families with tools to create healthy relationships with their adolescents and be a source of support for the teens. My passion for giving and caring is united with these teenage Latina/os. In order to understand and help them cope with their familial, peer, and social relationships, I must understand what daily life is like for them. I have to be well trained to navigate the challenges that these youth face that effect their emotional and physical health. Eventually I want to dedicate my time and career to lead the youth towards a positive and healthy future. I would like to instill in them that they are capable and deserving of an education and encourage them to fulfill their goals. The steps that I take towards becoming a professional in Latino psychology derive from wanting to provide these teens with hope, motivation, and empowerment.

The fifth biennial conference of the National Latino Psychological Association's theme was "Recognizing our Differences and Promoting Unity: Diversity among Latinas/os." I had the opportunity to express different facets of my identity throughout my participation in the conference. One purpose of my attendance as a student was to present an interactive workshop along with other members of the Fortalezas Familiares research team on our experiences with Latina/o families. As a Latina, I was curious to attend a professional conference that specifically addressed issues in the Latino community. By enhancing both components of my identity, I gained more energy to persevere in my academic journey. The energy I felt was enough encouragement for me to continue pursuing my academic goals. I also felt reenergized to become that source of progress for the Latino community to which I will someday cater to as a counseling psychologist.

The Fortalezas Familiares research team from the Department of Counseling Psychology in the School of Education is a family intervention program for Latino families with a mother dealing with clinical depression. The program provides weekly therapy sessions in Spanish and English for several families in the community. As a facilitator of the youngest members of the families, I have observed moments that united these families as well as differences among them. Some of those differences included: socioeconomic status, education level, language (monolingual or bilingual) among others. On my behalf I noticed how despite being a Latina, my experience varied from theirs but I also became aware of our points of connection. As a research team, we felt it significant and relevant to present these points of connection for the members of

NLPA and we created an interactive activity. Being able to present my experience at the conference reminded me how we are continuously learning about ourselves as we interact with others. Despite feeling some anxiousness before the workshop, I was confident in sharing my experience with Fortalezas Familiares and knew it was great practice for my presentation skills. I shared with the group how I created connections with families by speaking in Spanish. Although I do consider myself fluent, I sometimes struggle with speaking but I made the effort to break the language barrier between myself and the families of the program. I learned that my effort was more significant than the level of vocabulary I was using to communicate. It is crucial to appreciate the differences we may have but also not let them inhibit the attempt of finding a common ground with others. Given that it is a common misunderstanding that as Latinos we are all the same and falling into “one size fits all” description, it was important for me to present on differences that are present for Latinos and that ultimately these differences create a variety of struggles, triumphs, opportunities, and experiences for these individuals. NLPA is a space where Latina/o concerns are at the forefront of its mission and being able to engage in conversations about them is encouraged and welcomed. The creation of NLPA came about for this exact reason! It was encouraging to see the collective effort of so many professionals with the shared vision for advancing the Latino community.

Beyond the shared mission of the attendees, the collectivistic atmosphere of the conference was warming to the *corazón* (heart). It was an interesting dynamic for me to see professors and individuals in high positions interact with affection and *cariño* (tenderness). It seemed as though they were greeting their own family members. It was blissful to see the sincerity and appreciation among these interactions. The sense of collectivism is a central factor of my culture and it was lovely to witness at the conference. It really was an academic *familia*. As with family, there are tears, laughter, and encouragement, and similarly this is what I experienced at NLPA, a welcoming family. Ultimately, I was inspired to be near professors and individuals of whom I have read their research articles. Their presence alone was strong enough to make me consider my own topics for research investigation. I had a similar experience of awe during a roundtable of self-care strategies where I listened to the narratives of several graduate (master’s and doctoral) students and professors. Most of them were the eldest daughters in their family as I am and we shared our experiences of balancing our roles as daughters and students. The strength that came from these women was immeasurable. They had pure determination to continue their education despite the wildest of barriers. The obstacles ranged from being a teenage mother to having to live states away from their child. Being a part of this discussion made me appreciate my own academic journey as well as to inspired me to not surrender to my struggles but to overcome them. Overall, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in a setting where I could network and converse with prestigious professionals. There I was, an undergraduate among the brightest and most recognized Latina/o scholars. It started out as a foreign place with people I had never met, yet as I met others with similar interests and experiences I clearly saw my place among them. My experiences and sense of being part of something bigger, I knew I belonged among them.

In the future, I plan to attend the NLPA conference to learn, inform, and get inspiration and energy as I continue my academic and personal endeavors. I want to continue to learn from others' research and to present my own research that is progressive, empowering, and adds to the scholarly discourse of the NLPA *familia* and communities it assists. Even now, weeks after the conference, I have a specific moment engraved in my memory. At one of the conference's poster sessions, I stopped to read about a study from the Chicago School of Psychology that identified factors that propelled undocumented students to continue their studies. When I asked what was the main factor, the student responded with a single word. It was a word that was stronger than being undocumented and more powerful than poverty. The students had hope. It was the sense of hope that engendered the undocumented students to maintain their focus and continue their studies. It was a simple yet enlightening moment for me. I could resonate with the students from the study and those who continue to climb over, push aside, and struggle through barriers to get an education. They never gave up because of hope and it will be because of hope and perseverance that I will achieve my academic and professional dreams.

**About the Author:**

Bianca Bello will be graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in May 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and a Chicano /Latino Studies certificate. After graduating she is looking forward to dedicating her time to work alongside the Latino community in Milwaukee, her hometown. In the near future, she plans to pursue a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology. Her drive to continue her education and passion to give back to her community, will lead her to create positive and progressive change.



## **Expanding my opportunities to persist and feel empowered while creating new venues of mental health for Latina/os**

Cesilia Gonzalez

When I was 11 years old, my parents decided to move the family to the United States. They wanted to provide a better future for their daughters and give them the opportunity to achieve the American Dream by receiving an education and overcoming obstacles. The challenges I faced learning a new language while maintaining my Mexican culture have motivated me to persist in higher education. Although the journey has not been easy, I have been lucky to receive support from my family, faculty, staff and programs that focus on ethnic minority students on campus. Although my parents are not able to support me financially or academically, they have encouraged me and supported my decision to pursue and persist in higher education. Their *consejos*, sacrifices, and personal stories of their life in this country have given me the strength to continue my academic journey. Today I am a first-generation college senior graduating in May with a double major in Rehabilitation Psychology and Spanish Literature.

As an undergraduate I have had the opportunity to collaborate with graduate students, faculty and staff at the university through my involvement on campus with students from different Latina/o communities. One particular involvement that has facilitated my connection and integration has been my leadership positions for La Mujer Latina Organization, including chairing the committee for two consecutive years (2009 to 2011). Similarly, being part of the Pre-college Enrichment Program for Learning Excellence (PEOPLE) and the Center for Educational Opportunity (CeO) have given me the opportunity to be a mentor to pre-college and current first-year students in college. Each of these experiences has led me to my desire to pursue a master's degree in counseling to help other Latina/o students and their families in the future.

Through my activism and involvement on campus, I joined research groups focusing on campus climate and committed myself to engage in community work outside campus. In doing so, I have worked with Dr. Alberta M. Gloria individually and as a member of her ANDALE (Advancing Nurturing Developing Academic Leaders in Education) research team. Most recently, I have conducted research on my interests through the McNair program at UW-Madison. As a McNair Scholar, I am examining the perceptions and understandings of Latina/o, Spanish-speaking parents regarding higher education for their children. Through qualitative interviews with parents of my community, I explored the perceptions and specific psychological, social, and cultural involvement of mono-lingual Spanish speaking Latina/o parents in their children's education. My goal is to access a community whose voice and needs are not frequently heard or fully explored due to language barriers and to understand their perceptions to address their concerns and needs. As I examined the literature, it was clear that research accessing our Latina/o Spanish-speaking parents is not being conducted to the extent needed to support and advance our Latina/o communities. Importantly, I believe that my project creates new ideas to increase the number of Latinas/os in higher education.

As a McNair Scholar I am interested in pursuing an advanced graduate degree in Counseling (master's degree) and someday in Counseling Psychology (doctoral degree) in which

I can continue to conduct research addressing the higher education issues within the Latina/o community. Attending the National Latina/o Psychological Association Conference (NLPA) was my opportunity to meet Latina/o students and faculty in all fields related to psychology, all of whom emphasized the importance of the Latina/o population. As I apply to graduate programs, I wanted to meet faculty from other universities, explore their research and consider their university as a possible place to earn a graduate degree. This year's theme was *Unity, Identity and Diversity*, and this was my opportunity to engage in their projects, learn more from their research, and find a 'good fit' to continue my education. It was also an opportunity to participate in a professional conference and learn from other presentations. Later this year I will attend a professional conference for the McNair Program and NLPA has given me the experience needed to contribute my research to the fields of Counseling and Counseling Psychology.

As a first-generation Latina student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison I have experienced the need to use a multicultural counseling approach to recruit and retain Latina/o students in higher education. Attending the NLPA Conference gave me the opportunity to explore other topics that are not commonly explored in higher education. For example, topics such as spirituality within counseling, certified bilingual counseling, and the need to train Spanish-speaking counselors, encouraged me to explore my options within the field of counseling yet to also be aware of the challenges that inherently come with these different paths.

The conference was an eye-opener for me as all the workshops and poster presentations were focused on Latina/o communities and almost exclusively presented by Latina/os. It was clear to me the importance and the need for Latinos to pursue higher education and to promote and develop programs that integrate culture to improve the mental health of Latino communities. Throughout the conference I felt a sense of community that defines Latina/os and how although we all struggle to improve our community, we are not alone. In particular, I learned that to improve the services provided to Latina/o communities and to make changes, collaboration is needed. Many of the workshops that I attended were interactive and were facilitated by more than one presenter from different university affiliations. Similarly, the importance of having a community within our areas of scholarly research is important to come together and discuss current needs with the goal of making positive changes. Although there were disagreements when discussing potential solutions to improve the educational system, through collaborations new ideas and projects emerged from the workshops.

As a researcher attending the conference, I also learned first-hand about the different types of presentations that are possible at a professional conference. As a McNair Scholar I had been told about the different formats in which I could present my research, however by attending the conference I understood differently the range of possible presentation formats as well as the types of questions often associated with each format. Ultimately, from my attendance and active engagement with conference participants, I further developed my skills as a professional and a researcher as I observed different possible research methods and analyses, as well as improved my communication skills at a professional level. In particular, I met Dr. Torres from New Mexico State University who facilitated two of the workshops that I attended. Through her

presentations, I gained different insight into the importance of counseling for Latina/o families, adults, and children. She was passionate about her research and it reflected the human and cultural perspective that defines the Latina/o culture. During one of the workshops, she read a note from one of the children with whom she worked. The note was inspiring and ended with an expression of gratitude. It read, "*Dra. Torres, gracias por consolarnos.*" Dr. Torres inspires me to bring *consuelo* to our Latina/o families, as well as to persist and set an example and high standards for other generations to come as part bring hope.

