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"A Latina Captain in Showtime's *Dexter*":

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on Showtime's series *Dexter* as a rich text through which to study the production and consumption of racial and gender representations in media. More specifically, this research examines the representation of a prominent Latina character (Captain Maria LaGuerta) in *Dexter* and the audience readings of this character to explore the co-construction of contemporary discourses on Latinidad. On the basis of a critical discourse analysis of the television text and online viewer comments, I discuss relations between the meanings encoded in the text and the meanings co-constructed interactively by audiences online, and the ideological implications of such discourse on Latinidad given the current climate of racial relations in the United States. The analysis shows how a seemingly progressive representation of a Latina in a breakthrough role that over-steps "old" racial and gender boundaries, does not break down the reproduction of stereotypical representations and notions of Latinidad based on homogeneity, symbolic colonization, and immigration as markers of Latina/o identity. In addition, the analysis

shows how notions of Latinidad link Latina/os to ideologies of race and gender to which other minority groups are often associated in contemporary conservative discourse.

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Introduction

Television programs, along with other types of mediated communication, have a profound effect on the meaning-making activities of audiences. For viewers across the world, television images can be the closest thing they have to understanding or experiencing the reality of far-off places or unfamiliar groups of people. However, audiences are not passive passengers sitting in the backseat of a vehicle, waiting to be transported to the next, unknown, location. Audiences, along with media producers, co-construct the meanings of media texts. This activity has become easier to analyze in today's media environment, where trends toward convergence allow audiences of television series to react to texts and interact with other viewers online—in some cases as the episode unfolds—and thus construct a variety of discourses through discussion forums (Knaggs, 2011). In effect, the online environment allows researchers to delve into a significant space where viewers reproduce, critique, dismiss, complain about, and expand the meanings encoded in televisual texts to co-construct social discourses.

These mediated co-constructions can have a great impact on the ways in which the meanings of certain realities are reproduced and transformed in this country. The cultures and experiences of Latina/os, for example, are more visible in the media landscape today than ever before—be it on movies, television sitcoms, or advertisements. The time they are allotted on the screen is now much more than it was twenty years ago (Martinez, 2008) and a seemingly wider range of roles is being assigned to them. However, what does this visibility mean? The fact that Latina/os are represented more frequently in media texts does not mean that these representations are educating the

public on the cultural complexities of this group. On the contrary, media texts often

misrepresent Latina/o culture because the social realities faced by this community are far

more complex than the images in the media could ever portray (Cepeda, 2000).

Therefore, when Latina/os appear on television, they are usually confined to certain

stereotypical roles that serve as indicators of Latinidad (Valdivia, 1998, 2000). Indeed,

stereotypes of Latinas are hard to miss in television programs, where most of the Latinas

are usually, "secondary characters playing nurses, maids, and nannies" (Molina-Guzmán,

2010, p. 151). Hence, when a representation comes along that does not fall in line with

the aforementioned types, one can hear media critics and audiences claim that the world

of entertainment is being "revolutionized" because there are "finally" images to

counterbalance the forever present stereotypes and proposed new meanings.

One of such instances is Showtime's series *Dexter*, where the figure of Police

Captain Maria LaGuerta portrays a Latina character as a powerful leader in U.S.

American society. In this thesis, I examine the representation of this prominent Latina

character in *Dexter* and the audience readings of the character to explore the co-

construction of contemporary discourses on Latinidad. I applied critical discourse

analysis to the television text as well as to online viewer comments about the character to

investigate: 1) what does the relation between the meanings encoded in the text and the

meanings constructed interactively by audiences online reveal about the process of co-

construction of Latinidad via media representation, and 2) what are the ideological

implications of such discourse on Latinidad given the current climate of racial relations in

the United States.

Discourses on Latinidad and their ideological effects have certainly become the

subject of sustained scholarly attention as Latina/os become a larger demographic group with more visibility in mainstream culture. For scholars in communication, the emergence of the field known as Latina/o Communication Studies formalized a critical research agenda on Latinidad (e.g., Baez, 2007 & 2008; Beltran, 2002; Shugart, 2007; Valdivia, 2000; Valdivia, 2007; Valdivia, 2008). This research draws on this theoretical framework and aims to contribute to this scholarly dialogue. This analysis also builds on theories of representation, and ideology as developed by Stuart Hall as particularly relevant lenses for the study of the signification practices through which audiences construct and contest meaning. In terms of methodology, the research was informed by the perspective of critical discourse analysis of media discourse offered by Norman Fairclough (1995). CDA is a theory and method that allows for the analysis of how institutions and individuals use language to produce and reproduce power structures and unequal relations.

Before delving into the particular dynamics of the discourses on Latinidad in *Dexter* that will be elaborated in Chapter Three, it is important to define some key concepts that informed the analysis. For the purposes of this study, Latinidad was defined as the state or experience of being Latina/o and the assignment of Latina/o traits to people, culture, and habits (Valdivia, 2010). The term Latina/o was applied to characters linked in symbolic ways "to populations of Latin American origin living in the United States. While the tributary roots are multiple, most scholars in the USA see Latina/os' national location as singular, in the United States" (Valdivia, 2010, p.6). Even though it is nearly impossible to categorize and identify all of the Latina/os in the media, there are ways in which audiences have come to recognize them. Some of the most

evident markers for the general audience are the following: if the Latina/os explicitly state that they are Latina/o, through the way they dress or talk (accents), their racial features—most commonly the mestizaje of European and indigenous traits—or if they reside in some tropical location. In this sense, the central focus of analysis in this thesis, the character of Maria LaGuerta. occupies a unique role in the already existing discourses about Latinidad because she is an Afro-Latina—a racial marker often invisible in representations of Latina/os. As it will be discussed in Chapter Three, this situates her at a particular intersecting location in media representations.

In media studies, television has been one of the most popular sites of cultural study, for it is through television that Anglo, heterosexual male ideals of the U.S. culture are produced for mass audiences (Martinez, 2008). These ideals are most often brought about through stereotypes. The use of stereotypes "puts people in boxes and creates images that result in false presumptions accepted as inconvertible truths" (Oboler, 1998, p. 27). These "truths" then become part of people's lived realities, and this often times happens to be the most detrimental for non-dominant groups. Hall (1996) referred to this process as "articulation," by noting that it is an analysis of how groups of people with specific interests connect other people, groups, and ideas to carry out their interests. More specifically, articulation serves as an analysis of how such groups try to force diverse objects and subjects under homogeneous categories even though many markers indicate that they are different. The process of articulation is particularly powerful when there is underrepresentation or a lacuna in terms of contradictory images. When there is nothing to counterbalance the dominant images being presented across media texts, television myths are only reified more and more.

Among popular television shows today, *Dexter* provided a particularly interesting site for exploration because of its large audience and the prominent visibility of Latina/o characters on the show. The main character Dexter Morgan, played by actor Michael C. Hall, is a forensic blood splatter analyst by day and a cold-blooded serial killer by night. *Dexter* is a television drama about a serial killer who kills serial killers. Showtime first aired *Dexter* in 2006. Since then, the series has witnessed an exponential growth in the popularity of "America's favorite serial killer" and enjoyed critical acclaim.

Beneath the dramatic serial killer narrative, *Dexter* is the only television series on Showtime—and on most cable networks—that features a large number of Latina/os characters. And even though most of the Latina/o faces we see on this series are assigned to secondary characters with minor roles as murderers, there are still those, like Maria LaGuerta who stand out due to their positions of power within the police force. La Guerta is played by Lauren Vélez, a New York black Latina of Puerto Rican descent.

In addition to casting, other production values in the show appeal to Latina/o culture. Set in Miami to vibrant colors and tropical backgrounds, most of the music or soundtrack on this series consists of tropical beats, and these beats are often used as transitions between scenes. Thus, *Dexter* served as an indicator of media representations and what audiences are learning about the dynamics of police departments and those who work within the institution, including Latina/o officers.

As the most powerful woman on the show (in terms of hierarchy at the station), Maria LaGuerta's character holds a variety of meanings and provides a rich site of analysis. As described by Showtime's website, she is a "dictator" in control of the homicide division in the Miami Metro Police Department. She is also a Latina, who is

almost always either dressed in vibrant colors with large earrings or wearing some type of

leopard print attire. Thus she falls in line with typical Latina representations through her

physical portrayal while seemingly rupturing these images through her powerful position

at the police station. The elements of Latinidad in *Dexter* thus allowed for the exploration

of ways in which television is constructing Latina/o identities, specifically those in

positions of power, which is often a rare element to come across.

      The central argument in this thesis is that the co-construction of LaGuerta's

character by producers and interactive audiences illustrates some of the complexities and

contradictions of current, mediated discourses on Latinidad. On the one hand, the

portrayal of this character seemingly breaks dominant patterns of gender and racial

stereotyping by allowing audiences to view a Latina in a situation where she is in charge

and has authority over practically everyone at the police station. Yet, the impression that

LaGuerta is a breakthrough role that over-steps "old" racial and gender boundaries breaks

down upon closer examination. LaGuerta is also a "bad" cop. She is constructed as

ruthless, corrupt, and dissolute, the antithesis of the clean cut, self-reliant, hard-working,

and upright citizen. Furthermore, her gendered and racialized representation works to

strengthen the claim that her character still falls in line with prominent racist stereotypes

of Latinas as perpetuated by the media, even though discourses on Latinidad prove to be

complex and contradictory throughout.

      In these ways, the character becomes a complex site of analysis that proves even

more complex when examined alongside audience responses to the media text.

Audiences, I will argue, read Maria LaGuerta as someone who is undeserving of her

position at the police station, who has climbed her way to success through deceit and

trickery, and overall as a symbol of sexuality (though this is complicated through some of the negative comments about her physical appearance).

Furthermore, Captain's LaGuerta's character echoes the ideology that questions and seeks to dismiss the significance of race. Her character is created in such a way that race is eliminated from the equation (though rarely brought up in a few seasons) and this works to strengthen the claim(s) that when racist discourses are covered or veiled under a guise of progressive or anti-racist discourse, they are actually more powerful than if they were blatantly racist. By providing an image of a Latina in a position of power, though her race is rarely mentioned, as someone undeserving of her status, LaGuerta's character is helping to reinforce current discourses about Latinidad in today's current racial climate as Latina/os are continued to be viewed as foreigners who often times should be feared due to their rapidly growing rate in this country.

The critical analysis of Latina/o images in popular culture acquires greater social significance when one considers the current political context of backlash against immigration, despite increased media visibility of Latinas like Jennifer Lopez, Salma Hayek, and Eva Longoria, to name a few. How are we to make sense of these images we see on T.V. when most Latina/os are coded as illegal invaders with the potential to contaminate the U.S. national body? The lives of Latinas, "continue to be represented through media archetypes and tropes that have existed since the birth of popular film in the early 1900s, yet the new century has opened more complex representational spaces" (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, p.1). The complexity of these representational spaces and their meanings must not be overlooked. With more representational avenues for Latinas on

television, more questions must arise surrounding what these images are saying about Latinas in this country to Latina/os and non-Latina/os alike.

Through this analysis, I also contribute to the fields of communication and Latina/o Studies in two main ways. First, by conducting research that combines production and reception analysis, an approach that is often neglected in media studies even when it is the most appropriate if one wants to illuminate the dynamics of meaning making. Second, this research fills gaps in the field of Latina/o communication studies because it focuses on the analyses of a seemingly progressive character, one unlike many we have seen before her time. Most of the research conducted thus far privileges the dominant stereotypical portrayals that we have seen throughout the years. This investigation thus opens new avenues for understanding emergent representations of Latinas and how audiences are making sense of these television portrayals.

This thesis will explore the aforementioned concepts through an examination of the representation of the character of Maria LaGuerta in Showtime's *Dexter,* alongside viewer comments of the television series. Chapter one is a review of three main areas of existing literature- theoretical background, Latinidad in the media, and previous research conducted about women (particularly of color) in law enforcement. Chapter two highlights the methods I used to conduct this study, including the research questions guiding my work, key concepts driving the research, an explanation of *Dexter* as a series and IMDB as a website, and a brief description of the origins and purposes of textual analysis. Chapter three is an explanation of my findings and a discussion about these through an explanation of the construction of LaGuerta's character, an in-depth analysis of season seven and the viewer comments. This last section will tie all of the conclusions

reached through the analysis to the three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis as it relates and pertains to social practice.

Chapter One

Literature Review

This literature review is an examination of three primary areas of research. The first section of the review is an examination of the theoretical background informing this study. The second section focuses on studies on Latinidad as a mediated construction. It will identify the most prominent markers of Latinidad and discuss how these markers are re-presented in media texts, with a particular focus on images of Latinas. The markers of Latinidad outlined here are hybridity, symbolic colonization, and immigration discourses. The third section of the review will examine research on television representations of women in law enforcement, including women of color in law enforcement. These areas of research are necessary frameworks for situating the proposed research in relevant fields of scholarly research and dialogue.

Theoretical Background

A cultural critical approach to media studies informs this research. In this section, I present the main theories and concepts that will guide this study: the theories of encoding/decoding, representation, discourse, and ideology, with a focus on gender and racial ideologies. Given my focus in media producers and audience co-construction of meanings, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory provides a relevant frame. Hall (1980) theorized encoding and decoding as one (but not the only) siginification practice through which audiences construct and contest meaning. According to Hall (1996), encoding/decoding is part of a cyclical process of representation that bridges production and reception of texts. From this perspective, "circulation and reception are, indeed, 'moments' of the production process in television and are reincorporated, via a number of

skewed and structured 'feedbacks', into the production process itself" (p. 130). To further

expand Hall's encoding/decoding cycle and pave the way for this analysis, it is important

to note that there are three different types of readings the viewers engage in as part of this

model. Audience members decode through the following three types of readings:

dominant reading, which falls in line with the surface message of the series; a negotiated

reading, which keeps some of the surface message, but alters it enough to where a new

meaning is created; or an oppositional reading, which takes on a point of view

oppositional to the dominant reading (Hall, 1980). With this in mind, analyzing online

audience responses alongside the corresponding texts, provides a space for the discovery

of the ways in which the meaning of media texts is co-constructed by producers and

audiences.

In my study, I will focus on the encoding and decoding of visual representations

of Latinidad and verbal representations enacted in dialogue. In our culture, visual

representation saturates the media landscapes and has become the prominent idiom of

communication. In his theorizing on representation, Hall proposed the subversion of the

common view of representation as the media's objective "reflection" or re-presentation of

something that already existed in the material or "real" world. His concept of

representation is much more complex and refers to the notion that someone or something

is "standing in" for something else (challengingmedia, 2006). According to Hall,

"representation is the way in which meaning is given to the things depicted" through

images and words that "stand for" the events, topics, situations, groups of peoples, places,

etc., being addressed (challengingmedia, 2006).

When studying culture, representation is central to the discussion of how culture is produced. Through representation, meaning and language are connected to culture and power. When something or someone is being represented by something else (such as a group of people being represented by one person through images in the media), we are using this person (through language and visual elements) to selectively and meaningfully represent an entire group of people to other people. Here, meaning is produced through linguistic and visual representation. Hall (1997) noted that "language can use signs to symbolize, stand for or reference objects, people and events in the so-called 'real' world" (p.28). In this sense, access to the people and events in the "real world" is always mediated by language and representation.

Hall also built on Foucault's approach to discourse to explain the process of the production of knowledge and meaning. Hall (1997) stated that, "his (Foucault's) definition of discourse is much broader than language and includes many other elements of practice and institutional regulation" (p.51). From this perspective, to study representation it is central to examine not only the visual and linguistic features of a media text but how they relate to particular social relations, institutional practices, and historical contexts. Furthermore, Hall has also pointed out that representation becomes a political activity with ideological effects to the extent that it is a "process by means of which certain events get recurrently signified in particular ways" (Hall, 1982, p.69).

