LATINX: MEDIA REPRESENTATION & PORTRAYALS

LIZ-DIAMANTE TOLENTINO

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Instructor: Ursula Heinrich
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Abstract

Disadvantaged ethnic groups are often portrayed stereotypically in films; however, there has not been much research done into the portrayals of mass media on the Latinx community. Even less research has been done on how such portrayals affect members of this ethnic group. The following study is going to include extensive research into the media representation of the Latinx community and the portrayals that are created by the media on Latinx individuals. Additional analyses will explore the impact these portrayals have on Latinx individual’s self-esteem and on certain stereotypes that have been created by mass media. The term’s Latinx and Hispanics are often used interchangeably although, these two terms have different meanings. The term Latinx stands for a person of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina). Hispanic on the other hand stands for a person whose ancestry or themselves, come from a country where they speak Spanish. For the purpose of this study, the two terms will be used, due to the extent of existing research that has been done which uses either of the two terms. The U.S. Census Bureau defines the ethnonym Hispanic or Latino to refer to "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" and states that Hispanics or Latinos can be of any race, any ancestry, any ethnicity.

Key words: Latinx, Hispanic, Media, Stereotype, Portrayals
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Introduction

Generally, people assume they know everything about another race because of what they have seen or heard through the media. Media representations are how certain stereotypes are created. A stereotype is the idea or the expected way a particular group acts, usually offensive, harmful, or misrepresented. If a racial group grows by over fifty percent in a matter of ten years, does that mean that the perceptions people have of this ethnic group will also change throughout that time? The U.S. Census 2000’s results showed that the Latinx ethnic grow was already in the process of becoming, the largest minority group in the United States with a total of 35.3 million people identifying as Latinx (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Until recently, the minimal representation of Latinx in the media has had negative effects on the Latinx community. The Latinx community has been largely ignored and excluded from American media. Even when this community has been represented in the media, historically it has been portrayed negatively through stereotypes. Extensive research has unfolded, concluding that Hispanics are virtually absent as characters in the entertainment media and as correspondents and anchors in news media. When Latinx are represented in the media, you see a very consistent type of Latinx being portrayed. Previous research has looked into the negative consequences of exposure to ethnic/racial stereotypes in the media on the American audience. These distorted portrayals have caused media consumers, particularly whites, to develop negative stereotypical ideas of the Latinx community. Following this research, the effects of that media content on the members of the racial/ethnic minority groups portrayed have also been researched (Tukachinsky, Mastro, Yarchi 2017). However, how these portrayals created by the media affect the interactions with non-Latinx and Latinx ethnic/racial groups requires further research. When Tukachinsky et al. (2017), examined the relationships between the media representations and feelings the Latinx and Blacks had, they
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found that seeing an adverse image of their minority group increased positive attitudes in a group. They also found that the influence of media had no significance on the feelings Latinx/Blacks felt towards whites. Perceptions non-Latinx has towards them and the interactions between these racial groups, is usually always negative due to the different stereotypes that exist, and other misconceptions seen in mass media. Significant race inequality amongst Latinx and non-Latinx keeps growing as the number of Latinx in U.S. increases. Along with that, the stereotypical racism thrives. The media plays a significant role in how certain racial groups see one another, and this is something that has been researched in the past and will continue to be further investigate.

Purpose of the Research

Given the minimal media representations of Latinx and the widespread stereotyping and standardization of this racial group in American media outlets, this study describes how the media perpetuates misconceptions of Latinx community as a whole and how this negative representation, has prompted negative feelings and misinterpretations of the specific group in question. Overall, it will show the lack of representation and breakdown stereotypes that have been created from American mass media. How this affects people who identify as being a part of this community should further be researched via interviews.

Research Question

Given the issue of negative media portrayal of the Latinx community, this paper will address the following research questions:

RQI: Is the Latinx community represented in American media?