Throughout the two-day conference I interacted with Latina/o graduate students at all levels, university staff and faculty from across the nation. Such interactions took place during workshops, posters, paper presentations, and even over lunch and dinner. The workshops that I attended included the importance of providing counseling to Latina/o children in rural areas of Texas and the importance of having a certified and individualized bilingual program in the psychology field. Yet being able to participate in a workshop that discussed the challenges that Latinas face in academia when they see the need to find a balance between family, research and academic goals was one of the most empowering and inspiring sessions. In this workshop, Latinas who were at different educational levels (doctoral candidate and tenure track faculty) spoke of their own challenges finding that their experiences were similar. They explained how their colleagues view their academic achievements as an individual goal and as Latinas they have to find a balance between their friends, their own families and their academic setting. They are all well-educated women who are capable of completing any milestone they set their mind to, but they were unable to find a balance between their academics and their culture. The time I interacted with them was inspiring because I learned that, as long as you are a Latina participating in an environment that does not include your culture becomes a challenge.

At the conference end, I felt more encouraged to persist and invest in my education. Although I was just an undergraduate interested in the field with the hope to network and experience a conference, I was able to relate to the personal challenges and interests of doctoral students and faculty and I found that my experiences and processes were equally relevant and important. I was also able to feel the *familismo* in a professional conference focusing on Latina/os. The sense of being part of setting in which, Latinas/os come together to collaborate, learn and support each other, with the intention of advocating, promoting and improving the current and future of all Latinos in the Psychology field became the highlight of my attendance.

### **About the Author:**

Cesilia Gonzalez is a first generation PEOPLE, CeO and McNair Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is from Milwaukee, WI and will graduate in May 2013 with a double major in Rehabilitation Psychology and Spanish. Cesilia will continue her post-graduate education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in the Community Counseling Master's Program. For the past five years as an undergraduate she has volunteered in diverse educational settings across the Madison community and campus, hoping to have served as a role model for future Latin@ generations.

## **Lessons learned at the National Latino Psychological Association bi-annual conference**

Edith Flores

My parents always said, “nunca sabes lo que tienes hasta que lo vez perdido” (you never know what you have until it is gone) and although it is a saying that has been told to me at various points in my life, these words never meant nearly as much as they did when I became an undergraduate student. Being so many miles away from my family, community, and culture, I quickly came to value many things that I often took for granted back home because they were readily available to me without any second thoughts. What I missed and valued as an undergraduate ranged from being able to listen freely to *banda*, spend time with my family playing *loteria*, or even speak in Spanglish with friends to name a few. These were things that in California I never took time to think about their importance in my life because they were just there and I didn’t know what it would be like to not have the option to practice these activities until I came to school in the Midwest.

As an undergraduate in the Midwest it wasn’t always easy to find students with whom I could share similar interests and values. I attended a predominantly White institution and thus what had once been at arm’s reach now required me to seek actively and to be intentional in my choices. In my general requirement classes I didn’t easily meet Latino students with whom I could talk in Spanish and so I intentionally changed my major to Spanish in order to hear my native language on a regular basis. I also didn’t meet Latina/o professors to whom I could look to and ask for advice until I intentionally signed up for the Chican@ Latin@ Studies certificate on campus. It was these kinds of choices and intentional seeking of Latina/o peers, friends, and mentors that assisted me through my undergraduate years and supported my applying for a Master’s degree in Counseling. These experiences also motivated me to establish firmly an interest in research of Latina/o students in higher education; more specifically, retention initiatives and mentorship.

Currently, I am in my second year of the master’s program and since my undergraduate years have become actively involved in research and with Latina/o-focused organizations to understand how to contribute better to the academic achievement gap among Latina/o students. Although Latina/os are enrolling at increased rates in higher education, many do not find the support needed to persist until graduation. It is this exact issue that fuels my passion to conduct a thesis study which focuses on the specific mentorship characteristics that Latina undergraduates identify as important to their academic success. Given that the role of mentorship is often cited as a determining factor and positive influence in the retention initiatives of Latina/o students, I wanted to give voice to the specific characteristics that Latina undergraduates identified as key elements to their academic success.

Two years ago I first attended and presented at the National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA) convention in San Antonio, Texas when I was an undergraduate seeking entry into a graduate program. This time, I attended as a graduate student and had two proposals accepted for the presentation. In a poster presentation, I provided the preliminary findings of my

thesis described above and I also co-facilitated a roundtable presentation on ways research team members can establish points of connection with participating Latina/o families during community interventions. Given that the conference focuses specifically on Latina/o issues, it was gratifying to meet and talk with individuals interested in my work; who asked questions, gave constructive feedback, and encouraged me to finish the research. It was validating to know that professionals were interested to learn how to better mentor and support Latina students. As well as meet Latina students who were interested and invested in having stories be told, that reflected their challenges and experiences in seeking mentorship.

Throughout my educational journey, I have learned to seek out opportunities where I can find Latina/o role models, be surrounded by my community, and feel proud to represent my cultural background. To me, attending the NLPA conference has allowed me to meet these objectives and more. It is a place of inspiration, comfort, hope, and energy re-charge. It is inspiring to see professionals and students of all academic levels (i.e., undergraduates, master's students, doctoral students) present on topics that are personally meaningful and professionally relevant to the work that I, like many others, want to do to help improve our Latina/o communities. It is a comforting place where I could be myself and have my experiences and academic work validated by others who understand the importance of meeting our local and national Latina/o needs. For me, it is a place of hope where I could interact with other professionals who were once in my shoes and can tell me "si se puede" (yes you can) and "don't give up." In many ways, attending and presenting at this conference has been therapeutic as everyone is filled with a positive energy and eager to help and know your story. It is comforting and empowering as I am motivated to keep pushing and meet my goals despite the conference's end.

In this most recent conference, I learned the importance of finding my voice. I challenged myself to ask questions about concepts and topics about which I was curious and provided my perspective relevant to the topics being discussed. During my previous NLPA conference attendance, there were many times I felt the urge to say "I have experienced something similar" or wanted to offer a different opinion but was often uncertain about how my "voice" would be received. This year however, I was motivated to own my experiences and rather than simply sit by as an observer, I felt confident in my experiences and I learned that what I had to say is much more important and valued by others than I originally imagined. My comments and questions were echoed by the younger students who had similar wonders yet were too shy to ask or were uncertain if what they had to offer would be viewed as relevant or important. This experience helped me find confidence in myself as a growing professional and further solidified the importance that the role of mentorship has in my life.

Similarly important to my role of mentoring others is my role as a mentee and some of the most important conversations I had during the NLPA conference were with professionals such as Dr. Segura-Herrera and Dr. Navarro. Both professors were once students in my same counseling program and most importantly, they were mentored by Dr. Alberta M. Gloria, who has been an essential part of my academic success. I learned a lot from talking with them about

the importance of continuing to seek opportunities and was inspired by their own academic journeys as they followed their own dreams. I felt motivated by both individuals to value every lesson learned along the way and not take for granted any challenges that might have side tracked me throughout my journey towards becoming who I want to be. After all it is these events which make me unique and allow me to offer a different experience to the students who I will be working with in the future.

As a result of my conversations with these Latina professors and other inspiring interactions during the NLPA conference I have begun to think about what I might be taking for granted in Madison. I will soon apply to a doctorate program and I am excited about what new opportunities which, although unknown, are in store for me. I have learned so much during my time in Madison and attending and presenting at the NLPA conference has allowed me to appreciate the knowledge and new opportunities that I have been provided with in this institution.

**About the Author:**

Edith Flores is from Los Angeles, CA. She is a second year graduate student pursuing a MA in Counseling. She would like to continue her education and pursue her PhD in order to someday become a professor. She aspires to expand the literature on Latina/o psychology and contribute to the graduation of bilingual/bicultural Latina/o professionals.

## **Professional Development and Social Networking for Graduate Students**

Gerardo Mancilla

Attending the National Latino Psychological Association (NLPA) conference this fall was important for me because it developed my professional scholarship as a graduate student. Not only did the conference allow me to present my research and receive feedback, it also provided me a venue to establish social networks and to connect with other Latina/o scholars who are conducting similar work. As an academic scholar, the conference provided me with professional development and involvement opportunities that I would not have otherwise had if I had not attended.

I first attended the NLPA conference in 2008 when I was a Master's student in the Department of Counseling Psychology. This year, I attended as a doctoral student to present my master's thesis work, which explores the impact of a pre-college program for Latina/o middle school students. During the presentation, I interacted with faculty and other graduate and undergraduate students who came from national and international academic institutions who brought questions and perspectives to my research that I had not anticipated. As a result of our conversations regarding the presentation, I had an expanded notion of how to continue my research and relevance of scholarly discourse. Presenting my work at NLPA was a great experience as it focused primarily on Latina/o students and how to advance our development as the next generation of scholars. As a student, it is these types of activities that encourage me to continue growing as a scholar.

After my presentation, I was a participant in other workshops. One presentation that drew my attention was the "civic engagement of undocumented youth." I am familiar with the needs and considerations of undocumented youth having worked and provided volunteer services for this population, but I attended to explore and understand further what other scholars are currently researching within the area. The presenter provided a historical context and overview of clinical and educational resources for working with undocumented youth. The materials were informative, however my interactions post presentation were more beneficial. As I talked to the presenter about the topic, another graduate student came up and mentioned that he was working to develop a Special Interest Group (SIG) on undocumented youth for the American Psychological Association (APA) and we spoke of our shared interests. Since this conversation, we have remained in email communication and are working to develop the structure to impact APA and their membership about issues that are Latina/o focused. The conference allowed me to meet and interact with other graduate and undergraduate students who were also committed to working with Latina/o undocumented students. The conversations and collaboration encouraged me to continue pursuing research and best practices when working with undocumented youth. Furthermore, this type of research can provide undocumented youth with a voice about their experiences.