In this sense, discourse becomes a fruitful theoretical and methodological approach. Among the multiple approaches to discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) as proposed by Norman Fairclough will inform this research. For the purposes of this research a working definition of discourse will revolve around the idea of

language. When speaking of discourse we understand that different patterns help to structure language and people follow these different patterns when they find themselves in different parts of their social lives. Fairclough also defined discourse as a "set of relations including relations of communication between people who talk, write, and in other ways communicate with each other, but also, for example, describe relations between concrete communicative events (conversations, newspaper articles, etc.)" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 3). Fairclough noted that, "we can only arrive at an understanding of it by analyzing sets of relations…discourse brings into the complex relations which constitute social life: meaning, and making meaning" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 3).

Furthermore, the main focus of CDA is how language produces and (re)produces social life. Fairclough (2010) has conceptualized discourse as an integral part of social practice and in a dialectical relationship with other social dimensions. CDA is particularly concerned with how language use in historical context reproduces existing relations of power and social inequalities (Fairclough, 2010). Hence Fairclough has argued that "text analysis alone is not sufficient for discourse analysis, as it does not shed light on the links between texts and societal and cultural processes and structures" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 66).

For the proposed study on constructions of Latinidad in *Dexter*, CDA allows for the examination of discourse not only as a representational practice but also as a set of relations among media and audience members who construct meanings interactively through blog postings. In addition, as CDA calls for the analysis of discourse in context, it allows for the exploration of how particular instances of discourse only make sense

when seen in the light of the current racial climate and the rhetoric surrounding Latina/os in the United States.

Furthermore, the focus of CDA on drawing links between texts, ideologies, and power relations brings attention to how the particular ways in which Latina/os are represented in popular culture and perceived by the public may contribute to and perpetuate perceptions of inequality and racism. Lastly, CDA also highlights how racism can be approached as a discourse co-constructed by media producers, audiences and society. Therefore, I will apply Fairclough's three-dimensional model to the analysis of Latinidad in *Dexter*, as explicated in Chapter Two on methodology.

As stated earlier, media representation and discourse play an ideological function given their power to "signify events in a certain way" (Hall, 1982, p.69). In his work, Hall has explained that ideology can best be understood as taken for granted assumptions about reality that serve to reinforce the worldviews of the dominant sectors of a society. These taken for granted assumptions influence perceptions of situated events, structure thoughts, and control our interpretation of reality. Ideology thus shapes understandings of what is good, what exists, and what is possible (Hall, 1982). This concept of ideology greatly figures into the wider framework of an analysis of power, for which the concept of hegemony comes into play.

Hegemony refers to the sociocultural processes through which a dominant class (often supported by a coalition of other sectors of society) can maintain its power in a culturally diverse society. These processes are characterized as being in constant making and re-making, incomplete, and resisted by certain social sectors for they unfold in historically specific contexts of social struggle. The theory of hegemony focuses on the

cultural domain (beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values) and its institutions (schools, media, government, family, church, etc.) as the site where dominant classes cultivate popular consent for ruling-class worldviews (ideology) by presenting them as the societal norm. This societal norm is then perceived as a universally valid ideology that benefits all sectors of society when, in fact, it benefits primarily the interests of the ruling class (Fairclough, 2010).   In this process, media play an ideological role in the consolidation of hegemonic worldviews as they are sites where the always changing and often contradictory and incomplete process of hegemony plays out. Given their power to reach large audiences, they are influential in shaping and re-shaping public perception of reality in ways that normalize the status quo and marginalize meanings that do not serve the interests of dominant sectors of society.

For instance, in the reproduction of gender ideologies, throughout the years the media have represented women using many of the same tropes. Generations of feminists have been concerned about these meanings and the role the media play in shaping the realities of women through the use of images of femininity and masculinity. They have produced a critique of how the dominant images of women circulating in the media portray them as less physically capable than men, more apt to take care of the home, more nurturing when it comes to taking care of children, and as seductive objects of desire (Gledhill, 1997). However, throughout the years these images have not remained stagnant, and there has definitely been an increase in the portrayals of women in other arenas besides the home. Still, a dominant gender ideology endures and even today most gendered images support binary oppositions between male/female that place women in positions of subordination. Latina and feminist media studies have had great value in

deconstructing binary thinking not only in terms of gender but also in terms of the enduring black/white racial binary. By focusing on Latinas, researchers can debunk these tendencies to use binary categories when referring to women and open up another avenue for interpreting and making sense of the representations of a group of women of color (Valdivia, 2000).

In sum, the power of media to represent reality—to signify events and peoples in selective and particular ways—is an ideological power that often goes unnoticed but must be examined when performing critical work. In this study, representation is thus approached as a primary meaning-making practice of media that entails language use and construction of larger discourses that have particular ideological and hegemonic effects in the reproduction of social relations of power.

Relevant Research on Latinidad

By examining the sudden boom of Latina images in the media, we gain a new understanding about a field that is not studied as often by media scholars: Latina Media Studies (e.g., Baez, 2007; Baez, 2008; Beltran, 2002; Shugart, 2007; Valdivia, 2000; Valdivia, 2007; Valdivia, 2008). As Valdivia stated, "Latina/o Media Studies offers an important opportunity to interrogate the construction of broad cultural categories in mainstream and media representations" (Valdivia, 2008). Although Latina/os are quickly becoming the largest ethnic "minority" in the country, Latina Media Studies is relatively new and there is still much more to be explored. This is the case despite the fact that the 2000 U.S. Census showed that identification as Latina/o increased by 33.8% in ten years (Guzman & Valdivia, 2004), and in the 2005 U.S. Census, the Latina/o population was estimated at 14.4% of the national population. In light of this demographic trend, it is

important to see how this group is being represented and how Latina/os are making sense of their representations in the media (Cepeda, 2008).

For the purposes of this research, the definition of Latinidad I will be using is the one posed by Angharad Valdivia (2010): "The state or experience of being Latina/o or the assignment of Latina/o traits to people, culture, and habits" (p.11). From this perspective, Latinidad is a complex concept that has received thorough attention in Latina/o media studies. The study of Latinidad and its markers bring to the fore a number of tensions in the definition of the Latina/o experience and in how media have represented this cultural group.

Hybridity and media homogenization. One of such tensions is the tension between the hybridity as a marker of Latinidad and the dominant pattern of homogenization of Latina/os in mediated culture. In the definition of the Latino experience, the focus on homogeneity is commonplace. Baez (2007), for instance, has defined Latinidad in terms of shared lived experiences. This definition proposes that Latinidad is the way in which Latina/os come to understand more about who they are by interacting with other Latina/os in everyday life. Through interaction, they come to understand key components about their pasts and themselves. Similarly, Valdivia (2008) has stated that Latinidad is about the histories and experiences this community has shared. This type of understanding is produced by the knowledge that Latina/os come from a shared background.

Other scholars have explained *Latinidad* as an erasing of differences in order to create a single, similar group. In this case, different Latina/o groups are all placed into one category, thus erasing difference for the sake of grouping (Valdivia, 2008). In the

particular context of media production, the strategies used to represent and sell to the Latina/o population is through the construction "a largely homogenous Latinidad" (Baez, 2008). This construction of Latinidad as a homogeneous experience can be explained in terms of the political economy of media: in order to sell products to this population, advertisers and media must try to find a way to make Latina/os feel as though they are similar and could more or less enjoy the same types of commodities. And the main reason why there is such a need to construct a similar identity for Latina/os is because 38 million Latina/os living in the United States make up 8 percent of the U.S. purchasing power. This number has increased 10 percent each year for the past three years or 30 percent by 2006 (Humphreys, 2006). With this much purchasing power in their hands, Latina/os become a prime target that makes it essential for media to create a sort of unity in order to sell more effectively.

Latinidad is also conceptualized as a "demographic category" that unifies different peoples from numerous countries of origin based on the commonality that they are living in the United States and are of Spanish-speaking descent (Molina-Guzman & Valdivia, 2004). This attempt to unify erases differences and unite people under one common marker to create an "imagined community" (Molina-Guzman and Valdivia, 2004). This "imagined community," however, obscures differences for the sake of complacency with an image of unity and thus perpetuates the erasing of hybridity that characterizes this group. The creation of commonality and union brings about a feeling of acceptance, as opposed to rejection. This acceptance, however, must not passively be seen as a positive element. Instead, one must take into consideration what is being lost and pushed aside when a group of people is labeled and placed into one category.

The approach to Latina/os as an "imagined community" can also lead one to believe that the qualities and physical features that make up one Latina/o also make up another. In an analysis of *Latina* magazine, Martinez described the reactions to an editor who asked the staff in the office what it meant to be "Latina," The employees responded with the following words: "my hips, lips, and hair, music, my language, my ability to eat a jalapeño without crying" (Martinez, 2008, p. 148). This type of group identity can be described as a "cultural-political type of Latino identity" (Martinez, 2008, p. 148). Here, the bonds that bring the Latina/os together are physical qualities and abilities. This is crucial in understanding why Latinas are packaged a certain way by the media and how this creates certain images in the viewers' minds. Through these "common" physical characteristics, it is easier for marketing and media institutions to provide certain commodities for Latinas and to construct Latinas as commodities for the general public. With this institutional emphasis on common characteristics, the Latina body has been seen as a site of social struggle for Latinas trying to form their individual identities against a media discourse that confines them into certain categories.

Challenging this form of categorization is the understanding of hybridity as a defining feature of Latinidad that is often neglected in public discourse because it destabilizes dominant categories of knowledge and poses a threat to the social order. The term hybridity was first coined in reference to the mixing of racial groups, and it created much anxiety among dominant cultural and racial groups who were assigning the categories (Baez, 2007). The anxiety was brought about by fear of the unknown. Baez (2007) has described hybridity as a "third space" because it locates subjects in between two previously defined areas. And falling in between defined areas can pose a threat to

power and also to non-dominant groups in a world where binaries create a sense of stability. For example, binaries like black/white and rich/poor are often disrupted by categories that do not seem to fall into either of the two. For this reason, "Latinas are also coded as posing a class threat to the middle-class-dominant national imaginary of the United States as threatening and inescapable working class" (Valdivia, 2007, p.131). In effect, Latinas can pose threats to the stability of the social order because of their fragmented and ambiguous identities. As a result, there is often a desire to place them in familiar categories and thus conquer them in order to gain back a sense of normalcy.

For example, Tejano singer Selena is an example of this "third space." Selena can be seen as floating between two distinct divisions of race. She was born in the United States, looked like a Latina (under white supremacist standards because of her hair, skin color, and body type), only spoke English, but sang only in Spanish (until the end of her career). This description provides much room for confusion regarding what category Selena would fall under. She could not possibly fall under the category of white because of her physical appearance and because of the Spanish-language music she sang. She could not fall so easily under the category of Latina because she did not master the Spanish language outside her singing, which made it problematic to some interpretations of the term Latina. This placed Selena in a non-existing category. The reason why this presents a problem (especially to the dominant culture) is because there is no way to claim the territory because it is unknown.

Valdivia (2008) has argued that it is simple for white scholars—and I may add the general society—to claim certain findings as their own when they conform to familiar categories. For instance, she mentioned the semiotic reading of scholars who saw

Jennifer Lopez's buttocks as a marker of Latina identity. Even though Jennifer's butt existed long before the research did, scholars can claim it in that they were the first to talk about it (Valdivia, 2008). But when faced with hybridity, there is nothing to claim because no category has been established. How to control or conquer and take over that which does not even belong to a specific unit or block? Because it is the norm in society to categorize first in order to understand the implications of a particular social phenomenon, hybrid phenomena that resist easy categorization stir fear in those attempting to conquer.

Another reason why hybridity may be seen as a challenge is because it gives the illusion that there is more power in falling under no category. If a subject does not belong to any certain category, it does not have standards to follow or live by. A perfect example of this is the positioning of film actor and director Salma Hayek. Born to Lebanese and Mexican parents, she is seen as someone who has succeeded in the entertainment business due in large part to the ambiguity of her descent. Her last name leaves many people wondering where her family comes from since Hayek "disrupts gendered, raced, and nationalistic borders" (Molina-Guzman, 2007). Arguably, this ambiguity has helped her cross borders and come into new territories (and gain fame) even though her accent almost always places her in a category with other Latinas.

In her work on popular culture, Shugart (2007) has stated that hybridity also threatens the racial order by making whiteness visible. This stems from the fact that one of the key components of being white is the awareness of the things that set whites apart from non-whites. Basically, that the differences between whites and other designated groups are what give whites the power to be invisible. However, the hybridity of a group

is problematic because when a group of "others" share characteristics with whites as well as with non-whites. In this case, the boundary between white and non-white is easily overlooked and transgressed. By overlooking this boundary, whites are not as invisible as they were before. Therefore, whites cannot overlook these differences if they wish to remain invisible in the public sphere.

I will argue that the potential of racial and cultural hybridity to become a cultural threat is what drives media to represent Latinas in the stereotypical and homogenous ways they do. By being able to mold them into their own familiar categories, the media are exercising control over these images. For audiences (both Latino/a and non-Latino/a), seeing Latinas through the same types of images provided by media allows them to feel no threat by these women. If they all fall under one category and are neatly labeled, there should be no threat. Mediated Latinidad thus erases the components of cultural hybridity to unify the group under the marker of homogeneity.

Symbolic colonization. Ideas about what is to be Latina/o are easy to find in mainstream media texts in the form of stereotypes. Most Latinas are usually, "secondary characters playing nurses, maids, and nannies" (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, p. 151). They are also typically represented as "hyper-sexually proficient, insatiable, and available" (Valdivia, 2000). These images reify a colonial legacy of commodification of racialized sexuality (Baez, 2007; Molina Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004). The sexuality we see in Latinas is thought to be different from that of Caucasian women. However, this difference is mainly imposed by the media industry itself. These overly exotic representations seem to shape (for many Latinas and non-Latinas) what it means to be Latina and seemingly leaves little room for viewer agency.

Thus, when a representation does not fall in line with existing stereotypes, it is essential to take a very close look at it. These are representations that may appear post-racial and a symbolic rupture with the past, but may serve to perpetuate racism even more. They are representations that colonize what audiences might interpret as a symbolically ruptured image. The process of symbolic colonization relies on the stories told by the media to strengthen and solidify beliefs about Latinidad. For example, by representing Captain LaGuerta as a central Latina character, *Dexter* symbolically ruptures preexisting ideas about Latina subordinate role in society, as presented by the media. The representation of a character like LaGuerta calls attention to what seems to be a step forward in society and pays little attention to the underlying narrative that brought this character into existence. However, a careful analysis reveals that she is still a colonized female, with stereotypical traits that differentiate her from others in power at the station.

Overt racist discourses and symbols are becoming difficult to pinpoint these days because of the common perception that the United States finds itself in a post-racial period when racial inequality and racism have been overcome. With the colossal symbol of U.S. President Barack Obama serving as one of the key indicators of this transition in society, this optimistic notion renders it difficult to analyze racist situations presented by the media. But in order to contribute to the eradication of the ever-present problem of racism, it is essential to understand that racism is still present within our culture, even though not as blatant (or so it appears to be) as before. In many ways, our society is moving past the period of malevolent depictions to a period of more subtle and hidden representations of inequality. For this reason, it is particularly important to focus much

needed attention on images and representations that appear to be moving forward and representing Latinas in a more positive light.

Sitcoms, and sometimes crime programs, present images and examples that allow for audiences to believe our nation is leaving behind racist mentalities. But for scholars and citizens who aim to eradicate oppression and critique racist media portrayals, it is often difficult to reveal racism when there are images, television shows, and characters that present progressive images that seem to rupture oppressive hegemonic systems. Because racism is proving much more difficult to locate and can remind hidden and unnoticed, racism often becomes even more powerful. As Lacy and Ono (2011) explained:

> When racialized discourse does not call attention to itself, responses to it become easily misunderstood or formulaic. We can overcome such misinterpretations and ideological scripts and begin to understand different perspectives if we question, challenge, interpret, and critically analyze cultural practices (p. 3).

When most people think about racist representations in the media, they usually consider extravagant depictions. But for Lacy and Ono (2011), the "mundane, everyday, and routine cultural practices perhaps have the greatest potential to survive, work in tandem with overt racism, and affect us in their commonplace and taken-for-granted forms" (p.3).