RQII: What stereotypes and portrayals have been created within mass media that affects Latinx and Hispanics?
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The next sections of this paper are the results of the approach that I took in gathering and collecting scholarly articles on Latinx in the media. The methods that I used to gather articles and become more informed about how the Latinx community is represented if present at all. Following this is a review of relevant literature about Latinx representation in the media. The last section of this paper will recap the discussions and issues highlighted in this paper as well as propose suggestions for future research incorporating the perspectives of Latinx-Americans.

II. Methodology

Before starting this research, I had to brainstorm and narrow down what I wanted to research and how I was going to orchestrate a plan. I originally planned to work on a completely different topic; however, with the help of Professor Heinrich, I came to the conclusion that I would like to look into the perspectives of Latinx as a result of how they are being represented in the media and how it affects them. The reason I wanted to do this is that I am a Latina. Growing up, people have been sincere about their perception of me. On the one hand, my Latinx identity has allowed me to express my culture. However, due to the misrepresentation of my community within the media, it has allowed others to define me falsely. Eventually, I realized that people only think this way because that is all they have been taught. Their notion of Latinx may have been learned at home or throughout the media.

The media is one of the biggest influencers of our society and as technology advances, so does the media. Therefore, I decided to focus on the media because of how impressionable it can be. However, if I were to focus on media itself, it would be too general. Therefore, I focused on the mass media and its impact on society. Stereotypes have always been created by the media but the representation of Latinx in the media does not portray me. To this day, I do not connect with the Latinx media stereotypes.
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To add to research that has already been studied, I planned to gather data by conducting interviews from peers of mine who also identify as Latinx. Once I started going through the research I collected, I decided to focus on just those articles. I looked through the Purchase College library database and found many articles relating to my thesis. As I continued looking at these articles, I noticed some would be of good use to my research but not all of the literature. I also looked through different articles on google scholar. Something that stood out to me was the use of the words Hispanic and Latino/a. These two terms were used interchangeably even when they technically have two different meanings. That in itself was a misconception of Latinx as a whole. Another issue that stood out to me is that all of the research still uses gender driven pronouns. Throughout my research, I choose to introduce the term Latinx and alter the terms as I went on in writing my findings. If I were to continue my original plan of conducting interviews, I would ask Latinx individuals what they think identifies a person who is Latinx. I would also ask how they felt about the way they are seen in the media. Another question would be, how does it make you feel when your friends say, “Oh that’s because you are Spanish.”

It should be noted that there is a distinction between being Spanish and Hispanic, for someone to be Spanish means that an individual is from Spain. On the contrary, for an individual to be Hispanic means that an individual comes from a country that has a Spanish-speaking population. Many questions need to be asked to understand an individual feeling towards these stereotypes. Examining the representation of Latinx in the media is essential. My main focus at this point is to investigate if the proper representation even existed. I sat and looked at broadcasts. I watched. My experience proved that certain shows did not have Latinx individuals in them, and the ones that did, the Latinx individual played a minor role. Yes, certain shows are arising with more diversity; however not enough to break down these misconceptions yet.
III. Literature Review

Multimedia outlets accessible to consumers have the power to create specific ideas in mind through the use of television, magazines and the internet. Research has been conducted to show the different media outlets that represent groups of people. In this case, the second largest minority in the U.S., Latinx and how they are exploited. The advertising done in magazines, towards Latinx community is an example of how the media contributes to incorrect stereotyping. The U.S. Census Bureau (2000), stated that the Hispanic/Latinx population was going to continue increasing rapidly, advertising companies recognized this and saw the need to target multicultural segments (Seeling, 2007). The number of models that are portrayed in the ads seen in magazines varies by ethnicities. In the mainstream magazines, less than one percent of ads represented the Hispanic population (Seeling, 2007). Researchers found, that even though Latinx is not a deviant group, they are marginalized or under-represented in magazine advertisements. Shoemaker and Reese (1996), stated that the media gives importance to some groups more than others to show their idea of what is normal and what they believe is deviant (Seeling, 2007). The reason that magazine advertisement targeting Latinx has increased is to make more money. The magazine companies know that this is a growing population that can be used.