NLPA also has opportunity for involvement and leadership. Another session that I attended addressed ethics. I did not know what to expect in this session, but I ended up gaining a

broad perspective and more insight into how I can play a role in making national and needed change within the field of Latina/o psychology. The session was called a “working” session and attendees came together to work on an issue and find common ground to move it forward. The session focused on ethics of working with Latino clients, including bilingual supervision, bilingual measures, and best practices. The knowledge shared was amazing, but the experience of dialoguing with the team members was more impressive and allowed me insight in how important my role is in being active to advance work that will address Latina/o concerns and considerations. I was sitting and working side by side with the former president of the NLPA association as well as many executive members of the organization. The group discussed the upcoming journal from the organization, the structure as it related to APA, and how to work with other ethnic association like the Association of Black Psychologist (ABPsi), and the Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA) to advance changes and influence current psychology. Importantly, the session also offered ways for graduate students to be involved in the discussion and to provide venues for us to envision our roles and activities as leaders as well.

Overall, NLPA supports the type of work that I see myself doing as a scholar and my conference attendance was invaluable as it gave me confidence and continued motivation to continue my scholarly work. From pre-college youth programs, to working with undocumented youth, to changing the structure of the organization; the NLPA conference allowed me to continue to grow as a scholar. The organization’s structure is open for members to step into leadership roles and they work closely with new students as they step into those roles. Lastly, the community that gets created by NLPA is supportive and encouraging.

I am thankful to Dr. Gloria for connecting me to this organization. I was able to present at this conference with her guidance and mentorship. She is a role model, mentor, and advisor.

### **About the Author**

Gerardo Mancilla is a dissertator in the department of Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His current research focuses on the school-to-prison pipeline, program evaluation, and working with Latina/o youth. He is also a full-time Bilingual Resource Teacher for the Madison Metropolitan School District working with middle school student.



***Creando mi Camino en el Mundo Academico:***  
**Building on my Culture and Strengths in my Pursuit of the Ph.D.**  
Nancy Herrera

My parents sacrificed their lives, stability, and families in México, all with the vision of providing their future children with the option of a better life. Throughout my childhood I saw how they constantly pushed aside their needs to focus on our own, and how the bags under their eyes and the pain in their bodies from manual labor became more prominent with age; however, their strength, in spite of all the struggles they face as immigrants, became their source resilience and my pride. Although their limited education and English proficiency hindered their ability to continue helping us with school work, such challenges did not stop them from helping me through love and encouraging *consejos*. Their continual hard work and fearlessness is my primary source of motivation to continue my education. I inherited my parents' drive, determination, and hard work from their struggles and willingness to succeed. As a result, I made it my personal commitment as a first-generation college Chicana to obtain a higher education, partly as an act of gratitude towards my parents, but also to help the advancement of my Latin@ community.

Witnessing my parents' challenges as first-generation immigrants and the ongoing social and mental health disparities in the Latin@ community, is my ongoing source of motivation to give back to my community. I strive to conduct research that builds on the current knowledge in academia to help in the creation of more effective interventions and services for the community. Ongoing policies and laws continue to pathologize and systematically criminalize immigrant and undocumented Latin@ communities. The depiction of the Latin@ immigrant community as a problem to society, while simultaneously exploiting their labor is a constant walking contradiction in today's society. Furthermore, a plethora of academic research continues to focus on the experiences of Latin@ immigrants through a deficit lens; experiences such as acculturative stress, depression, and emotional distress are prominently explored in the field. My experiences inspired me to take an empowerment approach in my research agenda through exploring how Latin@ immigrants and undocumented populations tap into their strengths, family, and cultural values to facilitate their psychological wellness.

Thus, as a first generation woman of color, attending my first National Latina/o Psychological Association Conference meant to be part of a space where other professionals shared my propensity for Latin@ issues. Attending and presenting my study, Educational Micro-Successes: *Revelando Las Actividades Diarias de Latinas*, inspired and reaffirmed my passion to pursue a graduate degree. The approval and supportive comments from professionals in hearing the ardor of my words presenting my research on the educational successes of Latinas was one of the highlights in attending the conference. In addition, attending presentations on Latin@ mental health, spirituality, and psychology of immigration, reaffirmed my desire to explore community and culturally-focused research and interventions.

I was humbled and honored to be in a space where I could learn from *los mayores* of the

field, such as Dr. Lillian Comas-Díaz. Her keynote presentation filled me with a sense of honor in my heritage and duty to apply what I learned in my professional and academic career. Her inspirational messages of courage, self reflection, and ethnic pride ignited my passion to continue following my dreams and educational goals. In addition, finally meeting Dr. Theresa Segura-Herrera, an individual who had worked with my current advisor, was wonderful. Through our interactions I saw the legacy of the academic family of which I am part of, and the generations of Latinas guided by my mentors, Drs. Jeanett Castellanos and Alberta M. Gloria. In listening to Dr. Segura-Herrera share her personal experiences as a graduate student to a now tenure-track professor in the field of Latin@ psychology, I visualized myself as a mentor for the next generation. Through the advice and encouragement from these Latina *mujeres* in the field, I was filled with strength and motivation to continue to *hecharle ganas*, both professionally and academically. Seeing Latinas advancing in the field of psychology was truly inspirational as a Chicana in my first year in a Master's of counseling program.

Expressing my dedication to improve the wellness of the Latin@ community, through attending and presenting my work during my first national Latin@ conference will be one the most rewarding experiencing in my professional and academic journey. Gaining further knowledge of the factors that continue to influence my community through workshops and presentations reinforced my vision to serve populations of color through the field of Latin@ mental health and psychology. Attending an all Latin@ conference, and being in a space where I witnessed so many Latin@ professionals, reaffirmed that my dreams of pursuing a Ph.D. and becoming a culturally-competent researcher and practitioner and mentor are possible. As I continue my educational journey as a now graduate student, I always keep in mind that I have to be aware of my privilege in having the opportunities as a student and future professional. For all of us continuing our paths in academia, it is essential to always remember the importance of using our knowledge to always remember our roots and the struggles of our families as we advance professionally. The National Latina/o Psychological Association Conference enhanced my social and political consciousness and sense of duty in giving back to *mi gente*. I am further reminded that I have a responsibility to become an active participant in the fight to create spaces of support and empowerment for low income, Latin@ immigrant communities.

**About the Author:**

Nancy Herrera is a first year Masters student in the department of Counseling Psychology. Nancy is originally from California, and hopes to ultimately pursue a Ph.D. with the aspiration of serving the Latin@ community through research and counseling.

## **The Power of Connection and Academic Family**

Rachel Ocampo Hoogasian

I am a third year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology department and I presented on three topics at the National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA) biennial conference this past fall. First, as part of a roundtable discussion, I co-facilitated a discussion about the role of privilege in culturally adapted interventions for Latino/a immigrant families. In a poster presentation, I shared the co-creation and conceptualization of the first-ever course taught on Latino/a spirituality and mental health at UW-Madison. Finally, in a paper presentation, I co-presented on a study that explored Latina clinicians' understandings and use of spirituality in psychotherapy.

My participation in this conference reflects my interests and pursuits in giving voice to Latino/a risk and resiliency pathways in mental health. As a budding researcher, teacher, and clinician I have sought to attend to those risk and resiliency pathways across the systemic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels for Latino/a communities. Systemically, I have participated in action efforts that include community research and organizing around Latino/a and other youth of color in the juvenile justice system. Interpersonally, I have worked with groups of Latino/a children and families in psychotherapy interventions to explore the ways in which human connection can bring about healing. Intrapersonally, I have participated in therapy with Latino/a individuals who seek a more profound understanding of the ways in which they can access personal resources to overcome internal suffering. This drive to give voice and create change is born out of personal and familial experiences as members of the Latino/a community. Poverty, oppression, and violence as well as family, faith, and persistence inform the work I do with those who share a similar story.

Since this was my first time at the NLPA conference, I was unaware of the professional and personal impact that this would have on me. Its positive reviews from students on Dr. Alberta M. Gloria's ANDALE research team definitely provided some foresight into what was to come. First, being surrounded by Latino/a researchers, clinicians, educators, and students was an incredibly powerful experience for me. Before the conference I could count the number of Latino/a psychologists I have met on one hand. After the conference, I had dozens of business cards and contact information of Latino/a mental health professionals from across the nation and internationally. In addition, the focus on research and programming specific to Latino/a psychological issues proved to be a tremendous learning opportunity for me. I absorbed information on topics from school interventions with students on the Mexican-American border to navigating the publication process as a developing Latino/a psychologist. These two aspects of the conference helped me to see that I am not alone in my pursuits toward meeting the needs of the Latino/a community. I could see that there are people who look like me, with similar experiences, from whom I can emulate and borrow strength.

Two significant conversations I had at the conference include talks with Dr. Jeanett Castellanos and Dr. Brian McNeill. While presenting my poster, I was approached by Dr.

Castellanos with questions about the next steps for the two documentaries I co-created for the Latino/a Spirituality and Mental Health course. In that moment, Dr. Castellanos and I brainstormed ideas that eventually centered on the possibility of developing a website that could house all the work I have accumulated on the topic. She described this as a way of making this information more accessible to mental health professionals across the country and around world. I definitely look forward to following-up with her on this and pursuing our collaboration as an opportunity for mentorship.

I was also elated to be approached by Dr. McNeill during this same poster presentation. He commended me for all the work others and I had invested in this process and offered some of his own recent experiences traveling to Latin America to collaborate with healers. I thanked him for his useful resources and suggestions in the early creation of the course and discussed some wisdom he might share with the class when he guest lectures. Throughout our conversation, I felt my mind wandering to how incredible it was to be speaking with Dr. McNeill. Honestly, I was a little academically star-struck to be talking with someone who has had such a tremendous impact on mine and others' development in the area of Latino/a spirituality and mental health. His openness and warmth toward me as a student journeying in his footsteps was awe-inspiring.

That same receptivity and support, truly, seemed to be a theme throughout the conference between students and elders in the field. In the same way Dr. Gloria selflessly makes herself available to students for mentorship and encouragement, these elder professionals reached out to us as students. Pillars in the Latino/a psychology field (and wider mental health field, for that matter) like Dr. Melba Vasquez, Dr. Patricia Arredondo, and Dr. Lillian Comas-Díaz all found ways to inspire students to continue the struggle and progression toward building-up the Latino/a community. This culminated in the last night of the conference when these women "let their hair down" and "cut a rug" on the dance floor with the rest of us, as a way of celebrating all our contributions so far.

One last aspect of the conference that provided a foundation to my transformative experience had to do with the deep connections I made with my sisters in the ANDALE academic family. Sharing meals and lodging, stories of hardship and joy, and plenty of laughter and tears allowed us to know one another and encourage one another in more profound ways. An example of this arose in one conversation I had with a younger member on the team who shared her recent struggles and the ways in which our relationship has helped to give her hope for academic advancement.

