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# Examining Perceptions on Women's Issues Including Intersectionality of class, misogyny, and Stereotypes of Mexican and Latin American Women within the Telenovela La Reina Del Sur

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EXAMINING PERCEPTIONS ON WOMEN'S ISSUES INCLUDING INTERSECTIONALITY  
OF CLASS, MISOGYNY, AND STEREOTYPES OF MEXICAN AND LATIN AMERICAN  
WOMEN WITHIN THE *TELENOVELA LA REINA DEL SUR*

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Charles Ambler, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

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## **DEDICATION**

< This thesis is dedicated to my beautiful family: My husband, Fernando Siañez Jr. for his unconditional love, patience, and encouragement, and to my daughters Samantha Ashley Siañez and Deanna Renee Siañez for being the motivation in my life which keeps me wanting to learn, and to never give up. >

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by

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THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

In many cultures dominated by a patriarchal society, the media have had their influence on how women's issues such as intersectionality of class, misogyny and stereotypes are perceived. One particular medium is *telenovelas* which are a popular form of entertainment among Latino/a viewers. Therefore, this analysis is based on perceptions in the roles of women through *La Reina Del Sur*, a popular *telenovela*, and how it relates to Mexican and Latin American cultural norms.

Key Words: culture, intersectionality, *machismo*, *marianismo*, misogyny, patriarchy, perceptions, stereotypes, *telenovelas*



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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction: *Telenovelas* and Their Influence on Latinas

#### 1.1 *La Reina Del Sur*, a Notable Success!

*La Reina Del Sur* became one of the most recent *telenovelas* with notable success due to its action-packed drama, storyline, and its leading female actor, Kate Del Castillo. In February of 2011, *La Reina Del Sur* premiered internationally, including within the United States by *Telemundo* with the highest ratings for a *telenovela*. While driving in El Paso, Texas, I noticed some billboards showcasing the new sensation. An image of Teresa Mendoza, which was portrayed by actress Kate Del Castillo, the protagonist of *La Reina Del Sur* while she sat on her red leather chair that served as a throne. Del Castillo wore a short black dress with a plunging neckline and heels. Her exposed legs were crossed, and her pose exuded sexuality and power. The backdrop provided faded mugshots of Teresa Mendoza. The premise to this *telenovela* showcased a female character who had become a powerful drug lord with international connections such as México, United States, Morocco, Colombia and Spain.

*La Reina Del Sur telenovela* had a total of 63 episodes. According to *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Business Wire*, both online news sites, the Nielsen ratings for this *telenovela* topped all networks including English programming from ABC and NBC during its late evening time slot. In 2011, viewers tuned in to watch the finale, which topped *Telemundo*'s 19-year history of ratings. In addition, *Telemundo* spent more than 10 million to produce the most expensive *telenovela* in its history. After its regular series was over, viewers continued to watch re-runs on Netflix and other Spanish language networks during prime time. Moreover, its success propelled a cross-over to the USA Network with a re-make of the series called *The Queen of the South*, starring Alice Braga (Marshall, 2017).

Gayle Rubin, a well-known feminist scholar, wrote about the oppression of women and described possible hope to stop sexual oppression with: “Cultural evolution provides us with the opportunity to seize control of the means of sexuality, reproduction and socialization, and to make conscious decisions to liberate human sexual life from the archaic relationships which deform it” (1975, p. 199). This prompted me to evaluate the possible stereotypes and cultural perceptions in women from the *telenovela*, *La Reina Del Sur*. The premise to this *telenovela* showcased a female character who became a powerful drug lord which was an unusual role for a woman. Teresa Mendoza’s character may have been different to that of the traditional female roles found in *telenovelas* of the past.

While growing up in a Mexican-American family, along the El Paso border region during the 1970s, it was common to find my family members gathered around the television to watch a *telenovela* right after dinner. *Telenovelas* delivered the opportunity to have entertainment while providing background knowledge to discuss customs, language, and more. Among many relatives and friends, *telenovelas* offered common themes to engage in dialogue about plot lines, characters, culture, and its celebrities representing the characters. As researched by scholars such as Barrera and Bielby (2001), viewing *telenovelas* is a cultural experience among many Latino/a families. Various *telenovelas* have been created throughout the years; although some viewers have argued that the majority of the storylines became foreseeable and redundant.