Immigration discourses and Latinidad. The tenuous or explicit association of Latinidad with immigration is another mediated marker of identity that more often than not renders Latina/o immigrants and non-immigrants in a negative light. It is important to consider that public attitudes about immigrants (documented and not) vary widely and have changed throughout the years. While some believe that immigrants are hindering

and depriving legal residents of their jobs, others believe that they are an essential component of the economy because of the labor they bring into the country. These are merely two of the components of the much larger political debate in our country today. And these beliefs and attitudes also color the mediated discourse on Latinidad. In fact, researchers have stated that one consistent fact is that the media play a great part in shaping attitudes and beliefs about immigrants and immigration (e.g. Amaya, 2007; Berg, 2009; Clark & Reed, 2011; Dixon, Johnson & Rimmer, 2010; Fujioka, 2011; Provine & Doty, 2011).

Overall, attitudes surrounding Latina/o immigrants in this nation (documented and undocumented) say a great deal about where our country stands in terms of its acceptance of "foreigners" and about the implications of these attitudes for non-immigrant Latina/os. A reflection on the period following September 2001 and the beginning of President Bush's "War on Terror," sheds light on how immigration is seen in a nation that is taught to fear the foreign in order to remain protected. In the wake of September 11th, immigrants, particularly immigrants of color, were and continue to be viewed with increased suspicion. Immigrants are now associated with danger, and these fears are easy to identify in the media, even though some images more subtle than others.

As the population of Latina/os continues to grow in this country, its representation on television grows and becomes more complex. In effect, as audiences in the United States sit down to watch their television sets, they are constantly bombarded with different types of representations and contradictory Latina/o images (Molina-Guzmán, 2010; Valdivia, 2010). These images, whether on the nightly news, films, or television

series, imply a great deal about the way in which the media constructs the realities of immigrants.

For example, news programming often tends to focus on the more negative implications of immigration (such as the economic impacts), while entertainment programming is known to portray more romantic versions of Latinidad (Molina-Guzmán, 2010). Unlike film and television series, televised news is recognized by society as a method of truth-telling, merely showing us a mirror of what is happening in society. For this reason, it is particularly important to track the impact of televised news on society, especially pertaining to immigration issues. Molina-Guzmán (2010) contended that while the population of Latina/os in the United States has dramatically increased throughout the past ten years, Latina/os remain "seriously underrepresented in print and television news" (p.23). She was arguing not only that there is a serious lack of representation, but that the types of representations we tend to see in the news are negative a majority of the time. When we do see Latina/o faces on the news, these faces hardly ever seem to be engaged in benevolent acts.

In addition to textual representation, audience reactions to news constructions have also been examined in various studies. Fujioka (2011), for instance, examined the relationship between perceptions of Latino immigrants based on news coverage and the notion of threats, and overall attitudes towards this group of immigrants among white and African American college students. Fujioka argued that when presented in news media, issues of "immigration and immigrants are often framed in the contexts of national sovereignty" (p.43). Many of the general attitudes towards immigrants in this nation are often determined by economic and security threats, especially after September 11[th.] This

was proven by Fujioka's study of college students as well as by Berg (2009)'s study about white public opinion towards undocumented workers. When one begins to delve into the arena of public opinion towards immigrants, most of the trends exposed are related to fear. The fears may be expressed in many different ways, but most of them are perpetuated by the typical representations of the foreign and threatening "other" that we encounter through television news.

As racial anxieties continue to rise in our country, it is important to understand how immigration and issues surrounding race are being framed by the media. Racial tensions and anxieties are often times linked to issues of undocumented workers and the "threat" they pose to the nation's economy and safety. The racialization of immigrant bodies is enacted in many contexts and forms; the following examples are just a few of these contexts: the actual buildup of the border wall that began in the 1990s, strict immigration bills such as HB2281, and interior enforcement enhancements brought about by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). A great deal about what we understand to be our current immigration regime is informed by the stories depicted in televised news broadcasts. But the apparent plethora of news depictions of Latinidad through discourses on immigration ends up serving as a homogenizing tool that plays a large part in feeding racial and xenophobic anxieties in this country.

In news as in entertainment, most Latina/o representations are either as secondary characters or often as immigrant workers in various minor roles. For women, it is often in the role of domestic worker. When we do see images of Latinas as primary figures in television series, it definitely becomes a representation that stands out as distinct from the rest. For example, when audiences are presented with series such as *Desperate*

Housewives, in which Eva Longoria plays one of the lead roles, it is important to take note of how her character is constructed. Typically, when audiences confront characters like Gabrielle Solis (Eva Longoria's character), these images are often embedded with most of the markers that make up typical Latina images--hypersexuality, availability, and often times wearing the color red (Valdivia, 2000).

Research on Television Representations of Latino/as and Women in Law Enforcement

This section of the review of literature focuses on the roles women and Latina/os have played in television programming throughout the years, particularly how they have been portrayed as characters working in law enforcement.

Latina/os in crime series. Featuring Latina/os in crime television series is not a new concept, or one that should startle viewers in terms of its progressive qualities. Latina/os have been featured in crime or mystery narratives, but often times these depictions portray them as criminals, rather than authority figures and when they are portrayed as authority figures they are very rarely at the very top of the department hierarchy (with some exceptions, of course). Some examples of Latina/os featured as criminals include *Law and Order*, *Breaking Bad, Weeds*, *Sons of Anarchy*, and of course *Dexter* to name a few. The criminalization of Latina/os in this nation is not only present in television series, but in news reports as well (Provine & Doty, 2011). News reports are a main outlet where audiences receive their information about Latina/os, and the information received via this medium is not usually a very positive one. For example, when Latina/os are portrayed in the news, the majority of the images we see criminalize them (Rodriguez, 1999).

It has only been recently that the United States has experienced a rise in the portrayal of Latina/os as law enforcement officials on the television screen in shows such as the ones previously outlined. Even though these portrayals are becoming more and more prominent, there is still a great lack of research in this terrain, and the sentiments these types of images create in audiences' minds towards Latina/os in this country.

The ways in which Latina/o criminals are seen in this country, and therefore the ways in which they are often portrayed on the television screen, goes hand in hand with the discourses surrounding immigration. A great amount of fears and trepidations we have in this country surrounding immigration often come from the narratives we see on television, whether depicted through fictitious narratives or via the nightly news. Public attitudes surrounding immigration vary greatly, but a major belief is that immigrants are hindering and depriving legal residents of their jobs and are posing a threat to society. This is merely one of the larger components to an ever-growing political debate in our country today. Overall, though, one key element that is consistent throughout is that media play a great part in shaping these attitudes and beliefs about immigrants and immigration (e.g. Amaya, 2007; Berg, 2009; Clark & Reed, 2011; Dixon, Johnson & Rimmer, 2010; Fujioka, 2011; Provine & Doty, 2011).

Media are swarming with contradictory images of Latina/os and the role(s) they occupy in this nation. News programming often tends to focus on the more negative implications of immigration (such as the economic impacts), while television series are known to portray more romantic versions of Latinidad (Molina-Guzmán, 2010). The romanticized representations of Latinidad often times relegate them to very stereotypical roles, one of which is the role of the domestic house worker. These roles serve to

exemplify the fears this nation has about immigrants and foreigners; by relegating Latinas to these types of stereotypical characters, the producers and creators are merely appeasing the fears and anxieties about immigration's implications by allowing them to remain confined to a safe place on the television screen. With this in mind, the following section will be devoted to the role Latina/os have played in television series, in particular the crime genre. Much more research has previously been devoted to the portrayal of Latina/os in television news, but there is little research on Latina/os in television crime series.

Often times, the realities surrounding law enforcement in this country revolve around mistreatment of undocumented workers and unnecessary racist practices (Cavender & Jurik, 2004). This is definitely not always the case, but there is definitely a lack of media representation in relation to the (often times) harsh realities faced by these minority groups in the United States. There is especially a lack of media representation about these injustices in television series, as opposed to television news. These practices are very rarely portrayed through crime television series, and when they are, they are very rarely made the center of attention. It is difficult to come across a television series that spends a majority of its story-line portraying the lives of immigrant families who are detained along the border with minimal portions of food and no extra sets of clothing. Instead, when these stories are portrayed, they are shown very briefly and rarely do those instances serve to portray the harsh realities immigrants face. The mistreatment and racist practices often become blurred when a fear of the non-white person is created in the minds of the viewers (Cavender & Jurik, 2004). These tragic realities are whitewashed and dissolve into the background, especially if it is a series featuring a Latina/o law

enforcement official because in this situation, viewers are able to see a person of color (perhaps previously an immigrant) in a position of authority.

When it comes to the representation of Latina/os as law enforcement officials, it is not very often that their racial identity is made a central marker or component of the narrative. Sometimes, the character is portrayed as racially ambiguous, which is often the case with Latina/os in the media in general (Molina-Guzmán, 2010). When there is mention of the race or it is part of the story-line, these representations usually come in the form of more affluent or privileged Latina/os, who have lived in this country for more than one generation.

The existing literature in regards to these representations on the television screen is scarce, but the little that exists provides evidence that these representations are often time Cuban Americans (Rodriguez, 2007). This makes sense because discourses often frame Cuban-Americans in this country as refugees rather than immigrants (Molina-Guzmán, 2010). When we see these representations on the television screen, they are made to signify other women of the same race and/or ethnicity. For example, with the role of Captain LaGuerta in *Dexter*, we see a Cuban-American authority figure, who is used to represent other Cuban-American women and their position in this nation. This homogenizing quality is dangerous because it erases difference and hybridity within various Latina/o groups.

It is very often the case that Cuban-Americans are portrayed as the Latina/o model minority, and this could have to do with the fact that the two leading Latina/os in *Dexter*'s Miami Metro Police Department are of Cuban descent. Even though it is mentioned very rarely throughout the series, it is clearly stated from the first season that

both of these characters are of Cuban descent. There are constraints, however, to this idea

of Cuban-Americans as model Latina/o minorities. For example, according to Molina-

Guzmán (2007), "popular representations remain grounded in homogenizing stereotypes

of the Cuban exile community as politically conservative, law-abiding, religious,

predominantly white and middle to upper class, and staunchly Anti-Castro" (p. 222).

These representations leave little room for Cuban-Americans that do not fall in line with

this depiction, in particular the Afro-Latina Captain LaGuerta. The role of Captain

LaGuerta must be studied in relation to this popular narrative of U.S. Cuban identity.

 The existing literature about Latinas in television law enforcement series is

practically non-existent. The role Latina/os play in television is a highly studied area, but

the role they play in televised crime or law enforcement genres is greatly understudied.

There are a few examples out there about written texts, such as mystery novels, and this

could serve as a good starting point for opening up the possibility of dialogue in terms of

television crime genres and their portrayals of Latinas.

 In a case study by Ana Patricia Rodriguez (2007) about the Lupe Solano Mystery

Series we are able to see an example of a U.S. Latina/o detective fiction. In this series,

the lead character is a Latina (Cubana) and all the novels in this series revolve around

her. In this work, Rodriguez examines how the fiction of U.S. Cubanidad is materialized

in the particular character of Lupe Solano. She demonstrates that this particular figure,

"embodies not only the greater contradictions of representing Latina/os within the mold

of mystery fiction writing but also the Latina packaging of competing discourses on the

body, gender, sexuality, excess, and consumption in the United States" (p. 243). In her

work she outlines the typical narrative of the Cuban American success story and ties it to

the actual mystery series and the representation of Lupe Solano. This study is quite specific in that it focuses on a Latina/o mystery genre, in particular its representation of Cubanidad within this genre.

In the case of Captain LaGuerta, her Cuban identity is largely missing from the narrative and is not made a central element of the story-line, which is not the case with Lupe Solano, where we see her Cubanidad take a central role in the development of her character. Rodriguez's work is a great starting point for making connections between the constructions of race/ethnicity and specific crime genres, however her work on the Lupe Solano mystery series is lacking a visual component, which can be found through analyses of television texts. Throughout her work, Rodriguez constantly points out that the research surrounding Latinas in crime in basically non-existent; this is gap I wish to fill with my current research on Captain LaGuerta.

Women in crime series. Existing literature on Latinas and their roles in crime genres is definitely lacking and this might have to do with the fact that women in general have not occupied a large role in crime or law enforcement television throughout the years, even though they have been featured in leading powerful roles for many decades (Inness, 2004). Within the last decade, however, there has been an increase as television viewers have been witnessing more and more women take the screen in television series and now, more than ever before, there are more women playing powerful roles. We have early examples such as *Girlfight*, *Silence of the Lambs*, and *Charlie's Angels*, just to name a few, which helped pave the way. More modern examples now include video games like *Lara Croft* and even animated female heroes, like the *Powerpuff Girls.* Most of these women are either white or their race is seldom mentioned in the narratives.

Because of this, the existing literature typically revolves around the portrayal of white women in crime.

When branching off of the idea of the representation of women of color in crime and moving on to the portrayal of women in the television crime genre, it is helpful to start with a mention that there are rare instances on the screen where we see depictions of Latinas in positions of power or featured in unconventional roles playing tough (and sometimes dangerous) women. In the television series *Lost,* audiences are able to see an example of this through Michelle Rodriguez's depiction of Ana Lucia. This character proves to be powerful and more knowledgeable than most when it comes to the island. However, she is ruthless and dangerous, posing a threat to most of the inhabitants of the island. Prior to *Lost*, Michelle Rodriguez played Diana Guzman in *Girlfight* (2010), which also proved to be a breakthrough role for a Latina character in that Diana is depicted as a Latina with masculine traits, and not a stereotypical Latina character. In an analysis of *Girlfight*, Karen R. Tolchin (2007) noted that this character, "seems to signify progress for a population hitherto consigned to reductive, parodic spaces in mainstream American cinema, spaces dictated almost exclusively by the white male taste for so-called exotic pleasures" (p. 184). In this piece Tolchin argued that Rodriguez's role is progressive because of the aforementioned concept. However, throughout the work, it is evident that even though Diana's character is strong and powerful, she is often presented as an object of desire through the types of clothing she wears and some of the comments that are made to and about her, like the constant mention of her sexuality and figure.

Numerous scholars have devoted their time to studying cultural and social impacts of tough women in popular media. This research, however, has typically only

focused on earlier influential films and television shows featuring powerful white women. Before scholars begin to focus on more recent tough female characters (especially within the crime genre), it is important to make mention of and draw connections between these previously researched areas and the newer representations.

Inness (2004) pointed out that the heroines we are being exposed to these days on television are becoming more and more physically powerful than the ones previously portrayed on television. It is important to note that while this may be the case, for the purposes of this research, those are not going to be the only powerful images analyzed and researched in relation to powerful women. When dealing with women in law enforcement and crime in particular, the power audiences are able to see is not typically manifested in a physical manner, as is the case with Inness (2004)'s example of *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Paying particular attention to powerful women who do not exhibit this type of physical strength becomes especially important when focusing on the role women have and do play in crime television series.

When making note of the representation of women in the popular genre of crime, it is important to pay close attention to what types of roles they are predominately playing and how these roles contribute to the understanding of women in our society and the privileges (or lack thereof) they are allotted. In their article entitled *Television's "New" Feminism: Prime-Time Representations of Women and Victimization* (2006), Cuklanz and Moorti noticed that *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* portrays women in a way that is disempowering and problematic. They note that throughout the series, the function of women is primarily to serve victims of "sexual assault and rape" (p. 303). This analysis of key episodes is greatly indicative of what often happens in the television

crime genre in dealing with women. Although this is not always the case, it definitely is typical to portray women in law enforcement in these types of disempowering positions.

Even though the victimization of women is more evident in crime series, there are also instances in which we see "powerful" women in charge of operations within the force, such as the case with Captain LaGuerta's character. Even though they are more rare than the former, they are still making an impact in the ways women are seen and what roles audiences typically imagine them playing. In *Hardboiled and High Heeled* (2004), Mizejewski traced the evolution of the woman detective on television, starting in the late 1960s. She notes that during the 1960s and '70s many women detectives found themselves in situations which were more campy, for example, they were often featured in tight or little clothing.