Without my NLPA conference attendance, I would not have realized the significance of mine and others commitment to Latino/a psychology or the importance of our connections as one large academic family. As a result of the conference, I acknowledge my power to create change and make a difference in the field of Latino/a psychology. It is my hope that this rejuvenation spreads and becomes contagious to other students who are interested and able to make a difference by sharing their stories, experiences, and wisdom. The wider psychological field must continue to feel the waves we make and keep our community's needs a priority.

**About the Author:**

Rachel Ocampo Hoogasian is a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology department at UW-Madison. Her research interests include: Latino/a psychology, integrating Latino/spirituality into psychotherapy, and psychotherapy with Latino/a youth and families. She has presented at several national and international conferences as well as developed and taught courses around Latino/a spirituality and mental health. She is currently lecturing CP650 Communication in Interviewing at UW-Madison.

## **Section Four**

### **Stereotypes in the Entertainment Media**

Petra Guerra

In order for movie producers, and advertising agents, to create films and advertisements for Latina/os, they must create what Flores (1997) calls the Imaginary Latina and Latino. This means that media consumers have a false reality, as Gerbner (1987) would argue, not only a false reality, but a false representation of those in the media. Richie Perez (1990) gives us a great explanation of the movies of the 80s. These films portrayed Puerto Ricans as being wild and uncivilized. These are just a few examples of that imaginary portrayal.

Students in my CLS/CommArt class had the exposure to not just the readings of great writers but also the movies to critic. For me it was an excellent way to see how some of the students were made aware of the stereotypes created in the media. We discussed the importance of being media literate and understand the power of the media. The seed was planted in their minds regardless of their majors and interest.

## **The Power of Media as a Weapon**

Marisa Aronson

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to show how powerful mass media can be in either perpetuating or dismantling stereotypes of Latinos. Mass media has been notorious for being used as a weapon to further oppress and stereotype Latinos. Conversely, media can also be used as a tool to empower this marginalized group. To prove this point, this paper analyzes how the media has been used in both respects. The outcome shows that part of the problem lies in the fact that the majority of mass media in the United States is produced by the dominant Anglo society.

As stated by Chon Noriega (1992), the media is extremely powerful in enforcing certain ideologies and can be seen as a weapon. There are many forms of mass media that surrounds us every day. Whether we turn on our favorite television program, the news, a radio station, open a book, or a magazine, or even just driving past a billboard, media is everywhere, and it can have a huge impact of shaping our ideas of the world. Unfortunately, it is also true that many of the largest and most powerful media outlets are dominated by the dominant and privileged Anglo society in the United States. This is in part why there are many biases in the media, and is why it has the potential of being used as an oppressive tool (Noriega, 1992). News media is one of the most influential because it is seen as reflecting reality. Even though it is reporting on real events, news media still comes with a certain lens or bias. There are multitudes of events news outlets can choose from to report on, but Latinos and other minority communities are constantly seen as the perpetrators and criminals. Which is why it is not a coincidence that a majority of the time these ethnic minorities are seen as the criminals in television and film. An example of how news media has skew certain views on a news event, is how when reporting on the movement of the Young Lords Organization (Morales, 1996), they focused on the violence and internal conflicts that were caused by the police informants, instead of the good they were doing for the community. Even though the organization was providing services such as breakfast programs, health programs, and clothing drives, the media chose not to emphasize this. The media instead tried to demonize, and criminalize their actions. This of course ties into Charles Ramirez-Berg's (2002) classification of Latino stereotypes of *el bandido*. The fact that other media, such as movies and television, reinforces these stereotypes contributes to many social justice issues. According to Noriega (1992) media is not just a way to make profit, but can also be a weapon used by the dominant culture in that it can distort the truth. This fact of truth distortion has manifested itself in the criminal justice system. Racial profiling for instance is a major issue for Latinos in the United States, and is one of the reasons why there is a disproportionate amount of blacks and Latinos in jails and prisons compared to whites. From this, one might argue that blacks and Latinos commit more crimes than whites, but this theory has never been proven. The

truth of the matter is that blacks and Latinos are targeted more often than whites, and this is one factor as to why there is a huge racial discrepancy in our criminal justice system.

### **Documentary Cinema as a Tool for the Oppressed**

The same way media can be used to oppress and marginalize people. But it can also be used to empower marginalized people by given them a platform to showcase their voice. Lillian Jimenez (1997) states that documentary cinema can be seen as a weapon because it can be a way to combat and challenge the bias viewpoints of marginalized groups that have become intrinsic in our societal institutions. According to Noriega, documentary cinema can also be educational because it can call attention to issues that are affecting a certain group of people from their perspectives. This is important because it gives marginalized people the power to tell their side of the story, and describe their own personal experiences. An example of bringing light to a certain issue from a perspective that would not otherwise be told would be the documentary *Chicano! History of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement* (Morales, Rancho, Moreno, & Cozens, 1996). Part of the documentary told the perspective of how young Chicanos demanded a better education system. They noticed how they were not being treated as equals, and that education was supposed to be a key to a better life, but the schools systems were instead preparing them for cheap, unskilled labor. These types of documentaries are important because it brings to the forefront not only certain perspectives, but also issues and histories that otherwise would not be told. It is amazing how many people in the United States do not know of the Chicano Movement. This also applies to textbooks. It is easy even for some educated people to go through their careers and not know of this history because it is not regularly talked about and taught in the education systems. The reason for this is because many textbook companies are owned and operated by the dominant Anglo society in the United States. Just like news media, even though history books report on real events, it can be presented in a way that is bias. In addition, some events can be completely ignored. It is unfortunate that Latino and other marginalized people's histories are not inherent in our education system. The story of how Puerto Ricans used cinema to fight against oppression also relates to how important it is for the oppressed to share their history and experiences. Puerto Ricans in New York during the late sixties and early seventies were able to use media to resist stereotyping, and it also gave them the means to expose the terrible conditions many Puerto Ricans faced (Jimenez, 1997). There were also certain distorted images about Puerto Ricans that were imposed through media by the dominant culture such as the idea that Puerto Ricans were responsible for the horrible conditions that they encountered (Jimenez, 1997). The documentaries that were made by Puerto Ricans were a way to show what was going on in their communities from their perspectives.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, media in all forms has a big impact on the image of many marginalized people. The fact that most media outlets are controlled by the dominant and privileged culture in the United States is one reason why there is a skewed perspective on these groups. This reinforces stereotypes, which also contributes to the oppression of underprivileged groups. It is important to show the viewpoint of the oppressed as it combats these issues. Although there have been efforts in the Chicano and Puerto Rican communities to undo the years worth of misrepresenting Latinos, there is still a lot of work to be done.

## About the Author:

Marisa Aronson is from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She is currently a junior at the University of Wisconsin Madison majoring in Spanish with an emphasis on Hispanic Literature and is also obtaining a certificate in Chicana/o Latina/o Studies. She is looking forward to studying abroad in Lima, Peru this upcoming fall to broaden her perspective of the being a world citizen and promote more understanding of different cultures. She hopes to gain a position in a non-profit organization that serves underserved communities in the United States after graduation.

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# **The Good Neighbor Policy and Carmen Miranda: How U.S. policy can influence the media**

Mia Akers

## **Abstract**

This paper examines how the U.S.' Good Neighbor Policy of the 1930s empowered the rise and stardom of Latino sensation, Carmen Miranda. Due to the fact that Good Neighbor Policy enabled amicable relationships with Latin American countries and the U.S. actively tried to include Latinos in media productions, Miranda capitalized on this fame and became the star we know her as today. However, when this policy ended, so too did her popularity and stardom. Miranda's additional portrayal of overt Latino stereotypes and caricatures, like thick accents and dancing, also enabled her to reach an unprecedented level of fame. In total, this paper intends to reflect the way in which the political, social, and economic relationships and policies of the U.S. directly, impact, negatively and positively, the media and its portrayals of certain groups of people.

It is no secret that media representations and portrayals of certain groups of people in the U.S. are the result of political relations, among other things, between America and other nations. In Carmen Miranda's case, this statement holds true. Carmen Miranda's rise to fame was significantly impacted by Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy of the 1930s and 1940s, which established Pan-American unity under the ideals of diplomacy and democracy between America and Latin American countries (Sanchez, 1999). Due to this policy and other economic factors like industrialization and market profitability, Carmen Miranda capitalized on these amicable relations between the U.S. and Latin America and established herself as the "Latin foreign other"; Miranda became the exotic commodification of all Latin American women and became known as a cultural icon for her aesthetic pleasure, tropical rhythm and her bananas. As shown through the movie *Banana's is My Business* (1995) Miranda was only able to achieve this high level of fame because of the Good Neighbor Policy and her embodiment of the "Latin foreign other", who was assimilated into U.S. culture through her vivacious, stereotypical, actions and language. I will argue that Miranda's success was inextricably linked to her overt stereotypical representations as the "Latin foreign other" and to the Good Neighbor Policy. Without her caricature portrayals and this political policy, the world might not have known Carmen Miranda as we know her today.

As mentioned earlier, the Good Neighbor Policy was a policy established in the 1930s by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This policy was meant to be political and cultural crusade by the U.S. and other Latin countries, against the Axis powers; the overall purpose was to protect foreign markets and investments in Latin countries. In order to carry out this crusade, the U.S. and the Latin countries had to agree not to get involved in one another's domestic affairs (Sanchez, 1999). Due to this positive relationship between the U.S. and Latin Countries, like Brazil, Miranda was able to establish herself as an actress, singer, and dancer, in America. As

illustrated in *Banana's is My Business* (1995), an American executive saw Miranda perform in Brazil and thought she could be a new Broadway attraction; he brought her over to the U.S. to star on Broadway. When she began to perform in America, she quickly became a star and rose to fame because she embodied the essence of the Good Neighbor policy: harmonious relationships between the U.S. and Latin America (Meyer & Solberg, 1995). However, when the Good Neighbor Policy ceased to exist and the Great Depression occurred, Miranda did not have as much success as she did in her early career because Americans held discriminatory and racial prejudices towards Latinos. Americans did not see Latinos as the “foreign other” anymore; rather they saw them as “racial others” and a threat to the American lifestyle and culture (Sanchez, 1999). When this happened, Miranda had to create even more clownish and caricature portrayals of Latinas because those were the images that dominated Americans minds about Latinos. In total, Miranda’s successful career in the 1940s was primarily based upon her being in the U.S. at the right point in time to utilize the Good Neighbor Policy to her advantage and capitalize on the amicable relationships between the U.S. and Latin countries.