While many *telenovelas* of the past are based on the “Cinderella” syndrome in which a woman from a lower socio-economic status meets a man who is wealthy. They fall in love, but do not marry due to social status or conflicts with iniquitous characters. Eventually, the lead female character overcomes the obstacles, marries her beau and both live happily ever after (Lewkowicz, 2015, p. 271). Also known as *telenovelas rosa*, the traditional plots include

episodes of *la mujer sufrida* in which the heroine has many episodes of suffering and crying, as she remains faithful and in love, even when her prospective beau makes the wrong choices. For example, a leading man may succumb through seduction by other women, greed, and or social leverage. Leading women's roles have been traditionally suppressive since they accept the unfavorable circumstances while remaining unconditionally in love with the leading man. However, new story lines seem to indicate public fatigue of the predictability of traditional *telenovelas*.

Patriarchy, a cultural norm in many societies, is often exemplified in *telenovelas*. Men are portrayed as being the dominant force within the family dynamic in which they are the decision-makers and vital providers of the household. The negative aspect of a patriarchal society is the control by men which at times is accompanied with violence and psychological dominance over women. Female characters are exemplified to be respectable roles through their dedication to their families as they are shown to be self-sacrificing, submissive, virtuous, and nurturing for the betterment of their family (Bautista-Romero & Delgrado-Huelva, 2008).

*La Reina Del Sur* has a strong female protagonist, Teresa Mendoza, who confronts powerful men from both the drug trafficking world and the law. Despite having a strong female protagonist, one must closely examine if this *telenovela* is another example in which a patriarchal theme is seen throughout or if it places women on an equal field as men. Mendoza does not follow the traditional role of a woman, yet she faces challenges which are linked with being a woman.

## **1.2 *Telenovelas* and Viewers**

*Telenovelas* not only offer a form of entertainment for the public, but they also influence cultural norms. Scholars such as Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Vivian Barrera, Denise D. Bielby,

Guillermo Saavedra-Avila, Diana I. Rios, and Julee Tate have provided extensive research on the impact this medium has related to the everyday way of life for many Latinos. The structure of the storylines, archetypes, and gender roles have often coincided with what society may accept as part of a cultural standard as well as challenged stigmas which may be reevaluated to promote social change. *Telenovelas* have been successfully in existence for many decades. Just as in the past, they continue to be ever more popular due to its far-reaching broadcasting and networking. However, the transformation of their content and its implications as it relates to today's society should be investigated.

Originally, *Telenovelas* were broadcast as radio serials in which families would listen to story plots with dramatization and sound. Unlike soap operas which were traditionally designed as a form of entertainment for stay at home women (Barrera & Bielby, 2001) *telenovelas* were created for both men and women (Morrissey, 2002). Often, *telenovelas* were viewed by various family members and in some cases they became a daily routine. They are melodramatic and have a determined amount of episodes in which viewers may watch the beginning to the end of a story plot. According to Miguel Sabido, a well-known scholar for his work on education-entertainment, *telenovelas* have been extremely popular among Mexicans and Latin Americans for many years (Singhal, & Rogers, 1962). Although a popular form of entertainment, scholars such as Juan Bautista Romero y M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Degrado have noted that *telenovelas* are scrutinized for their imbalanced portrayal of sexes in which the storyline often favors the male gender in which power and supremacy is emanated over female roles (2008).

*Telenovelas* have a history of predominantly women viewers, but men are also participating. However, men will usually not openly admit to being viewers (Barrera & Bielby, 2001). Some scholars have reported on female perspectives on *telenovelas*, but have often

found it difficult to find male informants. According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, when this series launched, among the viewers were 779,000 women and 755,000 men between the ages of 18 to 49 (2011). Even though the numbers indicate that both men and women watch *telenovelas*, there is limited information on the male's perspective as viewers. Women continue to be dominant consumers of this medium. According to Sowards and Pineda (2011), "Another element that has led to *telenovela* success is the genre's ability to connect with audiences of women" (p. 125). The female viewership has influenced the reformation of themes associated with women's issues within the *telenovela* storylines.