However, she also noted that there is a benefit in studying television in this sense because, "network prime time has offered more opportunities for women's roles and performances than movies have" (p. 53). So, even though women were and sometimes still are portrayed in this way through crime television series, they are now allotted more time on the screen through the portrayal of these characters. With an analysis of such a medium as television, it becomes easier to find representations of women in law enforcement. As the role of the female detective, or law enforcement official grows more and more, it is of utmost importance that viewers pay close attention to what these images are saying (or not saying).

According to Mizejewski (2004), the woman detective character has been popular on paper for quite some time now, tracing back her evolution all the way back to Nancy Drew—the female sleuth. But, it was not until about the early 1990s, with Clarice's

character in *Silence of the Lambs*, that a character such as this (female FBI agent) appeared on a screen with a boom. As this type of representation began to emerge on the television screen, the popularity of the female investigator continued to grow in relation to books as well. Two decades ago, "by the end of the 1990s, the woman detective character had become a commodity with a hungry fan base" (Mizejewski, 2004, p.1). This fan base seems to still be growing as audiences are becoming more exposed to these types of female characters on the screen.

There is a clear distinction to be made between mystery fiction on paper and this type of fiction on the screen, particularly how women are represented in these two media. The difference lies in the visual element found in the television representations. Mizejewski stated that, "readers of women's mystery fiction can easily picture versions of themselves as the main character, but once we move from book to movie, the picturing of this character gets more complicated" (Mizejewski, 2004, p.6). I would argue that the same can be said for images on television. Even though women might not always be picturing themselves in said roles as they watch the series or movies, there is a great difference between words written on a page and the actual embodiment of these images on a television or computer screen.

Using Laura Mulvey's idea of the male gaze, Mizejewski (2004) further argued that, "feminist film theory makes a persuasive argument that much of traditional Hollywood cinema has been unconsciously organized along these lines: men looking and taking action, women being looked at" (p. 7). Even though this argument has been debated for quite some time now, the general ideas behind it are still evident even when taking a look at representations of supposedly powerful females in crime series or law

enforcement narratives, because we are often times exposed to, "the minute details of what these women wear, eat, and window shop" (Mizejewski, 2004, p. 4). This, however, seldom proves to be the case when dealing with male law enforcement officials.

When tracing the evolution of the literature about fictitious female investigators or females in any type of law enforcement work, it is important to keep in mind that these female characters are often portrayed in juxtaposition to their male counterparts. Throughout the media, "the Anglo-female investigator is presented as in some measure fundamentally flawed, that she serves as a marker for the incompatibility of the cultural categories of "woman" and "investigator" (Dresner, 2006, p.2). Her investigative powers are always put into question much more than those of the males working within the same force. This often proves to be the case with *Dexter*'s Maria LaGuerta who is often questioned and taken less seriously than the men on the force.

In short, the visibility of representations of female characters as law enforcement or crime investigators has definitely increased throughout the years. Through a perusal of existing literature on the subject, however, it appears that these types of representations frequently serve to reinforce dominant patriarchal norms. Particularly the most recent texts, do so in subtle and contradictory ways. For this reason it is important to engage in close readings of the evolution of these images.

Chapter Two

Methodology

The review of literature presented in Chapter One informed my methodological approach and development of questions that guide this research on the discourses about Latinidad co-constructed by producers and audiences of the television series *Dexter*, particularly through the encoding and decoding of the character of Maria LaGuerta.

Research Questions

The following questions helped guide this study:

1) How is the character of Maria LaGuerta represented in the media text?

2) How do the audience readings of the media text co-construct a discourse on Latinas and Latinidad?

3) How do the discourses on Latinidad co-constructed by creators and audiences of *Dexter* relate to dominant racial and gender ideologies in the current social climate in the United States?

Key Concepts

Four concepts that were central to this investigation are defined as follows. Representation, for the purposes of this project, refers to the particular ways in which images and words are used to construct the character of Maria LaGuerta as one that "stands for" Latina racial and gender identity.

Latinidad is the mediated construction of a "state or experience of being Latina/o" and "the assignment of Latina/o traits to people, culture, and habits" (Valdivia, 2010, p.11) in the particular context of *Dexter*.

Discourse is language use as a social practice that is constituted by and constitutes existing relations of power (Fairclough, 2010). In this case, discourse is a set of relations between media producers and audiences of *Dexter* who communicate regarding the characterization of Maria LaGuerta and thus establish links between representation and broader societal and cultural processes and structures.

Ideology relates to the taken for granted assumptions about reality that influence perceptions of situated events, structure thoughts, and control our interpretation of reality in ways that support the interests of the dominant sectors of society (Hall, 1982).

As previously mentioned, I used critical discourse analysis and the three-dimensional analytical framework proposed by Fairclough as my method. CDA research has been known to cover a variety of areas such as pedagogy, communication and racism, democracy and politics, nationalism and identity, etc. (Jorgensen, M., & Phillips, 2002). Discourse covers a wide area of analysis not limited to the spoken word or written language. The relationship between language and images is highly important when taking this approach. The main aim of CDA, "is to shed light on the linguistic-discursive dimension of social and cultural phenomena and processes of change in late modernity" (Jorgensen, M., & Phillips, 2002, p.61) in order to call attention and awareness to systems of production of unequal power relations in society. CDA is critical because "it aims to reveal the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world, including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power" (Jorgensen, M., & Phillips, 2002, p.63).

Dexter as a Relevant Text

The text I analyzed was Showtime's _Dexter,_ a popular television show that falls under three television genres—crime, drama, and mystery. The show is based on the series of novels titled _Darkly Dreaming Dexter_ by Jeff Lindsay. The main character, Dexter Morgan, is a forensic blood splatter analyst by day and a cold-blooded serial killer by night. _Dexter_ is a television drama about a serial killer who kills serial killers. Showtime first aired _Dexter_ in 2006. Since then, the series has witnessed an exponential growth in the popularity of "America's favorite serial killer" and enjoyed critical acclaim. For instance, season four aired its season finale to a record-breaking audience of 2.6 million viewers, making it the most-watched original series episode ever on Showtime. Season seven premiere on 2012 was the most watched _Dexter_ episode ever with over 3 million viewers. The seventh season as a whole was the highest rated season of _Dexter_, watched by 6.1 million total weekly viewers across all platforms. The show was declared the ninth highest rated show for the first ten years of IMDb.com Pro (2002–2012). On April 18, 2013, Showtime announced that season eight would be the final season of _Dexter_. _Dexter_ has won four Primetime Emmy Awards and two Golden Globe Awards. Lead actor Michael C. Hall has won five Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series and one Screen Actors Guild Awards.

In our post-network era, with more and more television shows available via not only television but also instant streaming and services such as Netflix, it often becomes difficult to keep shows on air for as many seasons as _Dexter_ has managed to stay alive. When a television show like this becomes so popular, it is important to pay close attention to the themes that emerge and what these might be saying to and about society.

Research Design

In order to examine the discourse on Latinidad constructed through the evolution of Maria LaGuerta's character, two stages of collection and analysis of data from seasons one to seven were followed. First, I conducted an analysis of seasons one through six to trace how media producers establish and develop LaGuerta's character and thus encode a particular representation for audiences over time. This analysis was also significant because viewer comments often referred to previous seasons. Hence, analyzing the encoding of the character over time allowed for a better understanding of viewers' comments. A total of seven episodes were analyzed for this stage. I analyzed two episodes from the first season, three episodes from the fourth season, and two episodes from the sixth season. I chose these episodes based on how much information they provided in terms of the evolution of her character in three different areas of her life- the introduction of her character, her romantic life, and her promotion to Captain of the police station.

This first stage served as a basis for the second stage of analysis that focused on the co-construction of meaning between media producers and audiences. The focus of this analysis is on the seventh season of Dexter and viewers' comments on LaGuerta during the seventh season. There were three main reasons for selecting the seventh season as the main site of study. The first, and strongest reason, was the availability of viewer comments about these episodes on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB). When analyzing viewer comments, I only focused on viewer comments that were made between the time the episode aired and two hours after the episode ended. After that two-hour window, viewers could be more likely to have seen a re-run, and I wanted to make sure that all the

people commenting had been exposed for the same duration of time to the same original

episode. The second reason for choosing the seventh season was the fact that the most

current season provided a well-rounded depiction of character, including new

transformations in the life and attitude of the character, references to background stories,

and past events. This made this season a particularly relevant site to study. The third and

final reason for using this season was the assumption that the most recent discourse

would relate to current events or trends in the racial climate and reflect any types of

tensions or anxieties that exist in this nation more accurately than a season produced

seven years ago. A total of three episodes from the seventh season were selected for

analysis based on how often the character of LaGuerta made an appearance. LaGuerta

was not featured as prominently in the seventh season until the last few episodes, where

her character was central to the storyline.

In addition to the episodes, twelve viewer comments on the episodes of the

seventh season were collected from the Internet Movie Database website (IMDB), an

online database containing information about films, video games, television programs,

actors, and production crews of the aforementioned categories. As of 1998, this website

was purchased by amazon.com and is one of the most popular sites for finding

information about your favorite movies, television series, etc. Not only does IMDB.com

contain information for television series and films, it also hosts live discussions about

these. I used this website for my study because I have found that IMDB allows the people

posting much more convenient features. By this, I mean that the ways in which the

discussions are organized allow for simple access to these and little confusion because

they are organized by subject. Each of the discussion threads has a subject heading, and

subsequent responses to the initial comment ensue thereafter. Through this, it is much easier for the bloggers to get on one manageable thread. Other discussion forums do not allow for this type of structured system and instead provide responses to comments in a much more scattered manner. Because of the simple access and arrangement of the comments on this internet site, I was able to chose discussion threads with headings including LaGuerta's name. This is how I filtered my search.

Overall, it was challenging to figure out demographics about the viewers on this site. Based on the screen names, sometimes I would assume that most of the people making the comments were male, but there is not way to be certain about that. There was also no indication of racial or ethnic groups, gender, or age.

Discourse Analysis

I analyzed and interpreted my data in line with Fairclough's (1995) methodology for critical discourse analysis; in particular, his three-dimensional model, given its focus on connecting textual analysis of media discourse to larger social frameworks that sustain systems of inequality. Fairclough has noted that, "every instance of language is a communicative event consisting of three dimensions" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 68). The three-dimensional model, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, identifies three levels of analysis: the text, the discursive practice, and the social practice.
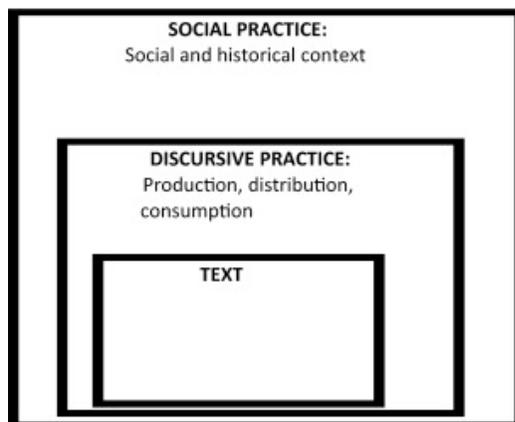
Figure 1. Fairclough's three dimensional model for critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010).

The first dimension, the text, consists of the visual images and/or writings (including grammar, sentence structure, language, etc.) selected for analysis. The second dimension, the discursive practice, "involves the production and consumption of texts" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 68). This second dimension may help explain how producers of texts rely on previously generated texts to create their new texts, and how audiences draw on previously available discourses to make sense of these texts and create new meanings. The third dimension, social practice, focuses on how texts relate to the social world by establishing links between language and certain types of social issues (i.e. racial ideologies and gender stereotypes). This level of analysis can illuminate how texts reproduce or challenge previously existing discourses. The sociocultural practices can be understood in the following way, according to Fairclough (1995):

There are various levels of sociocultural practice that may constitute parts of the

context of discourse practice. I find it helpful to distinguish the 'situational',

'institutional', and 'societal' levels—the specific social goings—on that the

discourse is part of, the institutional framework(s) that the discourse occurs within, and the wider societal matrix of the discourse. (p.16)

This model allows for empirical research of both society and communication, as all three dimensions are incorporated into the analysis. The model supports the notion that texts can never be studied alone, without the intricate webs of social meanings and contexts that comprise them.

Media discourse, in this approach, is produced via texts and discursive and social practices; it relates to ways in which texts are produced by media institutions, the ways in which audiences receive them, and the social distribution and significance of these texts (Fairclough, 1995). The study of media discourse through discourse analysis can thus be understood, "as an attempt to show systematic links between texts, discourse practices, and sociocultural practices" (Fairclough, 1995, p.17).

In this study, linguistic, visual and thematic analyses were combined as the analytical strategies incorporated within the three-dimensional model. According to Fairclough (1995), text analysis focuses on "the ways propositions are structured and the way propositions are combined and sequenced" (p.16). My textual analysis focused on identifying the ways verbal and audiovisual elements of the texts combined in the characterization of LaGuerta to suggest patterns of representation. In addition, I also used theme analysis to identify how clusters of ideas also constituted interrelated discourses that fixed the meanings of Latinidad, gender, and racial identity. As stated by Riessman (2008), thematic analysis privileges the content of communication rather than structural dimensions of it. The focus of thematic analysis is "akin to what scholars in folklore and history use with archival data" because of the way in which this method

seeks to uncover and categorize themes that arise in texts (Riessman, 2008, p.53). The aforementioned was the task of my analysis: to uncover and categorize textual elements and themes based on their frequency of appearance in the show's plots and characterizations, and audience readings of them.

The analysis was structured along three main dimensions. The first dimension of Fairclough's model, the text comprised episodes of *Dexter* where LaGuerta appeared prominently as a character. My coding focused on identifying markers of Latinidad to explore ways in which they became structured propositions through repetition in storylines and dialogues. More specifically, I coded for words and visual images that referred to these identity markers of LaGuerta: physical appearance, intellect, affective behavior, moral character, gendered behavior, and cultural background—such as language use, religion, race or ethnic identification. Coding also identified how these verbal and visual constructions created themes or clusters of meanings with particular propositions about LaGuerta's character and identity.

The second dimension of the model focused on the dynamics of media production and consumption by online viewers. In the third dimension of analysis, I related the findings of textual analysis and discursive practices to broader social discourses on Latinidad and the racial climate in the United States. At a time when many fears exist about foreigners in this country (Latina/os being part of this body of foreigners), it is important to pay particular attention to the ways in which the media are constructing the realities of this group of people and how the racial tensions and anxieties might be embedded in the encoding and decoding of these representations.

In sum, for the purposes of this study on constructions of Latinidad in *Dexter*, critical discourse analysis allowed for the examination of discourse not only as a representational practice at the textual level but also as a set of relations—or discursive practices—among media producers and audience members who co-construct meanings interactively through blog postings. CDA also calls for the analysis of discourse in context or social practices; to illuminate how particular instances of discourse relate to current racial climate and the rhetoric surrounding Latina/os in the United States. Thus, CDA allowed me to draw links between texts, ideologies, and power relations by bringing attention to the particular ways in which Latina/os are represented in popular culture and perceived by the public, and how this may contribute to and perpetuate perceptions of inequality and racism.

Chapter Three

Findings and Discussion

The discussion of findings is organized in three main sections that correspond to the three-dimensional model of analysis and address the research questions posed. In the first section, I will present the textual and thematic features in the characterization of Maria LaGuerta in the television show to discuss salient patterns of representation established over the course of the first six seasons. I also address the first research question posed to show that the representation of LaGuerta is constructed in such a way that it falls in line with dominant stereotypical representations of Latinas in the media. This section of the chapter demonstrates that she is constructed in such a way that creates the same type of Latina image throughout the first six years of the show.