Although Carmen Miranda still benefited from the Good Neighbor policy and as Sanchez said in his article was “the ideal symbolization of the Good Neighbor Policy”, Miranda still fell prey to stereotypical representations of Latina women and had to personify the overtly exotic, sexualized, rhythmic women that the U.S. thought represented Latin America (Sanchez, 1999). She carried the burden of representation in being the ambassador and embodiment of all of Latin America figuratively and literally. For instance, in *Banana's is My Business* (1995), the documentary describes some of Miranda’s first interviews with American reporters when she started performing and receiving national attention. In one interview, she said “she loved American money and men” (Meyer & Solberg, 1995). This statement illustrates the kind of stereotypes that Miranda had to play into in order to get the press that she wanted: she had to be seen as a sexualized woman always in search for love and who was driven by money and greed. When critics reported on Miranda’s performances, they often used this same type of discourse to discuss her, describing her as a sexual fetish or detailing her performance only by looking at her body (Sanchez, 1999). Due to the fact that she was seen as a “foreign other”, Miranda had to play into these common assumptions and be wild, clownish, and make a spectacle of herself in order to appease American audiences; her body and exotic ways and looks served as a marker of her ethnic otherness which can be seen in other films she starred in at the time. She could still be in Broadway roles and film performances, which illustrates the Good Neighbor policy and inclusion of Latinos in American media, but only if she was vivacious, had a heavy accent, and seeking love. Her fake and over the top portrayals were so stereotypical, that when she went back to Brazil, she was not well accepted and they even said that she was too “Americanized” (Meyer and Solberg, 1995). Since Miranda became Americanized and played into the stereotypical depictions of the foreign others during that time period, she was able to gain much success, even though it was at the cost of receiving negative responses from her home country.

Carmen Miranda’s success in mainstream America Media in the 1940s was largely based on two factors: Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy and the acts of mimicry she performed that

highlighted her sexuality, tropicalism, and outlandish personality to identify herself as a “foreign other.” The Good Neighbor Policy established a united front between the U.S. and Latin America against other countries and thus, opened upon a market in which Miranda was able to have much success. Additionally, due to the fact that she was perceived as the “foreign other” and not the “racial other”, she capitalized on these commonly held assumptions about exotic Latinas and spoke with a heavy accent and sexualized dance moves. Americans often described Miranda, not by her character as a person, but by her body and over the top portrayals and performances. This fame all came at a price, however. After the Good Neighbor policy ended and Americans started to discriminate against anything that was perceived as a threat to white, American ideology, Miranda did not experience as much success and had to play into the stereotypical roles even more, which ultimately led to her mental stress and eventual death (Meyer & Solberg, 1995). However, if it were not for these caricature-esque representations and the Good Neighbor Policy, the world would not have known Carmen Miranda. Carmen Miranda’s story illustrates that Latinos can have success, but it must be at the perfect time in history, involves immense stereotyping, and comes at an immense cost to their dignity and human rights.

### **About the Author**

Mia Akers is a rising junior from Naperville, Illinois. She is majoring in Communication Arts (Communication Science-Honors) and working towards a certificate in Educational Policy Studies. She hopes to follow in her father's footsteps and attend law school in the fall of 2015 and become a lawyer. While on campus, Mia has been heavily involved with the Associated Students of Madison (Student Government) serving as a Student Council representative and the Diversity Committee Chair. She also is involved in Wisconsin Singers where she pursues her passion of performing and educating. Through all of her work, Mia continues to fight for the ideals of social justice, diversity, inclusion, and eliminating inequalities for underrepresented groups in the U.S.

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## Banana Republic as an Epithet and as a Clothing Store

Katherine Scheuer

### Abstract

In the 1940s, the term “banana republic” was patronizingly applied to Latin American countries. The implication was that these nations could offer little more than exports for use in the United States (including bananas and coffee) and an exciting, exotic vacation setting. While this connotation seems incongruous with the current atmosphere and attire of Banana Republic clothing stores, the history of the retail chain shares interesting similarities with the politically charged epithet of the 1940s.

When I came across the term “banana republic” in the article “Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz: Foundational Images of ‘Latinidad’ on Broadway and in Hollywood” by Alberto Sandoval Sanchez, I was quite surprised. The only banana republic I knew was the store in the local mall, which I associated only with pricey, upscale clothing suited for work in a corporate office setting. Sanchez described a much different version of a banana republic, calling the phrase a “predominant epithet used to brand Latin American countries as incompetent and ineffective in a modern capitalist world,” (Sanchez, 1999, p. 26). Given the offensive nature of the term, I was surprised that a clothing company would choose to retain that name. I also noticed an apparent discord between the types of clothes sold at Banana Republic (which I considered American and preppy) and the cultural connotations of such a name. After researching a bit into the history of the Banana Republic, I noticed some interesting connections between the clothing store and the epithet described by Sanchez.

The concept for Banana Republic was formed when Mel Ziegler had a hard time finding a replacement military jacket. He eventually settled on purchasing a British Burma jacket and asked his wife Patricia to tailor it to be more comfortable and practical. When friends showed an interest in the jacket, the Zieglers decided to open a clothing store specializing in repurposing surplus military items for the American public (Larsen, 2010). Banana Republic was opened in 1978 and marketed as a “safari and imported surplus clothing company,” (Adams, 2011). The brand was centered on themes of adventure and the exotic other.

Banana Republic was clearly using the stereotypes of Latin culture to market their brand. Both the name of the brand and the focus on repurposing military items imply that Latin countries had abundant military clothing and, by extension, a large military presence. This point to an association between Latin countries and the idea of banana republic’s as locations with “violent government coups spearheaded by cruel dictators” described by Sanchez (1999).

Similar to the stereotype of the “Latin foreign other” that Carmen Miranda so successfully marketed; Banana Republic also used the sense of excitement and adventure associated with Latin countries to sell product. Catalogues included watercolor and ink drawings and were designed to look like handwritten travel journals. One catalogue page depicts the

“history” of Banana Republic in cartoon form, showing explorers in exotic lands. Another page shows a parrot drawn with the phrase “a person in bush clothes is worth two in Gucci’s hand.” Collection pieces such as flight jackets, paratrooper briefcases, photojournalists’ vests, and “yanqui” fatigue hats were clearly chosen to reflect the adventure associated with Latin countries (Adams, 2011).

Although adventure was an overall theme, Banana Republic often seemed to blur or confuse Latin cultures with African cultures. Catalogue images included parrots (reminiscent of the tropical rainforests of South America) and African animals, including giraffes and zebras. A strong coffee blend and “yanqui” clothes (implicitly contrasted with Latin clothes) were shown on the same catalogue page as safari ascots (Adams, 2011). One explanation for this mixing of cultures could be that Banana Republic was trying to cultivate an image of world exploration and intentionally included references to both African and Latin cultures. However, given the general political climate of the time and the fact that the brand capitalized on stereotypes, I am more inclined to think this cultural blending reflects Anglo-American ignorance. Sanchez (1999) describes how both Carmen Miranda and Desi Arnaz catered to incorrect American ideas of Latin culture by simulating blackness, and I think that the cultural confusion seen in Banana Republic products reflects these inaccurate ideas.

An irony becomes apparent when the stereotypical sense of the exotic Latin culture and the derogatory nature of the term banana republic is compared with the success of the company. As described by Sanchez, banana republic generally described countries that were not able to compete in a capitalist world. However, the Banana Republic did quite well on the capitalist market expressly by using stereotypes of the so-called banana republics.

Eventually, the safari style went out of fashion and around 1988 the brand was reformulated to reflect the more suburban, preppy style I currently associate with Banana Republic clothing. Interestingly, Banana Republic recently released a heritage collection that seems to be a nod to the earlier safari styles. This season, menswear in the heritage collection includes toggle jackets, bandana scarves, and military shirts. Women’s option in this season’s heritage collection includes a sweater cape with a geometric pattern, military jackets, a denim shirt, and safari, palm, and animal prints (Banana Republic, 2013). Though the preppy aspect is still clearly maintained, the heritage collection subtly directs consumers back towards the idea of an exotic other. I am not sure how to interpret this movement back towards clothing associated with foreign adventures. It is difficult to judge the brand’s current level of awareness surrounding the historical and cultural implications of their name and image. Still, interesting comparisons can definitely be made between the history of Banana Republic and perceptions of Latin culture in the time of Carmen Miranda.

### **About the Author**

Kate Scheuer is a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison majoring in psychology and Spanish. After graduation, she hopes to serve in the Peace Corps in a community development

position. She also plans to attend medical school for psychiatry. Eventually, she would like a career as a bilingual psychiatrist and therapist working with children and adolescents.

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# From Pepsi Bombshell to Modern Family: A Critical Analysis of Latina Stereotypes

Nikita Lee

## Abstract

As a Pepsi Spokeswoman and as one of the leading actresses in the hit TV show *Modern Family*, Sofia Vergara's characters demonstrates how the media exploits sensitive images of sex, stupidity, and stereotypes using Latina celebrities. Through an in-depth analysis of Vergara's roles in the past, this composition will outline the harmful effects of media stereotypes and how they can be solved in the future.

In terms of her most recent role in the hit T.V show *Modern Family*, Sofia Vergara's character embraces every aspect of Ramirez Berg's definition of the Latina identity in media. In the show, Vergara is illustrated as the "the spitfire female Latina characterized by red colored lips, bright seductive clothing, curvaceous hips and breasts, long brunette hair, and extravagant jewelry" (Guzmán, 2004, p. 13). At a superficial level, this construction of Latina identity ostracizes a large population of Latin American women by propagating vast generalizations that have many negative implications. For marketing agents, the raunchy imagery of a Latina female is not seen as a cultural exploitation, but rather as a highly profitable medium. So in the realm of mass marketing and media imagery, what are the implications of these actions? Through an in-depth analysis of Sofia Vergara's predominance within the Hispanic consumer market, this composition will outline how Latina identity is defined by hyper-sexualization, intellectual incompetence, and familial conflict in American advertisements and television. In order to rid the American media of racially offensive content, it is important to define specific aspects of these elements that could have detrimental repercussions.

In regards to the racial constructions that surround the imagery of Latin American women, it is quite obvious that sexuality is a large component of success in the Hispanic consumer market. According to Guzmán, "it is the gendered media practices that surround sexual exoticness, racial flexibility, and ethnic ambiguity that position them [Latinas] as globally consumable docile bodies subject to the erotic and voracious gaze of the United States" (Guzmán, 2010, p.13). One example of this phenomenon can be seen in Sofia Vergara's risqué debut as a Pepsi spokeswoman in the early 1980's. In her very first Pepsi endorsement, a young, bikini-clad Sofia Vergara seductively strips articles of clothing off to protect her feet from the hot sand. As she crosses the beach, the commercial puts emphasis on the impenetrable attention of male onlookers and jealous female counterparts. In total, less than five seconds of the commercial features clips of the actual product. This is a primary example of how marketers use images of Latina bodies as a sexual device to sell their product (Davila, 2001, p. 415).