For many Latinos, including those who reside in the United States, *telenovelas* offer a connection to their roots even when surrounded by a white dominant culture (Barrera & Bielby, 2001). For some, hearing Spanish offers a sense of comfort and familiarity (Rios, 2003). When compared to traditional *telenovelas*, the creators of *La Reina Del Sur* produced a storyline that may have been quite different from the traditional format. This story plot gives rise to the genre known as "*narco-telenovela*" which indicates that the story is based on a main character's dealings and involvement with drug cartels.

### **1.3 Narco-telenovelas**

One of the latest trends in *telenovelas* is the *narco-telenovela*. The first *narco-telenovela* was launched in Colombia on September, 2006 by *Caracol TV* which was called *Sin Tetas No Hay Paraíso* or "Without Tits There is No Paradise" (as cited in Palaversich, 2015, p. 351). In this particular genre, the dangers of drug trafficking are important catalysts. Most begin with poverty stricken characters that entangle themselves in the world of narcotics and face the perils associated with this way of life. Female roles in *narco-telenovelas* are noticeably attractive and sensual. In addition, women tend to have the roles of *mujeres trofeo* or trophy women. Some

female characters are referred to *las chicas pre-pago* or women who have sex with drug lords in exchange for money and gifts.

The premise of *Sin Tetas No Hay Paraíso*, involves Catalina. Her character is an impoverished young woman who dreams about obtaining breast implants to gain wealth and social status. She earns money through prostitution to pay for her implants during the beginning of the series. This *telenovela* was popular and remade for Mexican audiences. However, the title was changed to *Sin Senos No Hay Paraíso* or “Without Breasts There is No Paradise” which aired in 2008. The sequel debuted in 2016 with a new title, *Sin Senos Si Hay Paraíso*, or “Without Breasts There is Paradise”. The title alone marked a stark contrast from the focus on women’s body parts, no longer was the subject of women’s breasts considered in the story line. Women’s roles in *narco-telenovelas* often were dependent on dominant men. Even though women in *narco-telenovelas* continue to be physically beautiful, they seem to be transitioning to roles with empowerment.

Current studies tend to criticize *narco-telenovelas* for their use of romanticizing the notion of drug trafficking. Scholars such as Palaversich, have found that there is controversy based on the romanticized portrayal of drug dealers and the use of women as commodities and victims of violence (2015). This genre of entertainment and its effect on female perspectives are worth analyzing. As stated by Benavides, “*Narco-dramas* today control México’s film market and are particularly influential along the border between the United States and México, powerfully affecting a Latino cultural market created by Mexicans and other Latin Americans living in the United States” (2008, p. 2). While some countries have banned *narco-telenovelas* due to their possible influence on the public, there is minimal mention of female characters leading roles as the dominant figure within this genre. When it comes to the roles of women,



most do not indicate that women exude power, but instead gain status through their connections with their romantic male interests, usually drug lords.

Most recently, Netflix has made it readily available for its consumers to watch various *telenovelas*. Among the choices provided are *narco-dramas* which have been previously shown by *Univision* and *Telemundo*. The choices for *narco-dramas* have notably increased and some are subtitled. While some viewers may opt to watch the series when they first debut in their perspective channels, other viewers may choose to binge watch at their convenience. With the availability of English subtitles, viewers such as those who may not understand Spanish can be reached.

#### **1.4 The Reality of Drug Cartels and México**

“México’s drug ‘war’ caused approximately 100,000 deaths between 2006 and 2012” (Campbell, 2012). From 2008 to 2012, Ciudad Juárez became known as the murder capital of the world due to its extremely high incidents of killings which stemmed from the war between the Juárez cartel and the Sinaloa cartel. During this four year span, it was reported that in Ciudad Juárez, more than 11,000 lives were lost due to the constant violence in the quest for control of the region and political alliances within the drug cartels. Regularly, the news was flooded with information of violent acts committed among drug cartel members, government officials and regular citizens. Those affected included innocent bystanders and victims of abuse and extortion.