The second section highlights the dynamics of production and consumption by focusing on audience readings of the character in season seven in order to answer the second research question pertaining to how audience readings of media representations co-construct a discourse on Latinas and Latinidad. This section illustrates how audiences still perform a very flat reading of LaGuerta's character even though she is quite different in this season. In the seventh season she is seen as coming from a much more well-intentioned place in terms of the moves she makes at the police station. She is also seen as a hard working cop who is actually one of the only people in the series to figure out Dexter's true identity. Despite this new representation of her character, though, the way audiences read and interpret her character still falls in line with stereotypical representations of Latinas in the media.

In the third section, I contextualize the discourse on Latinidad constructed by *Dexter* and its audiences within larger social practices to relate to dominant racial and gender ideologies in the current social climate in the United States.

The last section of the chapter offers a discussion of the main theoretical and ideological implications of the findings.

Textual Analysis: The Representation of Maria LaGuerta

I examined the evolution of this character in order to understand how the producers of the show encoded in LaGuerta a particular gendered and racialized Latina persona with stable meanings. My approach to representation led me to focus on ways in which images and words are used to construct the character of Maria LaGuerta as one that "stands for" a Latina/o identity. For this purpose, turning points in development of the plot and the characterization of LaGuerta from seasons one, four, six, and seven will be used to illustrate my main points.

To start, it is worth noting that this series is set in Miami, and visual references to this geographical space are made routinely. The producers use Latin music rhythms (salsa, cumbia, etc.) as the sound track for the show. Within the first five minutes of the first episode in the first season, *Dexter* established itself as a different type of crime series because of its choice of music, constant use of Spanish (between characters who speak Spanish), vibrant colors, and a plethora of secondary characters—mostly criminals— hailing from Cuba. Even though Latin and Caribbean beats are not always linked to crime and violence in the series, they almost always serve as reminders of a Cuban presence in Miami. This association of Miami with Cubanness, Latin rhythms, Spanish language, and vivid colors is a regular signifier of Latinidad as a background in the show.

The setting is significant in a show that is titled and built around a protagonist—Dexter—who is a White male with no links to Latino/a culture. In the show, the main characters are mostly all White. There are about a total of four main, lead White male characters and three white women leads. The only other main Latino character in the series is Sergeant Angel Batista, who was married to LaGuerta at one point. Most of the Latinos we see in the series are murderers or victims in crimes.

Maria LaGuerta is the only Latina/o main character in a show that is set to the rhythms and accents of Latinidad in Miami. Her name—María Esperanza del Alma LaGuerta—encodes a Latinidad linked to Spanish language. Her race and gender are coded visually through her physical features—black skin, long, dark hair, and curvaceous figure—These physical attributes, while common amongst Latina/os of African descent, are not the ones usually selected to represent Latinas on television. She does not fit the typical image of Latina/os that privileges either the European features with fair skin and dark, straight hair, or the mestiza with brown skin and indigenous features. However, beyond the visual image, LaGuerta's ethnic and racial background as an Afro-Latina or Afro-Cuban are not addressed explicitly in the show via verbal constructions. Her character is not linked explicitly to any culturally specific group or nationality. In the episodes analyzed, I found only one direct verbal reference to LaGuerta as Cuban (to be discussed later in this chapter) but otherwise the viewers are left without a clue as to whether she is a Cuban immigrant or a U.S. Latina of Cuban descent. This ambiguity and silence reproduces the view of Latina/os as a homogeneous group.

In contrast, the gendered, sexual, and moral dimensions of her identity are established since the first episode in ways that suggest racialization. Season one

introduces LaGuerta to the audience and allows them to get an idea about her gender and sexual identity, and her standing as a Lieutenant in a position of power within the police station. Season four shows the audience a personal, affective side of Maria LaGuerta through the depiction of her marriage to Sergeant Angel Batista, another Latino character on this series. Season six provides the viewers with the most information about how she has succeeded in obtaining her career status in the force. Season seven presents LaGuerta in a new, more positive light right before eliminating the character from the series permanently. A descriptive examination of these turning points is presented in the following sections.

Season one: character introduction. The first season of a television series is often the one that sets the tone for the establishment and reception of a character. How characters are introduced is of utmost importance because this could be a determining factor on how audiences react to the character despite character changes later on.

In the first episode of *Dexter*'s first season, two main ideas are encoded about Lieutenant Maria LaGuerta: political manipulation rather than intelligence or merit explains how she has come to advance her career in the police force, and that hypersexuality is a marker of her identity. This is constructed through the dialogue between the two main characters on the television show: Dexter Morgan – who is the forensic blood splatter analyst at the Miami Metro Police Department's homicide division and Debra Morgan- who is Dexter's sister and a cop on the force. Through them, the audience gets a particular view of LaGuerta's character in terms of her success at the station and her sexuality. Within the first 10 minutes of the episode, LaGuerta is characterized as a "dumb" officer who is also a seductress who plays the political game

and has stereotypical visual markers of a Latina. This is encoded during the following

exchange between Dexter and Debra:

> Debra: "How does someone so dumb get so much power?"
>
> Dexter: "She knows how to play the game. She is good at politics."
>
> Debra: "That's how she does it!"

At this point in the episode, Dexter and Debra are inside a hotel room (part of the crime

scene), looking out at LaGuerta while they talk about her, but the audience still has not

been able to see her image. What the audience knows thus far is that the main character

of the television show believes that the only reason why she has achieved success is due

to her ability to "play the game" and not because of her intelligence. Three minutes after

this conversation takes place, the audience gets the first visual image of LaGuerta, as she

approaches Dexter and sexually winks at him. Although she is dressed in professional

attire with a two-piece suit, she is marked by the suit's light green color and the wearing

of large hoop earrings. As soon as she walks away from Dexter, he reveals through his

internal monologue that he believes LaGuerta's sexual advances are a little "creepy." In

this episode LaGuerta is portrayed as someone who is not deserving of her position as

Lieutenant and someone who seems to have a sexual attraction to Dexter, a man in a

subordinate position to her in the workplace.

The third episode of the first season serves to further establish and solidify how

she obtained her position at the police station. In this episode the audience is introduced

to Captain Matthews, who is in charge of supervising everyone at the station. The first

encounter with Matthews is when Debra goes into his office in order to complain about

the fact that LaGuerta never listens to any of her suggestions, which appear to be well-

informed. Soon after this encounter is over, Matthews summons LaGuerta into his office in order to tell her that she should learn to listen to other people's suggestions. In a line that marks her as mediocre and manipulative, Matthew says: "All you ever care about is furthering your political career, Maria. You were a middle of the pack detective before the press got a hold of you."

Matthew's comment to Maria is brought to life in the following scene, where the audience sees LaGuerta at the funeral of a cop who was recently shot during a crime. The audience is able to see LaGuerta giving a press conference dressed in all black and shortly after, she is seen consoling the family of the cop. Debra, and other employees of the station, are seeing this unfold as Debra states, "Can you believe LaGuerta? She didn't even know Simmons." As soon as Debra makes this statement, everyone whom she is with seems to agree, through verbal and nonverbal cues, that she is merely pretending to be affectionate and caring.

Thus, in the first and third episode of the first season the audience is able to gain an understanding of how Maria LaGuerta came to secure her position at the station. Through visual images and dialogue, it is clear that other people at the station (including the captain) do not deem her worthy of being a Lieutenant. It is mentioned that she has come to this position not because of merit but through manipulating the press to get positive publicity and playing the political game. In addition, there the indication that she is a hyper sexual woman in the workplace and that there might be some desire on her part for Dexter.

The representation of LaGuerta in seasons two and three definitely reinforce the two main ideas about her established in season one. Season two shows her involved in an

affair with a married man, allowing her to gain more status at the station because the man was married to her superior. Season three shows Maria working hard towards solving a case involving the death of one of her close friends, only to find out that one of her former lovers was the one who murdered her. Here, she is seen as a ruthless investigator, but the audience later comes to find out that she was so passionate about the case only because it involved the death of a friend.

Season four: romance and marriage. Season four provides a glimpse into her personal life, with a focus on how a romance with Angel Batista unfolds and leads to marriage by the end of the season. The fourth season provides the audience with an idea of how LaGuerta handles gender roles in a romantic relationship, with a portrayal of her as a very sex-driven and career-driven woman that subordinates marriage to professional advancement. Although the behaviors portrayed challenge gendered expectations of women, they are framed as negative attributes of LaGuerta. At the beginning of the fourth season, the audience sees Maria romantically involved with Angel Batista, the only other main Latino character in the series who is a Sergeant at the station.

LaGuerta and Batista are initially trying to keep the romance a secret. Nine minutes into the second episode of this season, they are in her bedroom; she is wearing a leopard print negligee and her hair falls in locks over her face, and it appears that they just spent the night together. As Batista puts on his clothes he says, "I can get to work first so no one gets suspicious." Later on, in the same episode, when they are both at the station, Batista goes into her office, gets close to her face, puts her hair down, and asks, "Why are we thinking ourselves out of a good thing?" Here, he is referring to the fact that LaGuerta was very adamant about them keeping the blinds shut so no one at work would

suspect of their romance. Batista seems to be at that point where he wants other people to know despite the fact of the ethical implications of a romance with a co-worker who is his superior. But LaGuerta informs him that she is trying to think rationally about the situation and not let her emotions get in the way of her job. One may argue that Batista plays to the expectation that Latinos would not be rational but driven by passion; yet LaGuerta challenges this expectation when asserting her intention to be rational given the professional consequences of dating a co-worker.

This is further developed in the fifth episode of season four, when LaGuerta has a discussion with Batista about her concerns in terms of possibly losing her job over their romance. She is concerned that someone will use the relationship against them because it is "off the books," so she believes it would be best if they informed the captain about their romance. She explains to Batista that he does not "understand the politics of the building" and that if they handle the situation wrongly, their jobs could be at risk. Arguably, if enacted by a male character, this position would have been seen as rational behavior. But coming from a woman, and a Latina woman, it is framed as a calculative move more concerned with keeping her position in the station than with the traditional gendered behavior of valuing romance above career.

While all of this is unfolding, there is a serious case taking place in Miami and at the very end of this episode both LaGuerta and Batista have to stay late at the office in order to crunch numbers for the case. This episode ends with LaGuerta and Batista having sex in one of the offices at the station. LaGuerta is seen passionately and aggressively putting Batista on the table and shortly thereafter the table breaks under them. This is the only time in all seven seasons of *Dexter* that any character is seen

having sex at the police station, but when it is seen, it is between the two Latino characters.

Ten minutes into the eleventh episode of the fourth season, Captain Matthews calls both LaGuerta and Batista into his office to let them know that he has found out about their romance. Matthews is very angry about this and tells them that they will have to have a board of review hearing. This time Maria shows a short temper when she snaps at him and asks, "What, exactly, is your beef with me? Is it my race? My gender?"

This is the only one moment in the episodes analyzed that the character opens room for the explicit codification of a discourse on race and gender. But the opportunity is suppressed when Matthews responds, "It's your arrogance." In this way, racial and gender dynamics are reduced to individual, character traits. More importantly, LaGuerta's appeal to race and gender in a situation when a superior has caught her engaging in unethical behavior gives further credence to the idea that racial minorities and women appeal to racial and gender discrimination to manipulate situations to benefit their personal interests.

At the end of this episode, we see LaGuerta and Batista deciding to get married in order to save their jobs. Initially, Batista does not seem very enthusiastic about the idea, but at the end he agrees and they quickly get married at the station in order to save their jobs, as opposed to getting married because they are truly in love. In this season, the audience not only gets to see LaGuerta as a hypersexual subject. They see ser trying to be rational by informing her superior about the romance, only to succumb to sexual passion, put her career and reputation at risk, and appealing to gender and race discrimination to get out of trouble. Audiences also get to see that she is much more

passionate about her job than to a love relationship with Angel Batista when she subordinates marriage to the imposition of work rules.

Throughout the fifth season of *Dexter*, audiences get to see LaGuerta as a failure in her role as wife to Angel Batista and giving priority to career over relationships. Driven by the ambition to succeed at the station, she becomes progressively colder and less loving towards Batista as the season unfolds. At the beginning of the sixth season, the audience learns that Maria has recently divorced Batista because he was not as politically driven as herself, thus leading one to believe that at the end of the day her career is always what matters the most.

Season six: promotion to captain. The sixth season of this series shows LaGuerta's moral character in a new light. Now, she has climbed her way to the very top and secured the position of Captain at the fictitious Miami Metro Police Department. In this season, the audience is able to see LaGuerta scheming the ultimate blackmail and performing as a "bad cop," more than it has been seen before, especially through juxtaposition to Debra Morgan.

In the first episode of this season, LaGuerta is seen at a ceremony for her promotion to Captain of the police station. At this point, audiences may begin to wonder how she was promoted and what happened to (former) Captain Matthews. Shortly after (through dialogue between Dexter and Debra), audiences find out that LaGuerta blackmailed Tom Matthews after they busted a madam and he appeared in her contact list, or little black book. At this point, knowing that this information would ruin his career, Matthews backed down from his position, and LaGuerta was the next in line to receive it. This moment marks a point when the audience is definitely aware of the fact

that LaGuerta was able to obtain her position as Captain because she blackmailed

someone, instead of rightfully earning it through outstanding performance.

In contrast, shortly after the ceremony scene the audiences see everyone at the

police station gathered around a computer watching one of Debra Morgan's great feats as

she saved the day with her skills at a restaurant shooting. She has apparently gained

Internet sensation because someone filmed it and uploaded the shooting on Youtube.

After much applause and celebration at the station, the camera suddenly pans and

audiences are able to see Maria, dressed in a flowery two-piece suit, making her way to

her new office (not paying any attention to the commotion over Debra). To her surprise,

she finds Captain Matthews there. He tells her that he can tell she has already settled into

his office because it, "reeks of perfume" and leaves. As soon as this scene is over, he

pulls Debra aside and informs her that she has been promoted to Lieutenant and will be

taking over LaGuerta's position.

The news of Debra's promotion is tough for LaGuerta because she had promised

that position to her former lover and husband Angel Batista. In a later scene of the same

episode, LaGuerta finds Matthews and the following dialogue takes place:

> LaGuerta: "Fuck you. You are using Morgan to get back at me."
>
> Matthews: "All these decisions in the department are still up to me. If they weren't, your little plan to blackmail me wouldn't have worked."
>
> LaGuerta: "Oh, so you were o.k. with letting me blackmail you?"

For the first time in this episode, the audience is able to actually hear from both Matthews

and LaGuerta that there was, indeed, blackmail involved. There is no longer any question

that LaGuerta did not rightfully gain her position as Captain of the station. Furthermore,

audiences learn that LaGuerta was ready to promote Batista to Lieutenant on the basis of personal relations and overlooked a competent officer like Morgan.

LaGuerta's work ethic is further defined in the third episode of this season, when Lieutenant Debra Morgan must select a new detective to replace her. She is taking this job very seriously and is going through various candidates meticulously. When she narrows the list down to three candidates, she consults with LaGuerta, who tells her that at the moment there is enough on their plates with a big case and that Morgan should take the easy road. She advises Morgan to "choose someone who you already know so you don't have to put work into the decision." Debra reacts with the position that she has chosen some great candidates and is not willing to take LaGuerta's advice, even though it would make her job much easier. Here the audience is able to see, once again, a juxtaposition between Debra and LaGuerta. One is blackmailing others and dismissing meritocracy to take the easy road, while the other is excelling in performance and ethical behavior on the job. The contrast between Debra, a White woman characterized as hardworking, honest, and morally upright, and Maria, a manipulative, dishonest Afro-Latina who cuts corners and gets away with it, is significant in marker of racialization in the series.

Season seven: death by complexity. The seventh season of *Dexter* provides audiences with an interesting twist to Maria LaGuerta's character before it is literally killed and eliminated from the storyline. It also marks a pivotal point in terms of exposing Dexter's secret identity as a serial killer. In the last scene of the sixth season, Dexter's sister and Miami Metro Police Lieutenant Debra Morgan see Dexter murdering Miami's number one killer at the scene of a former crime. The seventh season, then, opens with

Debra finding out the truth about Dexter's identity as a killer of serial killers—something unknown to the all characters in the police force until then—and attempting to cope with this realization. As the season progresses, Debra realizes that she is going to have to cover up for him and help him as much as possible, thus putting her in an ethical predicament in terms of her position as Lieutenant of the police station.