In addition to sexual illustrations, Latina females are also subject to the reoccurring racial construction that revolves around the portrayal of intellectual and linguistic incapacity. In popular American media, the addition of the "Latina female clown" is intended to add a comedic dimension to the already misconstrued identity of Latin-American women (Berg, 2002, p. 32).



One example of the “Latina female clown” can be seen in Sofia Vergara’s most recent Pepsi commercial where the Latina bombshell foolishly attempts to give an impromptu toast during a wedding reception. In the commercial, traces of misconstrued Latina constructions are reflected in Vergara’s over-exaggerated Spanish accent and her consistently incorrect grammar. In addition, the wedding bride’s contemptuous reaction implies that she sees Vergara’s exotic sexuality as a threat to her newly conceived marriage and that Vergara’s statements lack personal genuineness. Furthermore, Vergara’s insincerity towards the newly eloped couple is also underlined in the You Tube Video caption, which claims that, “When Sofia Vergara wants a Diet Pepsi, she gets it. Nothing, not even a wedding, will stand in her way.” Every element of this commercial indicates that Vergara’s character is a Latina buffoon who utilizes her sexuality and stupidity to produce comedic entertainment.

But aside from popular misconceptions about Latina sexuality and intellectual capacity, many marketers also exploit cultural myths that unjustly define Latina identity within the media. In the popular comedic hit show *Modern Family*, Sofia Vergara plays Gloria, a short-tempered Latina housewife who is married to Jay, a Caucasian man who is twice her age. In terms of her identity, she would be characterized as the *Latina Harlot*, a Hispanic female who lustfully desires the sexual accompaniment of Caucasian men. In total, the majority of Gloria’s humoristic value is predicated upon her Columbian background, which is used to justify many of her spontaneous outbursts and peculiar behavior. In one episode, Gloria battles over how to tell Jay that she is pregnant. Upon telling her husband, Gloria misinterprets his silence as a negative reaction and emotionally lashes out saying, “I can raise it alone. I have done it before and I can do it now. I come from a very strong line of Latin women, where husbands are nowhere to be found” (Higginbotham, 2012). In this instance, Vergara’s identity as the *Latina Harlot* also brings light to another stereotypical Hispanic role called *El Bandido*, a cold-hearted male individual who is estranged from his family (Berg, 2002). For the most part, the offensive nature of her statement suggests that the Hispanic community is bereft of male father figures. In total, Sofia Vergara’s character in *Modern Family* perpetuates racial misconceptions about Hispanic families.

Whether it is sexual imagery, blatant idiocy, or offensive cultural constructions, American media outlets continue to marginalize Latina women physically and emotionally. This misrepresentation ultimately breeds misunderstandings and conflicts. In order to resolve these issues, the portrayal of Hispanic females must change. With the emergence of successful Hispanic women like Sonya Soto Mayor, there is a wealthy abundance of positive Latina identities to explore. Although changing Latina roles in media may be unprofitable in the eyes of marketers and screenwriters, it is evident that the Latina identity needs to be redefined for future generations of America.

### **About the Author**

Nikita Lee is from Eden Prairie, Minnesota. She is currently a sophomore studying History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In addition, Nikita is also an active member of Delta Delta

Delta and a writer for B.Line, the official Wisconsin School of Business Magazine. As an advertising executive at the Badger Herald, Nikita spends most of her time planning marketing campaigns for local Madison business. Given her Puerto-Rican and Chinese heritage, Nikita loves to learn about different cultural traditions, especially within the realm of Hispanic and Asian culture. In her free time, Nikita enjoys eating curry, drinking Turkish espresso, and playing the ukulele.

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## **An Analysis of the Life of Rita Moreno**

Andrés Felipe Peláez

### **Abstract**

This paper will explore the life of Rita Moreno and how she was discriminated against for being of Latin American descent. Like all actors in the mid-1900's, Rita Moreno just wanted to pursue her career as a film dancer and actress, and though she got what she wanted, she was unable to obtain her A-list status and thus was always overlooked even though she garnered enough awards to prove her worth as an actress.

When Hollywood began including sound in their films, they developed this consensus that only Anglo-American's would get the lead roles, while the other ethnic actors had to fight for a supporting role or an unaccredited role. Sometimes they were given lead roles, but to the expense of their ethnic backgrounds. One great example that comes to mind is of Rita Moreno, and the fact that her roles as stereotypical Latino women kept her from achieving a higher status in Hollywood even though she was a highly decorated actor with proof of her talent.

Rita Moreno was born in Puerto Rico in 1931 but at a young age moved to New York City, "el barrio", or the Spanish Harlem (Beltrán, 2009). Her family moved as part of the wave of Puerto Ricans during the Great Depression due to better opportunities in the United States rather than back home. Yet though opportunities were scarce for her family, they still made sure Rita could get the dance lessons she needed to become a great performer. She eventually began dancing at nightclubs and in children's theater, but saw that to make it in America she had to over-do her Latina image. Due to this she got a contract with MGM in 1949 where she officially changed her name to Rita Moreno from Rosita Moreno which MGM thought was too corny (Beltrán, 2009). From there she began to play stereotypical roles in films, such as a Cajun woman in *The Toast of New Orleans* (1950) and a Tahitian girl in *Pagan Love Song* (1951). The problem with these roles, especially as the Cajun woman, is that they portrayed her as how American's viewed Latinos at the time.

In *The Toast of New Orleans*, Rita Moreno played the love interest of a white male, but was eventually denied and he instead fell in love with the white female protagonist. The role that Rita played was an example of the "dark lady", which is a role where Latina women are seen as passionate and fiery, yet eventually denied by the white protagonist (Berg, 2002). Though she was a teenager at the time, MGM gave her roles like these that did not help her career as an actress. Yet these roles could not help any Latino in the business, because they were stereotyped and shameful to many Latino actors. Rita knew this and took it as an advantage to get her foot in the door, but regardless of that MGM still used her for small useless roles that needed a "Latino type" character. Rita was dropped by MGM no later than two years after signing, and thus she began to star in roles without an official contract to one production company (Beltrán, 2009).

Rita Moreno went on to play small roles as a stereotyped Latina. Her first leading role came in *The Ring* in 1952, which was around the time that films were being made to sympathize

for the Mexican Americans and all the inequality they had been facing and were still facing. Yet the promotions for the film still portrayed Rita as sexually provocative so people would be more inclined to see a film that was still stereotypically true (Beltrán, 2009). Due to the lack of promoting Rita as an up-and-coming Latina actress, she was still relatively unknown and continued starring in various small roles while becoming the poster child for Latina women. She was considered a “spitfire”, a “firecracker”, and various other terms that made sure people knew she was Latina. Her posters and roles were becoming sexier, and due to that she was being portrayed as a real life “dark lady”, where many questioned whether her innocence was just an act (Beltrán, 2009). For years she accepted this, knowing that the only way for her to make it in this business was to further perpetuate this stereotype so she could make a living for herself. Yet this all seemed to change (or so she thought) when she starred in the highly successful *West Side Story* in 1961.

In *West Side Story*, Rita played Anita, the girlfriend of the Shark leader Bernardo. The film was a then modern-day Romeo and Juliet musical, which dealt with the confrontations between the Puerto Rican Shark gang and the New York Jet gang. They fought for the New York territory, engaging in dangerous fights that led to the deaths of three main characters. Apart from this story, there was the love story between Maria (a Puerto Rican) and her newly found love for Tony (a White New Yorker). In the film, Rita’s character sang a song called “America”, which was about the differences of living in Puerto Rico and America. The song was a big with audiences everywhere, and Rita’s acting was so well done that she won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in 1962 (Beltrán, 2009). Yet after this amazing performance she was unable to get leading roles, apart from those including Latina stereotypes. Even the leads for *West Side Story* were given to White actors, proving that Latino actors were still not considered good enough, even though Rita Moreno proved that wrong with her Oscar win. She thus became frustrated with not getting the attention she rightly deserved, and decided to act in very few films after that and instead stick to theater (Beltrán, 2009).

Rita Moreno went on to do very well in the entertainment industry, where she eventually became one of a handful of actors to win two Emmys (one for *The Muppet Show* and one for *The Rockford Files*), a Tony (*The Ritz*) a Grammy (*The Electric Company* soundtrack) and an Oscar (*West Side Story*) (Beltrán, 2009). Her role in *The Ritz* was extra special because it was specifically made for her, for she played a very stereotyped Latino that made fun of how Hollywood portrays Latino actors. It was a sort of kick to the face for Hollywood, and was her last best role to date. She has continued to act and still does to this day. Her career was as good as it could get for being a Latina actress, but one cannot help but wonder how it would have turned out if she were acting today or if Hollywood was not as racist back then.

For the longest time, Hollywood had been making sure Latino actors could not get the big roles they wanted on screen. They were scared of Anglo-American’s losing their “superiority”, yet this was met with frustration from Latino’s and other ethnic groups alike. Hollywood would purposefully make films that stereotyped Latino’s to “teach” Anglo-American’s how to treat them and to falsify how Latino’s should live (Perez, 1990). It was a way to keep white

supremacy relevant, yet in the mid 1900's many newly arrived Latino's were beginning to create a community to go against this unwanted view of Latino's. It took a long time for films to portray Latino's as normal American's, and due to that actors such as Rita Moreno were unable to spend most of their acting careers doing films they wanted, not films they had to or were forced to do.

### **About the Author**

Andres Peláez was born in Bogotá, Colombia, but grew up in Woodbury, Minnesota. He is a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison majoring in Genetics. He is planning on attending graduate school to further educate himself in the area of cancer genetics and to learn how to conduct research of his own. He has always wanted to make a difference in the world, and hopes that his future research will help him achieve that goal.

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## Section Five

### *Telenovelas: Influences, Media Content & Sex Roles*

Petra Guerra

*Telenovelas* are constructed by commercial organizations and consumed by audiences in the United States and around the globe. These dramas have witnessed wide-ranging success in their countries of origin such as in the U.S., Mexico, Colombia and Brazil. As a product, they have gained important export value to countries such as Germany, Russia, France, and England.

The Chican@ & Latin@ Studies Program provided a space for students to explore, question, and discuss why *telenovelas* have, and continue to be so successful in the U.S, through a class dedicated to the influences, media content, and sex roles.

In this section, students from the CLS *Telenovela* course had the opportunity to express their view on how *telenovelas* promote social, cultural, economic, political influences, and entertainment, including behavioral change when used as a tool to promote health and education.