According to Howard Campbell, it is estimated that the Mexican cartels’ revenue increased annually between \$6.2 billion and \$7.1 billion. However, some have expressed that this is a conservative number and it is possible that the actual revenue may have been six times more than what was reported. With President Calderon in office, a directive was taken to combat

the cartels through a military campaign. However, in many instances, their military and other government officials also became infiltrated by the cartels which lead to the formation of alliances. As a tactic to gain control through terrorism, acts of violence such as mutilation, mass murders, kidnapping, and public display of maimed cadavers became frequent occurrences. Innocent people such as business owners, clergy, and innocent families were directly affected as the heinous acts influenced political, social, economic, cultural, and religious aspects within their society. Drug violence does not discriminate gender as women were raped, mutilated, and killed (2012).

Powerful Mexican women in drug cartels have contributed to the enduring drug trafficking for many decades. In the 1920s, Ignacia Jasso better known as “La Nacha” from Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México, took over the business after her husband’s death. She rose to become a powerful socio-economic force within the cartels through her distribution of drugs within the Mexican and U.S. border. Around the same time, Maria Dolores Estévez Zuleta also called “Lola La Chata,” who centered herself in México City, supplied heroin, cocaine, and marijuana. Both women were the matriarchs and organized their drug enterprise by including close family members. One of the most recent women to receive notoriety for her prowess in drug-related crime is Sandra Ávila Beltrán also known as “*La Reina Del Pacífico*.” Another well-known female drug lord is Enedina Arellano Félix who some believe is the boss of the Tijuana cartel, she established a legal business which served as a means to launder money. These women were able to obtain their powerful status due to patrilineal relationships, in some cases they rose to power as *narco*-widows while they took over the business their husbands had already established (Carey et al., 2011).

The allure of powerful female drug lords is far from the reality. Most women do not have

the patrilineal relationships to climb within the social structure of the cartel organization. Instead, women who enter this way of life, find themselves to have the most dangerous and least paying jobs. Women are often hired as “mules” to transport drugs. Corina Giacomello describes that one form of trafficking involves women swallowing *pepas* or capsules filled with heroin or cocaine. The techniques could have detrimental consequences and could possibly cause death. Often women who are heads of a single-parent, may have little or no education, and may be marginalized due to social and economic disadvantages. For some, the desperation to make the most money when compared to other ways of earning a living such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for others may be worth the risk in order to provide for their children. Unfortunately, some unknowingly fall to the victimization by their own suppliers as they are reported to authorities while simultaneously causing distraction to avoid detection of other loads being transported. Within Giacomello’s study, she indicated that most women in Latin-American prisons were first-time perpetrators for drug-related crimes such as trafficking. When women were apprehended or gone due to trafficking, often their children were abandoned, orphaned or resorted to a criminal way of life to survive (2014).

### **1.5 *Telemundo* and the Latest Trends in *Telenovelas***

Founded during 1954 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, *Telemundo* includes programming such as world news, sports, and various types of entertainment such as *telenovelas*. With Univision leading, *Telemundo* is currently the second largest Spanish-language producer of television entertainment. Formerly, it was known as *Telemundo Canal 2*. In 1987, *Telemundo* launched in the United States and became based in Hialeah, Florida. In 1988, *Telemundo* was the first to produce a *telenovela* called *Angelica, Mi Vida*, which was intended for its local audiences. According to Federico A. Subervi-Velez, "the plot appealed to regional Hispanic differences by

webbing Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban immigrant families into the traditional *novela* elements" (as cited in Esparza, 1998, p. 18). Another first was the launch of *MTV Internacional* in which Daisy Fuentes hosted the Spanish version of *MTV*. In 2002, it became a division of NBCUniversal, which is owned by Comcast. Currently, *Telemundo* owns several stations and has formed affiliations with several cable and broadcast companies.