In recent years, television programs in the United States have become more diverse as well. The representations of Latinx community on primetime television is only five percent of the population, compared to the seventeen percent of the population that they make up (Ortiz, 2015). Two types of television that portray Latinx’s in the U.S. include Spanish-language television and English-language television. These media outlets provide viewers with representations of Latinx’s that influence social perceptions. The quality of their roles in the media is frequently constrained. Latinx portrayals in the media include: being seen as more provocative, lazier, having a lower
work ethic or being less intelligent. Gender roles are enforced more when it comes to the way the media is portraying the people who identify as Latinx. The women are characterized as being more aggressive verbally and having less of social authority, and the men are judged as being more hot-tempered and less of a job authority (Ortiz, 2015). When you see Latinx individuals in the media, they are represented to be over-sexualized and uneducated. Woman are often seen as being crazy and mainly having roles that include cooking or cleaning, while men are depicted as being hot-headed or drunks. Both Ortiz (2015) and Seeling (2007) would agree that Latinx is underrepresented in the media and understudied in general.

The idea of being an American is a question that not many people take the time to ask. The answer to that question, in most individuals minds, used to mean that you live in the United States and are white. However, America has become a melting pot. It is full of individuals who come from different parts of the world, or whose ancestors came and settled here for a better life or a new start. The idea that to be American, you must be white, have been born here and lived in the United States of America all your life should no longer exists. Certain people believe if you are born in the United States, you are automatically an American. The belief should make you an American, however since the media pushes a different idea, it creates the question which is being asked now, what makes someone American?

According to the census, being Hispanic was initially meant to classify the groups of people having origins or heritage of Spanish-speaking countries. The government did not intend for the term to become its own ethnic group/race. The Hispanic population is the second largest ethnic group in the United States of America. They are the largest minority in the U.S. with an estimated 54 million people, making up over seventeen percent of the population (U.S. Bureau of the Census: 2010). Sadly, individuals of Hispanic descent and those born in a Latin American country but then
raised in the United States are not considered American. Over time, as Latinx migrated to the United States, they too have started to identify as both, Hispanic and American. There are many different reasons why they might identify as American. Little research has been done looking into the extent to which Hispanics in the United States identify as American. If a specific racial group has these perceptions for themselves, it will then affect their economic, social and political status. Recent evidence has shown that depending on Hispanics sense of power; they are more likely to perceive themselves as having commonalities with non-Hispanics and being American. According to the census taken in 2000, respondents identified as more than one specific race. Research has also shown that for Hispanics race goes beyond your ancestral origins, biology, and history of grievance in the country (Tafoya, S. 2004). To avoid the stigmas that come with identifying as Hispanic in the United States, most Hispanics will choose to identify as white-Americans.

To get a better understanding of the study of Latinx representation in the media, first, the previous research on Hispanics in the United States and the extent to which they identify as Americans must be reviewed. Tafoya’s (2004) study, focused on the intersection amongst Latinx American immigration and racial and ethnic identity. Tafoya’s (2004) findings showed that Hispanics generally agreed that the United States offered more opportunities to get ahead in life. When she asked about discrimination, about half of both native-born Hispanics and white Hispanics viewed discrimination as a barrier to success in the United States, as a result of their race. Her findings also showed that the third generation Hispanics (born in the U.S. with parents who came here.) concepts of race were shaped exclusively in the United States and race differences are apparent. As a result of these differences, individual attitudes and opinions are formed.