## **Evolving Telenovelas: Then, Now, and the Future**

Rebekah Blocker

### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to situate telenovelas within society through education entertainment. It focuses on the way telenovelas have changed in the past and are presently changing to reflect the future. It includes a focus on Mexican telenovelas and its societal impacts in regards to society and women.

Telenovelas have a strong history in Chican@/Latin@ communities. Mexican telenovelas in particular, over the course of their existence, have undergone some notable changes. This paper explores how Mexican telenovelas have changed over time in both content and context. In order to understand the role of telenovelas one must know the importance and necessity of them within the Mexican community. “We come from Mexico, and, in Mexico that’s all that you look at. It just stays in your family and you just get into it.” (Mayer, 2003, p. 486). Telenovelas represent much more than soap operas in the United States. According to Abad-Izquierdo they are regarded as the “most popular form of entertainment in Mexican society” (2011, p. 93). Habits are derived from experience. Experience comes from first engaging in an activity upon which a tradition of repeating the same practices develops into a habit. Telenovelas develop into habits because the initial experience in the audience members viewing fulfilled a certain need (George Nguigi king’ ara 2011). So what is the need that telenovelas fulfill?

Telenovelas serve as a social outlet and as entertainment-education. After working, the time for telenovelas is viewed close to sacred in some communities. This is an ideal that does not come across in United States soap operas. It is important to emphasize the differences between soaps and telenovelas via the commitment base that telenovela viewers have. An emotional and cultural connection, through both characters and content, is an aspect that is lacking within United States soaps. The stories of telenovelas do not just unite those viewers but the entire community. It doesn’t just connect the viewers to the characters but to their culture. More importantly, telenovelas stirs up cultural pride to affect the viewers’ real lives (Mayer, 2003). That connection brings with it a social outlet that telenovela viewers utilize for changes in their own homes via entertainment-education. There is true meaning and impact that come from telenovelas and paramount to entertainment-education is purpose (Wilkin et al. 2007).

What is entertainment-education? According to Arvind (2004), entertainment-education is entertainment that has a proven social benefit. It is purposely designed to both inform about social issues as well as shift social norms and change behaviors. Some entertainment-education topics include HIV/AIDS, diabetes, teen pregnancy, and contraceptive use. Entertainment is an industry that because of its societal impact is under-utilized. Take for example that 56% of Latinas and 69% of African American women claim to learn about disease and prevention from soap operas (Beck, Pollard, and Greenberg, 2000). If these issues were structured for entertainment-education, by addressing disease and prevention, it would be well received

because the medium is the message. In other words, establishing communal ties, the way telenovelas have, provides the only avenue needed for these educational messages to be received. This relates back to the prior concept of a cultural connection. The key here is telenovelas need to purposely implement more of these specific media messages (I.e. HIV/AIDS, contraceptive use, etc.) into their shows by way of culture.

As the world evolves the entertainment industry reflects these changes, sometimes leaving aspects of itself behind. In the United States while soap operas are still popular they have been quickly submerged behind television sitcoms and reality TV shows. Due to the composition and connection of telenovelas as social outlets this is not the case. Telenovelas have evolved along with time and are still if not more popular than before. Some very important shifts have occurred though in content and context. “As an important alternative to American series, telenovelas had to evolve and change,” as stated by Abad-Izquierdo (2011, p. 97). Women in society both in Mexico and the United States have been regarded as the “weaker” sex. They are displayed in the media as passive, homebodies, less intelligent. Women began to move out of the home and were not limited by domestic activities. This was also a result of American influence (Perez, 2003). They became acknowledged in society and took their experience to the workplace. Women in this sphere had power and could thrive independently of men within society.

When women began to gain more power and rights in the world this too, was reflected in telenovelas. The original composition of a Mexican telenovela is situated around a very specific love triangle. In general a young honest, good girl falls in love with a rich man usually of a higher social class. They struggle to validate their love and have to overcome endless obstacles to be together. Female characters replicate the *puta/virgen* dichotomy. The telenovela *Gutierrez* (*name of the male character too*) challenged patriarchy and women’s roles from its traditional form. Not only did it give Rosa, Gutierrez [main character], the power in the relation, but it completely emasculated the male character. It also removed Rosa, as a woman, as the victim. Quite the opposite, it is Gutierrez that suffers from his wife’s nonconformity. She defied the patriarchal system that was established and also questioned the roles of breadwinner and head of the household. While audience members regard her as the villain, an important decision was made to keep her faithful to her husband despite his flaws (Banquells, 1958). *Gutierrez* provided an avenue that had rarely been seen before and demonstrated the roles of women changing within society (Abad-Izquierdo, 2011). This goes to show that it is not just the placement of women within the homes but it is also the mental displacement. From leaving the home they also expanded their minds to the world of business and politics and leadership roles both in the community and abroad. When a male gets criticized for not making more money and being mistreated by his wife it emphasizes a power change (Hamburger, 2000).

An additional change in society in the arena of advertising led telenovelas once again to evolve. A concept known as product placement surfaced in telenovelas more intentionally than ever before. Because women were the main viewers a lot of the product placement targeted females. Advertising spanned from household cleaning products for kitchen and bathrooms to brands of food. Female teenagers looked to telenovelas even for the latest fashion trends.



Storylines, womens' roles, and advertising were not the only changes. By reason of closeness to the Mexican government changes in politics and politicians often found their place in telenovelas. National sentiment was an important aspect of Mexican lives. It was not only crucial to those living in Mexico but even to those that immigrated to the United States. Telenovelas created a bridge between the two places. In past history, in the 1950s, with the growing popularity of television, Azcarraga Vidaurreta, owner of XEW radio and creator of Telesistema Mexicano, along with government officials, used his technologies to unify the Mexican people and strengthen the Mexican national culture (Abad-Izquierdo, 2011). However, the government wanted to cater to the middle-class and the urbanites. Telenovelas reflected this change and gave hope that Mexico would progress. *Maria Isabel* displayed exactly this concept. She was able to adapt to urban living despite her background and "represented the possibility of Mexico overcoming its obstacle and becoming an urban, modern, and industrialize nation" (Abad-Izquierdo, 2011, p. 104).

Unfortunately these adjustments in telenovelas were not the only ones. Negative changes have also been recorded. With the growing immigration of Mexicans into the United States a need arose for Mexican Americans to be represented in the media. Because of the United States' audience one not necessarily reflective of cultural expression and national sentiment but rather on sex, many telenovelas were pressured to now reflect modern American "values". American influence changed the dynamics of many telenovelas. They began to include more sex, unprotected and impetuously, and less education. Returning to the notion of entertainment-education it is imperative that the potential of telenovelas is once again taken up and grounded. The rise of HIV/AIDs specifically in the Chican@/Latin@ community is rising exponentially and studies show that telenovelas could impact this epidemic (Medina, 2011).

It is also critical to note that influence is a two-way street. *Sin Tetas No Hay Paraíso* serves as a prime example. This telenovela featured many beautiful Latinas who in addition to being beautiful all had one thing in common, large breasts. These girls, all of high school age, would skip school to go be pampered and admired by powerful misogynistic men in a drug ring. One girl, Catalina Santana, though eager to join her friends and gain money and status, her top half does not match those of her peers. This pushes the desire for breast implants and the need to belong to achieve this paradise her friends discovered (Restrepo, 2007). Though not the original intent of this Columbian telenovela reactions across Latin America were stunning. Audience members created a link between women's manipulation by men and the need for independence. This independence was thought to be through receiving breast implants. As a result, according to L'Hoeste, plastic surgery numbers soared from 25 a day in 1998 to "booming figures of up to 100 surgeries per day" in 2008 (2011, p. 175). Latinas went to various places to have this surgery done to assert their independence. Though the message was misconstrued from the producer's intent when *Sin Tetas* was released in Mexico, via cable, it was proudly supported by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). The message that was portrayed in meaning was translated across professionally but it is the communal intent that should hold the focus. Agencies even began raffling off lottery tickets for breast implant surgery

as a result of *Sin Tetas*. Many women caught infections, opted for cheap surgeries instead of professional, and some even died (L'Hoeste, 2011). In telenovelas, again being a part of community, how audience members are internalizing these messages is crucial. But telenovelas can incorporate other messages "to be catalysts for pro-social behaviors" (Guerra et al., 2011, p.151).

In conclusion telenovelas are not outdated and are constantly evolving because of the connection the viewers have with the shows. The telenovelas evolve in content and context alter to match the needs and/or wants of the community because they are a part of the community. American influence has swayed the strong Chican@/Latino cultural foundation and needs to return to the idea of entertainment-education for the good of the community.

### About the Author

Rebekah Blocker was born in New Britain, Connecticut and raised in Chicago, IL. She attends the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she is a senior graduating in May 2013. She is majoring in Communication Arts with a Rhetorical Science Concentration and earning a certificate in Chican@/Latin@ studies. Faith and ambition drive her work in the fight for equal access to higher education. She will continue that fight upon relocating to Houston, Texas after graduation and continuing her passion for community service and social justice.

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## Changing Homophobic Views through Telenovelas

Edith A. Flores

The media plays an important role in society because it is a fairly popular source of information dispersal that is accessible and highly available. From this mass media, television is a specific industry that is very well known, in part, because they air soap operas or telenovelas. The complete functions of telenovelas cannot always be noticed and for this reason many times are not given much importance. People do not see the full potential of telenovelas and just see telenovelas' content as "heart rendering, [and] tragic suffering" (Acosta, 2003, p.271). This perception of telenovelas as pure melodramatic plots causes a sentiment of purposelessness because there seems to be no clear, direct benefits derived from watching telenovelas other than for entertainment. Telenovelas are even seen as a "waste of time women's trash" (Acosta, 2003, p.485). This second perception of telenovelas is not only sexist because men also watch telenovelas, but it also fails to recognize or appreciate that telenovelas can be a great resource to promote behavioral and social change amongst its viewers.

However, once telenovelas are closely studied, it will be proven that telenovelas serve as much more than just an entertainment source. The perfect example is how Mexican telenovela *Las tontas no van al cielo* (2008) provides more than mere entertainment because it is entertaining and also capable of creating change amongst its viewers. *Las tontas no van al cielo* is a powerful telenovela to promote positive homophobic social behavior change due to its accessibility and availability in different formats, the large audience it is able to reach and the role of importance it plays on its viewer's lives by means of entertainment- education.