Remarkably, it is the only network which provides both English and Spanish subtitles for most of their programming. According to Glenny Brock, it is accessible to 94 percent of Latino/a households across the United States (2011). Therefore, this network provides a venue for cultural entertainment regardless of language. *Telemundo* continues to produce its own original *telenovelas* which are popular. Most *telenovelas* range from 60 to 80 episodes. Celebrities such as Kate Del Castillo, Lucero, and Pedro Fernández have crossed over from *Univision* to *Telemundo*. Due to its success with *telenovelas* and celebrity following, *Telemundo* has become *Univision*'s formidable competitor (Sternberg, 2006). *Telemundo*'s production of original *telenovelas* contains provocative plots, which has had an effect on its viewer demographics to include younger and wider based audiences. However, its target based audience are viewers from 18 years of age and older.

*Telemundo* has had a successful format with the production of *telenovelas* (Brock, 2011). According to Lorena Castaneda, the station manager for KTDO *Telemundo* Channel 48 in El Paso, after *La Reina Del Sur*'s success, *Telemundo* was the first to identify this type of *telenovela* as a "super series" (2017). Castaneda described these *telenovelas* as, "not your typical *abuelita novelas*" although they are open to all audiences. These series are differentiated by being filmed in different locations and having action-packed scenes. Other super series which were highly successful were *El Señor de los Cielos* which has surpassed *La Reina Del Sur*'s ratings, *La*

*Querida del Centario*, *Señora Acero*, *Señora Acero 3: La Coyote*, and *El Chema* which is a spin-off of *El Señor de los Cielos*. These super series include plots which encompass cartel and drug trafficking dilemmas. Notably, *La Reina Del Sur* was the first *telenovela* to top NBC's, ABC's and Univision's ratings (L. Castaneda, personal communication, March 23, 2017).

*Telemundo's* president, Luis Silberwasser explained that their appeal comes from original programming created in their Miami studios rather than in México or other Latin American countries. They also describe their programming to be edgier as they "redefine Hispanic TV" (Forbes, 2016). Given *Telemundo's* success with *La Reina Del Sur*, on May 11, 2017, they announced the reprisal of Teresa Mendoza character with Kate Del Castillo for *La Reina Del Sur* 2. The forthcoming plot is described to take place in México where Mendoza will be dealing with unfinished business (Lopez, 2017).

## **1.6 Feminism and Intersectionality**

Within intersectionality, there is transnationalism in which international and global perspectives are examined (Dill & Kohlman, 2014, p. 160). In 2003, Acosta-Alzuru conducted a study on feminism within a Venezuelan *telenovela* called *El País de las Mujeres*. This particular series was categorized as a *telenovela de ruptura* because the protagonist was portrayed as resilient and intelligent. According to Acosta-Alzuru, these types of *telenovelas* "break with this traditional mold, as they include social and cultural issues taken from Latin American reality. These *telenovelas* present complex, ambiguous and unpredictable characters" (2003, p. 271). The study concluded that for some countries dominated by a patriarchal society, the term "feminism" had a negative connotation. Instead of indicating equality or empowerment for women, many perceived it as women being "man haters" or selfish. Often, it was frowned upon to suggest the storyline was indeed feminist as it dealt with struggles often experienced by

women in real-life. “The gradual but consistent way in which the word feminism has been substituted by the term *estudios de género* (gender studies) suggests the strength of Venezuela’s rejection of the words feminism and feminist. Feminism is sensed as a threat to the established social order. This perception is at the root of resistance to the term” (Acosta-Alzuru, p. 286).

On the forefront of feminism in México is Marcela Lagarde, a professor of anthropology and feminist studies in UNAM, National Autonomous University of México, a national university located in México City. While contributing as a scholar by publishing articles and numerous books on feminism, she served in the political arena as a member of the Mexican Congress and at the United Nations as an advisor for gender (Blázquez Rodríguez & Pichardo Galá, 2009, p.). While bringing awareness of the violence against women, she has participated in various symposiums and spearheaded investigations as chair for the committee in the Mexican Republic focused on femicides. Through her work, she was approved and granted full sponsorship by the Mexican Congress to investigate femicides which she believes can be eradicated (2009). Lagarde’s activism demonstrates a contrast of what feminism may be perceived by supporters of patriarchal idealisms.

Leslie McCall states that “intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (as cited in Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 154). This study is based on the perceptions of women’s class, sexuality, and social inequalities. Therefore, intersectionality is an instrumental part of my research. According to Dill and Kohlman, “intersectional scholarship is engaged in transforming both theory and practice across disciplinary divides, offering a wide range of methodological approaches to the study of multiple, complex social relations” (p. 172) . Intersectionality comes with its complexities. It is a theory as well as a methodology which is qualitative in nature.