LaGuerta's character also undergoes a transformation. At the beginning of the season, LaGuerta is seen finding a blood slide in one of the boxes from the scene of the crime in which Debra just found Dexter murdering last season's main murderer. In order to fully investigate the situation herself, LaGuerta takes the blood slide against department policy and has it analyzed even though the case is officially closed. Here, once again, audiences see her performing an operation against departmental policy. The reason why she is so adamant about analyzing this blood slide is because she believes that five years ago, her former lover and partner was framed for a crime he did not commit. As soon as she sees this blood slide, she realizes that the person who actually committed these crimes so long ago is still out there and decides to find a way to clear her lover's name post-death. Her lover, James Doakes, an African American Sergeant at the police station, was one of the few people in this series who discovered Dexter's identity.

LaGuerta's quest for the truth in Doakes' case is one of the first instances in this entire series where audiences see her having a real detective instinct about a crime. At this point, even though her reasons for finding out the truth seem personal and selfish, she is determined and succeeds through instinct and skill in finding out the identity of the murderer. The identity of this murderer, as audience members have known for the past five seasons, is Dexter Morgan. The last episode ultimately proved that LaGuerta has

done the right thing by following her instinct and trying to find out if Dexter was a murderer. In the last, dramatic episode, the storyline places Dexter, LaGuerta, and Morgan facing each other and the truth of Dexter's identity, only to have Morgan kill LaGuerta to protect Dexter.

When examining visual and verbal representations in key episodes of the seventh season, certain patterns of representation remained constant. In every scene I analyzed LaGuerta was shown wearing bright colored clothes, primarily red and pink, often with floral designs or animal prints. Even though her attire was suited for professional dress at the police station (be it slacks or two-piece suits) it was always much more vibrant and stood out from the conservative clothes worn by her White? female counterparts. Earrings were another marker of her identity, large earrings that is—like hoop earrings. Wearing this type of earring with her office attire was another way in which she stood out and was associated to a particular image of Latinas. In addition, she was also almost always seen wearing her hair long and down, flowing over her face—in contrast to the other female characters, like Debra who cut it short for two of the seasons.

Despite this stereotypical portrayal, explicit references to her ethnic origin within the Latino population or even reference to Latinidad in general were not abundant in the dialogue. The only instance of ethnic identification is given in the tenth episode of the seventh season titled, "The Dark…Whatever." In a memorable scene, Tom Matthews says the following to LaGuerta, "Go home, Maria. The only help you'll get from me is a lift back to Cuba…." This is one of the only moment in which the audience actually gets a concrete reference to Maria's origin. But the reference is also ambiguous, since there is

no confirmation by Maria, and viewers are left without a clue as to whether she is a Cuban immigrant, or a U.S. Latina of Cuban descent.

In any case, the quote is significant because it marks Maria's Latinidad in reference to immigrant status, foreign origin, and precarious legal situation. From Matthews' comments viewers infer that she is not a part of the U.S. national identity and could be deported back to Cuba. Matthews not only draws attention to her national origin outside the United States but also follows the comment with a statement regarding her abilities to say that she "does not know" what she is doing. With the close proximity of the two statements, it seems as though Matthews believed that the two are somehow related.

Overall, regarding intellectual abilities, the representations of LaGuerta in season seven also stress her apparent lack of ability to hold her current position and title in the basis of performance. This marking is inscribed most often through dialogue that comes from other characters, specifically Matthews. In another scene, viewers hear Matthews state: "I'm a lot less likely to fuck this up," and "You are not an investigator, Maria. You're talented at playing the game and you played a great one. Hell, you beat me." The texts thus construct LaGuerta as someone not capable of solving a crime or being in charge of a police station, despite her title of Captain.

As mentioned earlier, this season also features moments when LaGuerta is seen as a good cop, working hard and intelligently to solve a crime. However, the moments when she is doing her job correctly are often overshadowed by an instance in which she breaks rules for procedures or uses deceit and trickery to get ahead in the game of finding the murderer. Even though LaGuerta is seen as much more qualified to hold her position

and perform her duties in line with departmental policies, these depictions are overshadowed by what other characters think of her/say about her and her constant need to manipulate the situation and do things under the table in order to get ahead.

In the final analysis, this season complicates the representation of LaGuerta as an investigator capable of solving a case through instinct and skill, motivated by a lofty goal, and succeeding in her effort. This twist still has gender connotations, for she is a woman motivated to solve the case to clean up the name of a former lover. But the use of her intelligence and skills, in addition to her given position of power, placed LaGuerta in an impossible predicament in the storyline as the antagonist of Dexter. A Maria LaGuerta with power, skill, and moral force would have been too close to being a protagonist capable of displacing Dexter. Hence LaGuerta had to be killed.

Discursive Practices: Media-Audience in the Co-Construction of Meanings

This section presents the thematic patterns that emerged in the analysis of media representation and audience readings of the character of Maria LaGuerta as a process of co-construction of a discourse on Latinidad. This discussion relates to the second research question and dimension of analysis, discursive practice, to explore how producers of texts and audiences interact to make sense of these texts and create meanings. The discussion is based on the analysis of the prominent scenes in which the characterization of LaGuerta is given attention and the linking of these scenes to audience blog posts on the Internet Move Database posted during and after the episode. Since the character of Maria LaGuerta did not feature prominently in episodes one through eighth, I focused on key moments of co-construction of meaning found in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth episodes of season seven, where LaGuerta's character is more prominent. The

analysis identified three salient themes that emerged in both the scenes and the audience responses to these scenes.

Overall, it may be argued that the media representation of the evolution and end of Maria LaGuerta's character in seasons one through seven definitely set the tone for the ways in which the audiences responded to the character, despite the character change that occurred in the last season. Maria LaGuerta's character, for the first six seasons of *Dexter*, is constructed as selfish, seductive, manipulative, self-serving, and deceitful. For example, two of the most memorable instances in which audiences were able to see her succeed within the force involved her having an affair with a married man and blackmailing the Captain of the police station. It is no surprise then, that by the seventh season, when it seems that she is finally attempting to change her ways as a professional, audiences are weary of considering her a hero and focus instead on reading her character in light of the persona established form the beginning of the series.

Within this context, three distinct themes emerged from a close reading of the last three episodes of season seven and from reading viewer's comments to these episodes. The themes are the following: LaGuerta's image as a bad law enforcement official lacking credibility who is undeserving of her position; the image of LaGuerta as a manipulative and deceitful woman; and the audience's rejection of LaGuerta's image of as an officer trying to play good cop. Embedded through these three themes, primarily in viewer comments, is the gendering of the discourse through references to LaGuerta's sexuality.

Undeserving of a Lieutenant status. The first six seasons set the stage for LaGuerta's reputation as someone who does not fully deserve her position within the

station. Even before the moment audiences see her securing her position as Lieutenant through blackmail, it has well been established by producers in the storyline that there are probably people more deserving of her job. In the seventh season, other characters in the series verbalize that they do not believe that she is suited for her position, and the audiences reproduce this interpretation in their comments.

For example, shortly after the opening of the tenth episode, Maria LaGuerta tells former captain Tom Matthews about her doubts about the Bay Harbor Butcher case (the case in which her former lover was wrongfully framed by Dexter), hoping that he will help her out. The scene is laced with signs of LaGuerta's sexuality and seductive ways. With her hair down, wearing brown heels, brown pants, and a flowery button down top, she goes to find him, off duty, at his boat. Here, Tom Matthews is reclining on a chair, sipping on what he says is an alcoholic beverage, and LaGuerta stands up and talks to him the entire time, taking a firm stance.

After hearing of LaGuerta's doubt, he laughs and says, "Go home, Maria. The only help you'll get from me is a lift back to Cuba. You don't know what you are doing." Maria looks upset and walks off without saying goodbye to him.

Minutes after this scene aired, IMDB blogger "jarosh77" observed that:

> Of course LaGuerta suspects Dexter. She went to Matthews for help and that's it. He assumed that she was accusing him because he thinks (accurately) that she is a terrible cop. She is going to have to catch him [Dexter] in the act if she wants anyone to believe her story because of how bad a cop she is.

Even though "jarosh77" knows that LaGuerta is getting closer to finding out the truth about the situation, like Tom Matthews he sees her as a bad cop and thinks no one will believe her speculations. Also significant in this instance is the fact that audiences did

not react or comment on the pejorative reference to LaGuerta as Cuban. Across viewer

comments, the silence regarding race and ethnicity is telling.

As LaGuerta digs deeper into this investigation, she keeps getting closer to

finding out the truth about Dexter's secret identity, but the audience and other characters

on the show continue to have a hard time acknowledging that she is actually doing her

work correctly and ethically. In a later scene in the same episode, LaGuerta and

Matthews are at a booth in a Chinese restaurant discussing the same situation. Maria sits

in front of Matthews and gives him very rational and useful information that point to

Dexter being the Bay Harbor Butcher and says she is going to question him about the

matter because it is the right thing to do. Tom responds by saying, "If somebody is gonna

talk to Dexter it's gonna be me. I've known him since he was a kid. He trusts me. What's

more, I'm a lot less likely to fuck it up." Once again, we have a clear example of a

character on the series believing that LaGuerta is not as qualified as others (himself) to do

her job intelligently and skillfully even if she tries and proves to be competent.

An hour after this episode aired, "RussDent81" shared the following in a thread

entitled "Please don't tell me you love LaGuerta":

> I always liked her ambition, her willingness to do the lowest things to climb the
> political ladder. Now we are seeing a side of her we haven't really seen before. As
> Matthews said, "When did you start becoming a cop?" Well no one thinks she is
> actually a cop so it's going to be hard for her to convince anyone even when she
> is doing the right thing.

Here, "RussDent81" sees that LaGuerta is finally performing as a real cop would, but this

blogger also understands that because of the way her character has been constructed, it

will be difficult for other people to see that she is a good cop. A couple of posts later,

"Ahstaroth" states that, "I think they are setting her to be killed off. No one can expose

Dexter. She is doing things the right way now and is going to die for it." At this point, this viewer has come to understand that LaGuerta is finally performing her duties as a law enforcement official "the right way," but because of how her character was constructed the only option left (in the viewer's opinion) is death for the character.

In response to "Ahstaroth"'s post, "Mr_Nin" says the following comment:

> Yeah I don't find myself hating her as much this season for once she is actually doing her job instead of playing politics but she is probably going to end up dying for it. The only purpose she served on the show was being slut and now she is not a slut and a good cop. She has to go.

"Mr_Nin"'s comment brings forth her sexuality in a negative light. Not only does "Mr_Nin" believe that LaGuerta is going to have to die in this season, but this viewer also believes that LaGuerta is no longer "being slut" also plays a part in her having to leave the show because that was, apparently, that is the only purpose this Afro-Latina character served.

During another instance on the eleventh episode of this season, LaGuerta is quite far into her investigation and is now searching the supposed place where her former lover, Doakes, kept a boat. To her surprise, Debra has already gotten to this location before her and has planted evidence, which proves that Doakes was the Bay Harbor Butcher (even though this is obviously not the case). Twenty minutes into the episode, the audience sees LaGuerta wearing bright pink pants and an orange leopard print long sleeved top. Her hair is down and flowing over her face. Maria is looking over the "evidence" as the following dialogue between her and Tom Matthews ensues:

> LaGuerta: "This evidence could have been planted. Dexter is a forensics expert. He has the skills…"
>
> Tom: "Maria, it's over. The fat lady isn't singing. Her song is done. She is getting dry humped in her dressing room."

> LaGuerta: "Jesus, Tom, what is wrong with you?"
>
> Tom: "Maria, why can't you let this go?"
>
> LaGuerta: "I guess because I feel I owe it to James to clear his name."
>
> Tom: "Why? Because you were a couple?"
>
> La Guerta: "Because he was innocent."
>
> Tom: "You are not an investigator, Maria. You're talented at playing the game and you played a great one. Hell, you beat me. But, either way, I'm done here."

Once again, LaGuerta is trying to prove the innocence of her former lover by attempting to get to the bottom of the crime. Tom Matthews, however, stands by the fact that she is "not an investigator" and has only achieved her success because of how she plays "the game." He also speaks to her in a very crass manner, indicating that he does not truly have respect for her or her motive for solving the case.

In response to Matthews' comment about LaGuerta not being a real investigator, a couple of bloggers shared similar views and their reasons for feeling this way after the scene aired. "pankoeken" stated that, "I just want someone to kill that fat nasty skank. She does not belong on a cop show because she is not a cop." To this, "summa1" responds:

> I think porkchop is finally doing things the right way but its gonna backfire because she is playing with the lead character. this whole scheme is gonna blow up in the fat bitch's face. She might know how to play the game but it seems like she forgot right about now.

Both of these bloggers agree with Matthews that LaGuerta is not a good investigator and their posts were made shortly after the scene aired. However, they also bring to light

comments that go hand in hand with the theme of sexuality that keeps emerging through many of the IMDB posts. In this situation, both of the bloggers feel the need to mention her body size and physical appearance by making negative remarks, even though this has nothing to do with her performance as an investigator.

Through the examination of key instances in the last few episodes of the seventh season, it is easy to note that viewers and characters on the show do not believe that LaGuerta should hold the position she holds within the station because she is not deserving of it. What's more, plenty of viewers felt as though she needed to be removed from the show (by dying) because she was straying from the original ways in which her character was constructed and becoming a threat to the leading, male character.

*Manipulation and deceit***.** The previous theme emerged even around scenes where LaGuerta is finally starting to do play in accordance to the rules. This "playing by the rules," however, is not the tone throughout the season. Even when LaGuerta acts in line with policies at the station, there are still tasks that she performs without permission and in order to save the reputation of her former lover (which is not the most benevolent act or one done to solely benefit the city of Miami). The ways in which she goes about obtaining certain information about the case are not as righteous as they might appear to be when one thinks about the major shift in her character. Thus, because of her sneaky ways, audiences are definitely inclined to continue to see her character in a negative light.

From the moment LaGuerta decides she is going to investigate the crime of the Bay Harbor Butcher, she decides to go to former captain Tom Matthews for help and advice. From this point forward, near the end of season seven, audiences see the two

interacting a great deal. Tom is an older Caucasian, blue-eyed man in what seems to be

his mid-sixties. The character serves as a counterpoint to LaGuerta in several ways.

For instance, in a scene in the tenth episode of the season, Matthews realizes that

he needs to find LaGuerta to talk about the situation with the Bay Harbor Butcher case.

Tom Matthews approaches her from behind and the following dialogue takes place:

> Tom: "Your assistant told me I'd find you here. We need to talk."
>
> Maria: "About what? The horrible things you said to me?"
>
> Tom: "You cost me my job, Maria. I was nine months shy of a four year pension before you stuck the knife in me."
>
> Maria: "Before you could return the favor. It's not my fault I beat you at your own game. So, why don't you take your own advice? Go home."
>
> Tom: "Now, why would I want to do that if I am here to help?"

Through the exchange of this dialogue it definitely becomes clear, once more, that both

of these characters know exactly what happened in terms of their job situation—LaGuerta

blackmailed Matthews and now has his job.

But now both characters will appear shady and manipulative. At this point in the

episode, LaGuerta quickly walks away to fix her coffee and Matthews follows her. He

gets very close to her left ear and says the following:

> Tom: "That little list of yours… you'd be surprised what I know about some of the names on it."
>
> Maria: "Which names?"
>
> Tom: "Oh, not so fast, no. I help you, you support my statement…. Just long enough for me to get my pension bump. Boats are fucking expensive. So, the question Maria, is, how bad do you want this?"
>
> Maria: "Looks like a table just opened up."