### **Broad Accessibility and Reaching Ability of Telenovelas as a Factor for Success in Social Behavior Change**

The boundaries of accessibility and availability of telenovelas that people once faced has disappeared with the advances of technology. Telenovelas have moved along with technology and expanded the mediums through which they are accessible. At first, telenovelas were only aired through the radio industry, so only people who had radios had access to the telenovelas. If people had radios they had access to the telenovelas but only during the designated time that the novela was aired. As time has progressed telenovelas have advanced to be aired on television, the internet and portable devices. Since Telenovelas' accessibility is no longer restricted to those who own a radio, everyone has accessibility to aired telenovelas through the various methods of dispersal. Even if a person is not home on time to watch a telenovela on their television, they can watch the telenovela on the go on a smartphone or an iPad at the same time it's being aired on television.

What is even better is that through the advances of technology, the boundaries of availability have also disappeared. With the access to a digital recording device, a telenovela can be recorded and viewed at any given point regardless of the time and day. Acknowledging that

not everyone will have that technology, it is important that telenovelas are “[Aired] mornings, afternoons, and during primetime” (Acosta, 2011, p. 474) to ensure that they will be accessible to the most amount of people across the board. The different airing times reduce the probability of giving priority to a specific group of people who might be free during the morning over those who are not.

The availability of telenovelas has also increased alongside the range of viewers telenovelas can reach. According to Acosta, telenovelas “generate public discussions simply by virtue of their omnipresence on Spanish-language network leaders, Univision and Telemundo” (2011, p. 474). Telenovelas aired through Univision and Telemundo are usually transmitted in other countries as well as in the United States at the same time, meaning that the audiences who are exposed to the telenovelas are multiplied. The larger the audience, the more people telenovelas can reach, the more conversations about telenovelas people will engage in, and overall the more telenovelas can promote social behavior change.

In addition to the availability and accessibility of the telenovela, the commotion they can cause amongst viewers and the large audience they can reach, there is also the aspect of viewer loyalty. Telenovelas are a valuable part of people’s lives and, for example, as Acosta relates, a young woman in San Antonio, Texas had student responsibilities to fulfill, but she still devoted specific time to solely watch telenovelas and describes it as “[taking] precedence over all other duties and responsibilities” (Acosta, 2011, p. 486). This goes to show just how important telenovelas are to some people and the seriousness of people when it comes to watching novelas.

Another instance where the importance of telenovelas or soap operas for viewers is clearly exemplified is the case of a girl from Kenya who killed her step-father because “he would not allow her to watch a favorite television soap opera” (Ngugi, 2011, p. 134). The step-father and the girl argued about each wanting to watch a different program on television, and when the girl saw her time with a soap opera threatened she took immediate action to defend her time with the television. Killing her step-father was not necessary especially since the soap opera could be re-accessed some other day through different means other than a television.

The soap opera was such a big part of the girl’s life that she needed to watch it on a regular basis; it can even be argued that it became a habit that she needed to continue. Ngugi (2011) states that “when viewing soap operas becomes such an intense habit, its entertainment value for the audience reaches the greatest degree and it changes into something more intimate- a sort of the audience’s ‘beingness’ or identity” (p. 134). At this point, considering that the girl was upset about not being able to watch the soap opera, the girl could have felt a personal connection with some aspect of the soap opera that she needed to reconnect with on a regular basis. It is possible that soap opera watching was not a habit, if it ever was, anymore. Watching the soap opera could have been the only way she could identify herself at a broader level. This identity was placed at a much higher level where she could find her place within society.

## **How Education Entertainment and Vicarious Learning can Promote Social Behavior Change**

Telenovelas transmit a lot of health, social, and political messages, to mention a few, that are not always understood at first sight. These messages are weaved into the plots of telenovelas which require a lengthier, more careful examination in order to be understood and even noticed. A telenovela that simply lays out facts about an issue will not spark interest in the viewers. On the other hand, entertainment- education a social changing behavior technique that is applied to some telenovelas that proves to be more efficient because it is: “the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members’ knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms and change overt behavior” (Medina, 2011, p. 184). The use of media through this lens has the purpose of both providing something pleasurable to watch and also providing an educational component that aids in the modification of certain beliefs and actions. While watching telenovelas, the viewers do not notice how their personality is being influenced by the characters they see on television unless they take the time to reflect after a long period of continuous exposure. This concept relates directly to Albert Bandura’s concept of vicarious learning, which stresses that people learn through observing the actions of others. There is “research literature [that] indicates that the public can vicariously learn healthy and/or unhealthy social behavior through mass media” (Medina, 2011, p.186). In this way, telenovela viewers can be influenced to change their social behavior.

### **Telenovelas as Social Behavior Changer: Case of *Las tontas no van al cielo***

Now that the telenovela’s accessibility, availability to large audiences, importance in viewer’s lives and the concept of entertainment-education have been explained, now vicarious learning and entertainment education can be analyzed as applied in *Las tontas no van al cielo*. But first, there will be a short explanation and critique of the telenovela.

Rosy Ocampo’s *Las tontas no van al cielo* (2008) is about a woman named Candy who on her wedding day finds her fiancé cheating on her with her own sister. When she finds her fiancé cheating Candy is completely emotionally destroyed and decides to move to Guadalajara, Jalisco Mexico. In Guadalajara, she moves in with her uncle Manuel, who also goes by the name of Meño. Throughout the novela, Meño is very supportive of Candy and the decisions she makes, acting almost as Candy’s father and certainly a great friend. They have a wonderful, healthy and open relationship that allows Meño to confess to Candy that he is gay. Her understanding and loving personality accepts him just as well as before and does not change the way she treats him. However, this accepting atmosphere in Meño’s household changes when his son Charlie comes to live with them.

Charlie is a very energetic, charismatic teenager that has a very judgmental homophobic attitude. His homophobic attitude is specifically observed in a scene where Candy asks him what

he thinks of his dad (meaning Meño) and he responds “es un poco raro, pero buena gente” “he is a bit strange but nice person” (NoVanAlCielo, 2008). Candy proceeds to ask him why he says this, and Charlie says “sí, tiene unos gestos como medios *delicados*, (*while he does a feminine gesture*) tu sabes, y nada que yo no soporto a los gays” (NoVan Al Cielo, 2008). This scene shows that Charlie is insensitive about his father’s sexuality without knowing Meño is actually gay and he directly states that he does not stand gay men. He is quick to characterize his father as feminine by saying his movements are *delicate* and making a “female- like” gesture. Charlie deliberately says he does not want to be around gay people, and by saying this he is combining all gay people into one category as if all gay people were the same or as if he knew all gay people. Charlie’s homophobic attitude is not the only attitude towards gay men portrayed in the telenovela, but it does set the mood for the acceptance of negative perceptions of gay people. Even though there is a change of how gay people are perceived as the telenovela advances, the first impression of rejection always stays in the back of people’s head and is not easily forgotten.

Although the negativity is not forgotten, it eventually starts to dissolve with an experience Meño shares with one of his male friends. He tells his friend, who is also coming out, the story of what it is like to come out as a gay man. Meño shares that coming out is a difficult life- changing process where friends drift away (NoVanAlCielo, 2008). The discussion of particular feelings and struggles that someone from the gay community has faced is a good approach to positively change the previous homophobic social behaviors that were promoted by Charlie in afore mentioned scene. In this new scene the viewers are able to better understand where Meño, a gay man, is coming from and what his journey of coming out was like rather than just judging and seeing him as *the* gay character from the telenovela.

By the end of the telenovela, after Charlie finds out his father is gay, he learns to live with that fact. He accepts his father for who he is and does not question his sexuality. In a later clip Charlie is seen warmly hugging Meño and expressing his love towards his father in front of others. At this point, Charlie has drifted away from homophobic feelings and acknowledges that his father will always be a loving father no matter what his sexual orientation. He learns to differentiate between his father’s sexuality, their father-son relationship and his father’s right to have amorous relationships even if it is with another man. This progression allows Charlie to serve as the perfect character to positively influence others to drift away from homophobic perspectives and behaviors. He invites the audience to jump into an experience where they encounter a person who is gay and they learn to live with that until they eventually see the gay man as a normal part of society.

The concept of the viewers learning to change their perceptions about gay people by seeing others change their behavior or perception is supported by Medina, who states that “Mass media, through content and interpretation, provide parasocial interactions and vicarious experiences through which the viewers can collectively shape meanings about people, norms, and life” (2011, p.186). Viewers are provided with the content and it is up to them to decipher the message that is trying to be passed along with Charlie’s acceptance of his gay father, which would hopefully be to change their negative homophobic social behavior change into a positive

one. Since “many media scholars agree that media helps shape the ways in which society understands the world (Medina, 2011, p.186), it would be possible for consumers to change their homophobic behaviors based on the positive way people in the telenovela react to the presence and existence of gay people.

If viewers were exposed more constantly to the acceptance of gay individuals, their ideals would be challenged and stimulated through the use of both educational and entertaining materials in telenovelas like *Las tontas no van al cielo*. In terms of entertainment, *Las tontas no van al cielo* includes a great load of comic instances where jokes are shared, awkward moments are lived, and overall there are many characters to identify with. There is an inclusion of major protagonist being from the toddler stage until being elders, all age ranges are seen in the telenovela, but there is also a lot real life situations involved. The life situations range from marriage, cheating, remarrying, sexual identities, sexual health, lies, friendship, love, greediness etc., there is enough material and the plot is sufficiently developed to not bore consumers while at the same time be able to incorporate an educational factor.

## **Conclusion**

Telenovelas are important and influential although many people cannot and sometimes even choose not to see their effects in society. The way that *Las tontas no van al cielo* follows the process of entertainment-education in order to create positive homophobic social behavior *change can be repeated to further positively change additional negative behaviors*. Since *telenovelas* already reach a large audience who is committed to staying loyal to the plots and they can be easily accessed it would just be a matter of picking an issue to be creatively discussed through *telenovelas* in order for the information to disperse and start creating change community by community. Although the constant exposure to *telenovelas* is repeatedly seen as a waste of time, there will not be any common knowledge of the messages that are trying to be passed on until viewers start to seek something out of a *telenovela* or is critical enough to discover their own message in order to not waste time.

## **About the Author**

Edith A. Flores is a second year undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison majoring in Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian Studies with a Certificate in Chicana/Latina Studies. She was born in Chicago, IL but is very proud to represent her roots from Zacatecas, Mexico. Edith has always had great expectations of herself because she knows she is capable of accomplishing anything she sets her mind to. She wishes to continue her studies in order to change the demographics of Mexicanos in higher education, professional fields, and to improve the overall quality of life for her family and *comunidad*. Ms. Flores is extremely grateful for the opportunity to pursue a higher education and for all the support she has received from her family, friends and selected teachers and professors.



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