A problem Tafoya faced due to the lack of research representing Hispanics perceptions and feelings towards their identity, was that she could not determine whether they chose the identity
of SOR Hispanic because of their native-born characteristics or if they were adopted. Wilkinson (2014), found that native-born Latinx identify more with blacks than with whites. The research stated that Latinx born in the United States were more likely to adopt a minority status. Wilkinson discussed how native-born Latinx perceptions of blacks and whites results in them perceiving; they had less in common with whites when they were economically threatened. The findings also stated that Latinx who perceive to be and identify as white was a result of being surrounded individuals of that race. With the information provided by these two studies, it can be inferred that Hispanics tend to perceive that they would be well off if they identified as white-Americans. Olivarez’s studying representations of U.S. Latinx culture introduces the meaning of being Hispanic from the media perspective. Its findings gave a clear overview on the lack of Latinx illustrations in the media and how the use of language and cultural ideas are misrepresentative, which in turn affect the way Hispanics themselves identify (Olivarez, 1998).
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IV. Results

The exploration theory affirms that the commonness of cliché media portrayals of Latinx individuals, will be related with progressively negative emotions towards one's very own gathering, though counter-cliché bunch portrayals will be related with increasingly positive ingroup mentalities. To test this hypothesis, I looked into the research of past studies done, some which have included longitudinal national level studies on the effect of primetime television stereotypes on ethnic groups of Latinx Americans. This examination enabled me to look at the commitment of the respondents' socioeconomics and media portrayals of minorities on the respondents' ingroup frames of mind. In spite of the fact that the past examination done, have not analyzed changes after some time, it empowers research to be conducted that finds out about the effect of factors estimated on various dimensions on a needy variable. The issue with the presumption that Latinx are so homogenous is that it persuades that no decent variety exists. The absence of assorted variety can be reached out to the decent variety of social, monetary, training and wellbeing needs. On the off chance that individuals in the United States accept that all Latinx are poor or rich then none of these issues are being tended to. The main way that the vast majority of these issues can be tackled is with the assistance of the bigger national and worldwide network. With regards to stereotyping Latinxs the media will in general interpret everything adversely. Agreeable sexuality is marked as prostitution, having a great deal of children is related with being ruined and acting confident is seen as 'macho'. Watchers' unlikely perspective on significant issues and absence of comprehension of Latino culture enables Media depictions to develop and strengthen legends about the Latino people group. These negative perspectives likewise loan themselves to negative purposeful publicity against Latino people group. Generally, woman have either been depicted as 'senioritas' or seductresses. These two jobs convert into Latinx women as
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being uninvolved, weak, unintelligent, and dependent. Male roles have advanced from having a progressively negative generalization to the buzzword Latin darling.

V. Closing Summary & Further Research

The question on how the media portrays the Latinx community and how these portrayals influence self-esteem, identity, and relationships with non-Latinx versus Latinx individuals negatively will remain unanswered/understudied until we begin to try and understand the identification process and the way perceptions of other ethnicities play a role in one's self-image. The research that needs to be done to find the answer would require extensive interviews and examining previous literature. Furthermore, listening to different perspectives from Latinx individuals themselves on how they identify will help to see what changes must be made.

The problem I eventually was seeking to address, was the ways in which, Latinx individuals are portrayed in the media in the wrong direction, which then leads to them to feel as if they are not American enough, even though they are equally as American as people of other races around them. The attitude is a problem because if an adolescent sees the media portrayals and stereotypes of Latinx their self-esteem and feelings of identity may be put into question. In order to fix this issue, the media must start to show the people of this community, in a different light. Not everyone human, no matter what race/ethnicity they identify as, are the same as one another. A research needs to understand the identity when looking into a topic such as Latinx. To implement a change, we must first begin with ourselves. It is okay not to be completely aware of something but asking questions and doing research instead of staying uneducated is always a step in the right direction.

Moving forward researchers can conduct semi-unstructured interviews that would help in uncovering the perceptions certain people have and the reasons why. By interviewing non-Latinx
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in an unstructured form one can get to see their points of views of their ethnic group. Questions geared towards where they have gotten these ideas will then help in understanding interactions amongst different racial groups. Seeing the perspectives from both points, non-Latinx, and Latinx will be crucial to this study and understanding the various interactions in certain social situations would also be a large part of the experimental design.
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