Here, Tom is referring to a list that LaGuerta found containing the names of people who

docked their boats where the Bay Harbor Butcher would dump his victims. Earlier, while

on his boat, LaGuerta had mentioned the list to Tom and now it seems as though Tom is

willing to help her with some of the names on her list if she agrees to help him with his

case in order to receive his pension. Obviously, the situation surrounding the pension

bump is not going to be done according to the Miami Metro rules and as soon as

LaGuerta says, "Looks like a table just opened up," audiences are able to see that she is

once again not playing according to the rules. Likewise, Matthews is manipulating

LaGuerta to extract personal benefit, but this fact does not appear to change viewers'

reactions to LaGuerta.

Blogger comments surrounding this scene with Tom Matthews focus on

LaGuerta's depiction as a deceitful and undeserving character. "Rye9969" commented:

> My theory for this season is like after the first meeting with Matthews and
> LaGuerta things are going to unfold because now she has the help of Matthews.
> She couldn't do it alone and now she has his help because she is going to help
> him lie like she always does.

"Rye9969" points out two interesting things here. First of all, he comments on the fact

that he believes LaGuerta could not have done this on her own, tying back directly to the

last theme in which audiences did not find her capable or worthy of holding her title as

Captain of the station. He also points out the fact that LaGuerta is going to help Matthews

"lie," and he does not find this to be atypical behavior for LaGuerta.

In response to a later comment about LaGuerta and Matthews both being

deceitful, "JadeSirenna" mentions the following:

> Yeah they are both pretty shady. She has played dirty since the beginning and
> now he wants her to help him play dirty so he can get his money. She is going to

agree to this and then they are probably going to end up doing it in some back room.

"JadeSirenna" adds on to the theme of her shadiness and deceitfulness by stating that she has always been this way from the very beginning. This blogger also contributes to the ever-present theme of sexuality by stating that they are going to "end up doing it."

Good cop?: Audience rejection of the character change. Throughout the seventh season, audiences are able to see LaGuerta performing her duties and investigating a crime in a much more righteous way than they have ever seen before. However, no other characters on the show or audiences are willing to accept this character change. As viewers/bloggers watch each episode unfold, they speculate as to how the season will end and how her character will continue to behave. They, along with other characters on the series, do not believe that LaGuerta is truly becoming a good cop, even though there are clear indications that she is making a change for the better in terms of her career.

There are three key moments in this season which demonstrate that LaGuerta is still not entirely playing by the rules: she takes the blood slide from the scene of the crime without proper permission and continues her investigation in much the same way, she agrees to accept Tom Matthews' help under the condition that she will help him lie at the police station, and she is deceitful about how she plans to capture Dexter at the end by releasing the man who killed his mother from prison without a proper reason.

Aside from these instances, LaGuerta is shown as having a real instinct for what everyone at the station has been oblivious to for the past seven years: the fact that Dexter Morgan is a serial killer. She is seen as ruthless and unstoppable because she is determined to get to the bottom of the case, whether anyone believes her or not. This is definitely a side of LaGuerta that has never been exposed before. She usually handles

cases and crimes based on what she will benefit from them and has always attempted to take the easy way out. There are several examples in the last three episodes of the seventh season which demonstrate her keen ability to be an investigator.

In the tenth episode of season seven, LaGuerta and Matthews decided to go to the cabin at the Everglades to find out that the man that was living there and renting out the cabin was tied to Dexter Morgan through the murder of his mother. Throughout the verbal exchange that ensues between LaGuerta and Matthews, the audience is able to see Maria talking faster each time as she feels she is getting closer to discovering more information about the real identity of the Bay Harbor Butcher. This is a pivotal point in the season because it is the first time audiences see LaGuerta actually on to the real truth about a case and getting excited by the possibility of uncovering something, much like a good detective would when they are getting closer to solving a mystery. Audiences are definitely able to see a distinction between her and Matthews when she states, "We can't ignore the facts." Here, Matthews is the one who is not performing like a good cop ought to, he is ignoring the fact that the points Maria is making are perfectly reasonable and should be investigated. He blows this off by saying, "Oh, c'mon Maria," implying that he does not believe what she is saying.

However, there were not many comments on IMDB following this episode that indicated that viewers believed her to be a good cop. On the contrary, comments posted on IMDB during and after the episode also fell in line with the same types of themes that characterized her as undeserving and not a good cop. "Becca_nh" wrote: "just because a cop does one good thing in a span of ten years does not make her a good cop." This blogger is acknowledging that fact that LaGuerta is doing "good things," but the blogger

also seems to be saying that performing this way now is not going to erase what she has done in the past.

Following this episode another blogger, "alleyeyzoneme2" notes, "I'm not buying this act of hers. She is onto something more." This type of comment is echoed by other viewers who, in speculating about what would happen next in the season, also believed that LaGuerta must be up to something else. The fact that as soon as LaGuerta gets close to figuring out the truth about Dexter is seen as an "act" is very indicative of how audiences and bloggers she her as a cop.

In the twelfth episode of the seventh season, as LaGuerta gets closer to finding out that Dexter is the Bay Harbor Butcher, there should be not doubt in the audiences' minds that LaGuerta has literally been one of the only people in the series to come this close to finding out his real identity. The other few people who have done so, have ended up dead. By constructing her character this way in the season, the creators of the show are definitely bringing to light a new aspect to Maria LaGuerta: a good cop who knows how to find killers. At the end of the last episode, titled, "Surprise, Motherfucker," Maria finds Dexter at the scene of the crime where he is about to murder his mother's murderer. What she does not know, however, is that because of his fear of being found out, Dexter has set her up. When LaGuerta arrives at the shipping yards (where Dexter is about to kill Estrada), she is wearing a bright pink flowery top with white patterns and tight fitting black slacks with heels. Her hair is all the way down and a crucifix is hanging around her neck. She has a flashlight in one hand and a gun in the other. She slowly makes her way into the container where Dexter is about to murder his victim. As soon as she comes in,

Dexter comes up from behind and injects her in the neck with a tranquilizer in order for her to fall asleep for a little bit.

As Dexter plans out how he will murder both Estrada and LaGuerta without leaving any trace that it was him, Debra comes in to the container and sees what is happening. This entire time, Debra has been extremely hesitant to accept Dexter's ways and has even felt remorse on several occasions for what they have been putting LaGuerta through. Dexter then puts LaGuerta's body against the wall of the shipping container and tells Debra that she should not be there. After many times of Dexter telling Debra to leave, LaGuerta finally starts waking up and appears to be groggy from the effects of the drug. The following dialogue takes place:

> Maria: "Shoot him, Deb. You have to end this. Shoot him."
>
> Debra: "Stop."
>
> Maria: "Do it, Debra. Shoot him. Do it. Shoot him! This is not who you are. You're a good cop. You're a good person. Put him down."
>
> Dexter: "It's true, everything she said. You're a good person. It's o.k. Do what you gotta do."
>
> Debra: "Dex!"

The entire time this is taking place, LaGuerta starts to sob and Debra has her gun pointed at Dexter. After Debra yells "Dex!" we see her shoot LaGuerta in the chest and hysterically run up to her dead body, sobbing the entire time as Dexter watches from afar. The scene ends with tragic music playing in the background as Debra holds LaGuerta's bloody body in her arms and Dexter looks on. This last scene ultimately proved that LaGuerta's ability to excel in her investigative work by following her instincts and trying

to find out if Dexter was a murderer. Audiences are finally able to see her perform her

duties as a good cop.

This episode definitely had mixed reviews from the viewers and bloggers in terms

of LaGuerta's fate. Some people believed her death was just and it had to happen, while

other people believed that it was not very realistic. Ultimately, however, regardless of

whether it was realistic or not, most of the bloggers were content that her character would

no longer be in the series. One of the posts that stands out is the following made by

"harryparachute" shortly following the episode. He says:

> Yeah I was happy to see her go but a little disappointed. I was hoping for a
> violent, torrid sex scene between her and Matthews while he says dirty and
> racially insensitive things to her, her eyes rolling into the back of her head from
> the pleasure of being ravaged and degraded. Then the camera can have lingering
> panning shots of her panting, glistening body as she drips in sweat.

This post points to the fact that this blogger, as many other viewers, disliked LaGuerta

and does not care about seeing her go as a character. More significantly, it suggests that

the more lasting image of the Latina Captain is centered on her sexuality.

Other bloggers reported the same type of positive feelings over the death of

LaGuerta's character, and even went as far to explain that she did not do her job correctly

because it ultimately lead to her death. "symphonybeets" says:

> There was no where left for her character to go. She actually royally screwed up
> by trying to do the right thing. Someone like her should not be getting involved
> with that stuff and playing with fire. She got burned for sure.

To this comment, "papaboos22" replies:

> Yeah, this show definitely showed that if you try to mess with Dexter you are
> going to die. Dexter is the man and LaGuerta was just a lousy cop. She got burned
> and ultimately didn't play the game as good as she thought.

Both of these bloggers agree that LaGuerta brought upon her own death. Though they did

agree that it seemed she was acting correctly and perhaps being a good cop, this is what they ultimately feel led to her demise. The fact that "someone like her" (which could mean a variety of things for this blogger) got as far as she did with her investigation by playing the game the right way is what viewers believe caused her to lose her life.

Through an analysis of viewer comments and her characterization as a good cop, it is safe to say that as soon as LaGuerta began to turn over a new leaf and show her true skills as a prominent cop, she was taken off the show because, perhaps, there was no where left for her character to go.

In sum, the relationship between the construction of the text and blogger comments is direct and easy to note. In comments to all episodes analyzed, audiences reproduced the preferred negative reading of LaGuerta. There was a clear connection between a majority of the comments and the ways in which LaGuerta's character had been constructed in the particular scene/episode to which the bloggers were responding/commenting. The only way in which the viewers' reading did not relate directly to the text of the episodes was in the mediating discourse on sexuality that pervaded audience comments—even when sexuality was not a clear referent in the scene commented. In effect, sexuality was a common referent in blog posts that did not necessarily relate to anything that was constructed through the actual dialogue, writings, and/or images of Captain LaGuerta. On the contrary, it seemed out of place and sometimes the comments even lacked coherence. However, it is not necessarily foreign that readers invoke a discourse on sexuality, given that a dominant pattern of representation of LaGuerta throughout the seasons is as a seductress and hypersexual character. This discourse, therefore, activated a gender ideology in the episodes to

articulate a social practice in the interpretation of the character of Maria LaGuerta. This will be the focus of the next section.

Finally, it can be argued that the analysis of co-constructed meanings of the character of Captain Maria LaGuerta reproduce the dominant views of Latinidad in popular culture along the three dimensions discussed in the literature review: homogenization, symbolic colonization, and immigration as a marker of Latinidad. First, the lack of cultural specificity and reference to the cultural hybridity of Latino cultures reinforces the view of Latina/os as a homogeneous group. Only a single reference to LaGuerta as Cuban and the erasure of specific cultural references and little diversity in casting does not advance a view of Latinos as a diverse group. Secondly, her powerful persona is undermined by symbolic colonization achieved through the use of the stereotypical representations of Latinas' physical traits, style, lower intellectual caliber and competency, and exaggerated sexuality. Finally, although not as visible, the Latinidad of LaGuerta is also connected to her status as a Cuban immigrant, a condition attributed in pejorative terms by another character to connote an undesirable status.

Social Practices: Activating Gender and Racial Ideologies

This discussion of discursive practices is predicated on the assumption that producers of television series rely on existing stereotypes and social discourses to create characters, and audiences also draw on previously created discourses to make sense of the texts they are viewing (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In this section of the chapter, I am mostly concerned with answering the third research question: How do discourses on Latinidad in *Dexter* relate to racial and gender ideologies in the current social climate in the United States?

Instances such as the ones analyzed above illuminate the ways in which producers and consumers (bloggers) were heavily relying on existing gender ideologies that construct Latinas as sexual creatures when viewing and attempting to make sense of LaGuerta's character (Valdivia, 2010). In the texts analyzed, the activation of sexuality stands out in both representation and interpretation of the character. This is particularly telling in the seventh season, when the sexual dimension of LaGuerta's character was less visible than in any previous season. However, many bloggers found room to discuss her sexuality in very explicit terms. As noted in the previous section, some bloggers decided to focus on LaGuerta's sexuality when making claims about her character or professional behavior. This is illustrated in moments of co-construction of meaning, as in the following examples.

In the tenth episode of the seventh season, when Matthews attempts to find LaGuerta to make a deal with her so that they will both benefit from the situation, LaGuerta tells Matthews: "Before you could return the favor. It's not my fault I beat you at your own game. So, why don't you take your own advice? Go home." Here, Maria is making it very clear that she blackmailed Tom and is not ashamed to admit it to him. About this scene, blogger "JadeSirenna" posted the following:

> Yeah they are both pretty shady. She has played dirty since the beginning and now he wants her to help him play dirty so he can get his money. She is going to agree to this and then they are probably going to end up doing it in some back room.

"JadeSirenna" is pointing out two interpretive moves in terms of co-construction here. First of all, she is reading what happened in the scene in terms of LaGuerta's deceitful character. The producers of the show opened room for this reading by having LaGuerta openly address the fact that she had blackmailed Matthews and was willing to help him

out (this time) by lying to the police department in order to get ahead in terms of her investigation. The blogger responds to the scene with this preferred reading. "JadeSirenna" also does something very interesting, though, by associating LaGuerta's "shady" character with her sexual promiscuity in terms of LaGuerta and Matthews "doing it." This type of statement does not seem to fall directly in line with the image the producers created in this scene. Matthews and LaGuerta did not seem flirtatious in any manner. They did not hold hands or glance at one another in provocative ways. They kept their distance and had a conversation regarding a deal they were about to make. If anything, it seemed like they were annoyed with one another, but were only doing this in order to advance their own, separate careers. They were, more than anything, solidifying plans to carry out a corrupt mission.

There were other instances where viewers would respond directly to the character with comments such as the following made by "harryparachute":

> Yeah I was happy to see her go but a little disappointed. I was hoping for a violent, torrid sex scene between her and Matthews while he says dirty and racially insensitive things to her, her eyes rolling into the back of her head from the pleasure of being ravaged and degraded. Then the camera can have lingering panning shots of her panting, glistening body as she drips in sweat.

With this comment, "harryparachute" reacts to the death of Maria LaGuerta (a clearly constructed instance by the producers of the show) by expressing disappointment not at the fact that she is eliminated from the plot, but at the fact that he/she never saw a sexual scene before LaGuerta died. This blogger further invokes sexual violence by stating the desire to see LaGuerta being "ravaged and degraded." There is no mention of Matthews in the same position. On the contrary, Matthews is the one, supposedly, doing the ravaging.

These types of constructions of sexuality seem to fall in line with typical Latina images and representations as sexual creatures. Relevant research has indicated that Latina representations on the television screen, even though they are supposed to embody ideals of whiteness, always contain an element that renders them subject to the white gaze (Beltrán, 2002). This seems to be what is happening here, both in terms of Matthews' white gaze upon LaGuerta and the gaze of the blogger (who may or may not be white). Further, her sexualization (and that of Batista in interaction with her) is offered in contrast to other White female characters—particularly Deb Morgan—who are portrayed as models of ethical behavior.

This also says a great deal about the ways in which Latinas are perceived in this country and the seriousness that may be attributed to them when faced with situations at the workplace. As the text emphasizes and viewers/bloggers suggest through their comments, sexuality is one of the first things people note when faced with a Latina character and in explaining their behavior. If one were to take it a step further, it would be implied that this is the same for every day interactions with Latinas in this nation.

In terms of LaGuerta's character, what I had originally noted from the early moments of the series was how she seemed to be a progressive representation of a Latina on television because of all the success she had achieved at the station (even from early on). As was evident through the literature review, there are very few portrayals of Latinas in law enforcement, especially in positions of power. After examining and noticing more important instances of the series, however, it became clear that her character actually fell in line with a majority of the typically stereotypical Latina representations.

This stress on sexuality contrasts with the activation of racial ideologies. Race and racism were difficult to code in the text. One may argue that by remaining hidden and understated, race and racism often become even more powerful. As Lacy and Ono (2011) explained,

When racialized discourse does not call attention to itself, responses to it become easily misunderstood or formulaic. We can overcome such misinterpretations and ideological scripts and begin to understand different perspectives if we question, challenge, interpret, and critically analyze cultural practices (p. 3).

When most people think about racist representations in the media, they usually consider extravagant depictions; as Lacy and Ono (2011) add: "…the mundane, everyday, and routine cultural practices perhaps have the greatest potential to survive, work in tandem with overt racism, and affect us in their commonplace and taken-for-granted forms" (p.3). These taken-for-granted forms are represented in a televised fashion through the role of Lieutenant LaGuerta as powerful Latina character in Showtime's *Dexter*.

Overall, the analysis of social practice suggests that the way Maria LaGuerta's character is constructed heavily draws on previously existing discourses about Latinidad, and relates in connotative ways to racialized discourses on minorities in the United States. On the surface level, *Dexter*'s Captain LaGuerta appears to be a powerful representation of Latinidad in a crime television show. She is in charge of most of the operations that take place throughout the seasons and through this role seems to become a symbol that paves the way for progressive Latina representations to come. This progressive representation seems to rupture the most common Latina stereotypes in— more likely than not in secondary roles or as powerless object—by providing, at least, a

counterbalance. A close reading and critical examination of her character, however, allows for a different narrative to unfold.

Firstly, her powerful persona is undermined by symbolic colonization achieved through the use of the stereotypical Latina representations that teeming with negative qualities that perpetuate common beliefs about Latinas' potential in this country. For example, in her rise to success, the character is marked not only by her sexuality but also by her reliance of playing political games to obtain upward mobility, and by an ambitious personality that does not abide by the rules of meritocracy.

Secondly, and more importantly, this encoding activates ideological notions often associated with women of color and minorities, particularly African Americans and Latina/os in conservative discourses on affirmative action and minority "entitlement." Arguably, an implicit racial encoding is observed in *Dexter* in the association of LaGuerta with uncontrollable and irrational sexual drive, use the "race card" to play a political game and access opportunities to advance in the job; the perception of lower competencies and intellectual standing, and questionable moral character. It is important to take a look at the underlying (potentially) racist narratives because by going unnoticed through a veil of progression, they could cause more harm. Noticing how these stereotypical representations can remain hidden, allows audiences and researchers to understand how these images can negatively contribute to everyday struggles that Latinas face in this country.

Theoretical Implications of Research

As stated in the literature review of previous analyses of Latina/os images in media, it has been established that a common pattern of representation of Latinas

involves vibrant colors, which are apparently reminiscent of tropical settings (e.g., Baez, 2007; Baez, 2008; Beltran, 2002; Shugart, 2007; Valdivia, 2000; Valdivia, 2007; Valdivia, 2008; Valdivia, 2010). Aside from these vibrant colors, television often depicts Latinas with long flowing hair as well (Valdivia, 2008). Both of these markers were evident when viewing the key episodes in which Maria LaGuerta was featured. I would add that wearing large earrings in a workplace environment further emphasized the stereotype that Latinas (and also African-Americans) accentuate—or even exaggerate— their feminine qualities in ways that may prove inappropriate for the standards set by White, mainstream expectations of professional women's appearances. In this sense, it is possible to say that LaGuerta's character was constructed to meet up to typical Latina stereotypical representations commonly seen on television.

The findings of this research support previous research on Latinidad, production and consumption of media discourses, gender/race ideologies, and intersectionality. For example, the representation of Maria LaGuerta invokes representation patterns as noted by Molina-Guzmán (2010), particularly in terms of gender stereotypes and the idea of meritocracy in relation to Latinidad on television. She has argued that when dealing with Latinas, television series often depict them in ways that show them getting ahead through means other than merit. In the case of Gabrielle Solis (Eva Longoria) in *Desperate Housewives*, she gets ahead due to her looks and not hard work. These types of representations, along with the representation of Captain LaGuerta, create an image in viewers' minds about how minorities get ahead in the system (the few times that they do), usually not based on work, intelligence or merit.

I would argue that exposure to these patterns of representation facilitates the ways in which audiences and producers co-construct the meaning of this text. Even when a character such as LaGuerta becomes complicated (due to a change in tactics and motives) audiences still performed a flat reading of her character because of dominant discourses about Latinidad influencing them. These discourses come not only from the construction of her character in previous seasons, but also from exposure to similar narratives throughout the media.

From the analysis of this television series, it is evident that media did encode certain patterns that resonate with audiences. This interpretation of the character (according to the viewer blogs) stays in line with dominant readings about Latinidad, as proposed by theories of encoding and decoding. However, the dominant readings are not entirely due to the powers of the media, they are also greatly affected by the context. It is in the larger context of the discourse that a great amount of these readings are created. It is not entirely the producers that give this character her meaning; it is a negotiation between the viewers and the producers. The co-constructions here relate to the concepts discussed by Hall (1980). Encoding/decoding is part of a cyclical process of representation that bridges production and reception of texts. The viewers of this series were influenced not only by the creation of the character by the producers, but also by the already pre-existing discourses about Latinidad found throughout the country. This includes discourses about immigration (often times brought about by the news), meritocracy, and affirmative action, for example.

Gender and racial discourses intersecting notions of Latinidad shape our ideologies and the ways in which audiences perceive Latinas in this country. In the case

of Captain LaGuerta, her gender is much more obvious than her race. Gender ideology is most visible through the theme of sexuality that is central to the story line and comes up not only through the viewers' comments, but through sex scenes such as the one between Batista and LaGuerta at the police station (they have been the only two people on the series to have sexual relations at the station).

On the other hand, her race is only very rarely talked about (the exception being when Matthews threatens to send her back to Cuba in the seventh season). In previous research, it has been noted that when racial discourses do not call attention to themselves, they become more powerful and even more dangerous because they go unnoticed. The character of Captain LaGuerta exemplifies this because the racial discourses surrounding her character are obliterated by the show. The fact that her race is very rarely mentioned affirms colorblindness by reducing everything to individual character. As previously stated by Lacy and Ono (2011), the invisibility of racial discourse serves to strengthen racism by making it go unnoticed and, therefore, taken for granted. For instance, the silencing of a racial discourse in Dexter, while the representation of LaGuerta emphasizes intellectual, affective, and moral deficiencies traditionally imposed on racial minorities is one way in which racism operates in this text.

Yet, there is another relevant component of this representation that brings together the intersectionality of race and gender in LaGuerta. Through the character of LaGuerta, audiences are able to see a Latina representation that does not necessarily fall in line with the representations discussed in previous literature. Typical Latina representations usually fall into two categories—indigenous and of European descent (Valdivia, 2010). The representations of the indigenous Latina are usually associated with the nanny/domestic

worker roles Molina-Guzmán (2010) and the European descent representations are more often associated with the sexual vixen characters. LaGuerta is an Afro-Latina who does not fit into either of these two typical representations. The intersectionality between her African and Latina descent challenges typical stereotypical representation of Latinas on the television screen. But it is more complicated to actually determine what that means in terms of the discourse that it creates. In her case, the physical attributes, hypersexuality, lack of intellectual ability, and tendency to play the political game to get ahead, position her along the set of stereotypical images that apply to African American women as well as Latinas.

Overall, it can be argued that her Latinidad, even in instances when it is represented as ambiguous, aligns nicely with previously researched discourses about Latinidad. The analysis of co-constructed meanings of the character of Captain Maria LaGuerta indeed reproduce the dominant views of Latinidad in popular culture along the three dimensions discussed in the literature review: homogenization, symbolic colonization, and immigration as a marker of Latinidad (Amaya, 2007; Aparicio, 1997; Molina-Guzmán, 2010).

First, the lack of cultural specificity and reference to the cultural hybridity of Latino cultures reinforces the view of Latina/os as a homogeneous group. Only a single reference to La Guerta as Cuban and the erasure of specific cultural references and little diversity in casting does not advance a view of Latinos as a diverse group. Secondly, her powerful persona is undermined by symbolic colonization achieved through the use of the stereotypical representations of Latinas' physical traits, style, lower intellectual caliber and competency, and exaggerated sexuality. Finally, although not as visible, the

Latinidad of LaGuerta is also connected at a critical juncture in the plot to her status as a

Cuban immigrant, a condition attributed in pejorative terms by another character to

connote an undesirable status.

Conclusions

In this section, I summarize my answers to the research questions posed based on the evidence presented earlier. I also address limitations, contributions, and questions for further research that arise from this investigation.

In terms of research question one: How is the character of Maria LaGuerta represented in the media text? I demonstrate that the construction of Maria LaGuerta as a powerful persona in a position of power is undermined by the use of stereotypical representations of Latinas teeming with negative qualities. Although physical features as an Afro-Latina depart from the most common images of Latinas in popular culture, the ascription of traits such as dressing in vivid color and sexually appealing outfits, use of jewelry that catches the attention, and use of sexuality to assert her power, all follow a well established pattern. Further, the character of Maria LaGuerta reproduces other negative stereotypes. She is a character who is not deserving of her position at the police station but blackmailed a superior in order to get his job, is not interested in hard work and/or merit, and is deceitful, dumb, and manipulative.

The media representation of LaGuerta suggests that despite her power, there are common tropes in the historical representation of Latina identities on television. Through an examination of existing literature, several tropes and themes came to light in terms of how Latinas are usually depicted on television. Some of these tropes include the nanny or the domestic workers (Molina-Guzman, 2010) and others include the sexual Latina vixen. When an image like that of Captain LaGuerta comes around, it is simple to fall into a trap and believe that we are witnessing a revolutionary image. However, through a careful

analysis of the television series audiences are able to notice that even though she is not portrayed in the type light of the nanny, domestic worker, or sexual vixen (to a certain extent), she is still not seen as worthy enough to hold the title of captain of the station. As progressive as this image might seem and as much as it might appear that it does not fall in line with traditional Latina representations, a closer look proves otherwise. LaGuerta's character suggests that the constructions of Latina identity on television are still teeming with stereotypical portrayals.

Question two asked, How do the audience readings of the media text co-construct a discourse on Latinas and Latinidad? In the reading of audiences, I found that media portrayals were reinforced. In a sense, the meanings encoded by producers prompted audiences to directly respond with agreement to the fact that LaGuerta is not suited for this position, has no moral standing, and is defined primarily by her low morality and sexuality. Even when Maria is portrayed as playing good cop, audiences oppose this meaning by maintaining a view of LaGuerta as undeserving of her title and as a treacherous and deceitful character.

The bloggers comments on IMDB shortly after the airing of the episodes, which I analyzed emphasized, more than the televisual text, sexuality as a defining trait. Through this emphasis, we see a degree of audience agency in performing its own readings and co-constructing a meaning for this character. The meaning, however, draws on the characterization of LaGuerta since the first season as well as existing discourses of Latinidad.

The co-construction of these discourses all seem to fall in line with previously examined dominant ideas about Latinidad, thus supporting existing views about Latinas.

In current discourse on Latinidad, as portrayed in media, Latinas are very often portrayed as sexual characters and sometimes seen as nothing more than that. This also relates to the ongoing discourse about Latinas in positions of power. By placing a Latina in a position of power on a television series, it appears that dominant ideas about Latinas are being challenged. However, her character is constructed in a way that audiences are able to discern that the reason why she is in a position of power has very little to do with her skills as a law enforcement official. She is constructed as a woman who is undeserving of her job and this does away with the progressiveness of her character. As stated earlier, this co-construction reproduces some of the dominant ideologies that define Latinidad: homogenization, symbolic colonization, and immigration.

The third and last question asked: How do the discourses on Latinidad co-constructed by the creators and audiences of *Dexter* relate to dominant gender and racial ideologies in the current social climate in the United States? For the purposes of this study, I focused on the character of LaGuerta in an attempt to uncover what her character implied about Latinidad and broader gender and racial ideologies. With more complex representations of Latinas in the media these days, it is of much value to analyze images (like LaGuerta's) to elucidate their ideological underpinnings. In this regard, LaGuerta's character proved to fall in line with a tendency to portray Latinas as sexual creatures on television. This was emphasized more in the earlier seasons of *Dexter*, but it was something that audiences carried with them all the way to the end of the seventh series, when the character of LaGuerta is removed from the show. A plethora of the blogger comments described LaGuerta as sexual above all else. This idea and discourse also goes hand in hand with the idea that seduction and sex are the only ways Latinas can excel and

exercise power. Often, sexuality is a way to negotiate fear of foreigners or difference. In portraying a brown immigrant body as primarily a sexual creature, producers and audiences reduce the threatening appeal and make her body safer for consumption by audiences.

The racialization of LaGuerta and Latinidad is co-constructed through references to her position in the work force. Through LaGuerta's character, audiences see a Latina in a position of power at a police station (which is rare on television) but realize that she truly did not earn her position through her talents as a law enforcement official. These readings imply that even to this day, this country does not find Latinas deserving of high paying and prestigious positions. Further, the show and the audience promote reinforce the association of Latina/os in power with political manipulation (arguably with notions of affirmative action, entitlement, or racial quotas) rather than merit, hard work, and moral character.

This type of discourse also suggests that fear of Latina/os and other racial minorities reaching positions of power can be negotiated through a negation of their intelligence, competency, and integrity. The final and most symbolic act proves this point. When in the last episode of season seven LaGuerta demonstrates skill and competency as an investigator, her moment of redemption as an officer—in addition to her political power—makes her too powerful in front of Dexter and Deb Morgan to remain a viable Latina on the show. She is shot in the chest by her White female counterpart, to the cheerful pleasure of online commentators.

Limitations of Research

As with other forms of textual analysis, particularly when coding a television series with intricate plots and sequential stories, relying on a single coder can be a limitation. Having another coder for reliability checks would enhance the power of the analysis. In terms of data collection of audience commentary, expanding the data selection to other types of blogs instead of IMDB could further enhance the analysis of audience reception. At the time, IMDB proved to be the most rational avenue to collect comments because of its structure and availability. In addition, finding web sites where demographic characteristics of audiences could be traced would add richness and insight into racial and gender dynamics in audience reception. Even though I did have limitations in my study, I still see this research as making a significant contribution to the field.

Significance of Research

This study contributes to the already existing literature about Latina/o Media Studies, specifically in the area of representation and reception. My work adds to the conversation by extending, highlighting, and reinforcing the work of people like Mary Beltran, Angharad Valdivia, and Isabel Molina Guzmán, to name a few. By conducting a study that focuses on analyzing a text and the audiences' responses to this text, I believe my work serves to fill in a gap of the literature in terms of the understudied area of reception studies (Valdivia, 2010). Audiences have a myriad of ways of interpreting a text and delving into the possible explanations for these interpretations is a task which has not been studied as widely as other components of Latina/o Media Studies.

Through the examination of a character like LaGuerta, I also believe I am contributing to the literature by providing an example of a textual analysis/audience response study about a Latina character who is much more complex than the ones we have previously been exposed to in other television series. LaGuerta holds a great deal of power at the Miami Metro Police Department and on the surface her character seems to transcend and challenge dominant discourses about Latinidad as produced through the media. It seems as though very few studies have been produced in relation to characters such as this one, who is seemingly progressive, and there should be more attention afforded to characters and series that appear to surpass sexism and racism by providing such depictions. Thus, this study contributed to the already existing literature in a variety of ways.

Future Directions of Research

As research in this field is evolving, this project could be extended in two directions. First, as previously mentioned, the selection of texts could be expanded to include not only more episodes, but more seasons as well. This could possibly provide more insight into different discourses about Latinidad constructed through her character. It would also be beneficial for future research to include an analysis of the eighth season, which is scheduled to air in the summer of 2013, because that season will no longer feature LaGuerta and it might contain important information about the meaning and legacy of her character post-death. Second, the analysis of the blogs could also be carried out in different ways. There are many other sites that provide blog responses to this television show and it might also be beneficial to find a site that provides audience demographics. By being able to determine the audience demographics, such a study

would be more suited to illuminate complex relations between race, gender, age,

socioeconomic status, education, etc.

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