“Intersectionality provides a unique lens of study that does not question difference; rather, it assumes that differential experiences of common events are to be expected” (Dill & Kohlman, 2014, p. 154). With this premise in mind, I used textual analysis and qualitative research methods to conduct my study. Textual analysis was based on images and language used within the series. For some scholars, textual analysis may be subjective; hence, interviews support my arguments or provide an insight to new perspectives. In depth interviews about participants’ experiences in viewing *telenovelas* and in particular *La Reina Del Sur* were analyzed. Furthermore, the interviews included questions about family involvement, female character analysis, and personal connections within the *telenovelas*.

As previously noted, studies about men and their participation in viewing this medium is limited due to reluctance in admitting that they view the *telenovelas* (Barrera & Bielby, 2001), therefore, I have decided to omit the participation of men within this study. Hurtado also provides insight on why only women’s perceptions should be studied in this case: “I retreat from feminist film discourse when it lodges itself in a male/female binary, thus eliding racial, class, and sexual subjectivities: the crucial differences among women, rather than simply between men and women” (2003, p. 223). I focused on women’s perceptions since their voices offered personal connections within this study. I also wanted to study whether they perceived the female roles in *La Reina Del Sur* as empowering or oppressive. The female roles within this *telenovela* are diverse from ethnic origin, occupation, sexual orientation, sexual identity and socioeconomic background. Even though male perspectives are important, it will be kept in mind for a future research project.

In this regard, examining *telenovelas* and how they relate to cultural practices is important. “*Telenovelas* can serve to maintain ideological hegemony or, very occasionally, to

question certain aspects of a system” (Beard, 2003, pp. 21-22). One must question if *La Reina Del Sur* is conveying oppressive messages about women. On the other hand, does the main female character, Mendoza, support a message of empowerment for women? This series is popular in México and in the United States. For U.S. Latina women, watching *telenovelas* is important as “it assists them in maintaining and defining themselves as a culture that is unique within the larger dominant American culture” (Barrera & Bielby, 2001, p. 14). Intersectionality employs a deep understanding of cultural beliefs in the United States and globally (Dell & Kohlman, 2012). For this study, I sought Latina participants. Given the different cultural experiences from all female participants, finding commonalities and differences in perspectives provided valuable information for my study.

Given that research indicates that *telenovelas* play an important role in cultural norms, one has to question the following:

RQ1: What message(s) does *La Reina Del Sur* convey about women’s roles and stereotypes?

RQ2: Does *La Reina Del Sur* reinforce or challenge traditional cultural norms about women, or is it breaking new ground on how women’s roles are perceived?



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review: Women's Issues and Stereotypes**

#### **2.1 A Brief Overview of the Feminist Waves**

Feminism describes the plight for women for equality in political, social, and economic issues. Historically, it has undergone through transitions throughout the years. The first-wave of feminism was evident during the western campaign for women's suffrage which took place from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. "John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill believed women needed suffrage in order to become men's equals. They claimed the vote gives people the power not only to express their own political views but also to challenge those systems, structures, and attitudes that contribute to their own and/or challenge others' oppressions" (Tong, 2009, p. 20). Along with fighting for women's rights, the abolitionist movement also took place. However white male abolitionists were reluctant to link the rights for women as well as the rights for slaves. "Male abolitionists even convinced famed feminist orator Lucy Stone to lecture on abolition instead of women's rights whenever her audience size was noticeably large" (Tong, 2009, p. 21). More so, the abolitionist movement was focused on the equal rights of male slaves. Even though the women's suffrage movement was critical in helping women's voices be heard in the political and social spectrum, it did not include all women, such as women of color.

The second-wave took place during the early 1960s through the late 1980s. During the mid-60s groups such as the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) and the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) were formed by liberal feminists (Tong, 2009). One particular group which included women of color was the National Organization for Women (NOW). The founders were "Betty Friedan, Rev. Pauli Murray, the first African female episcopal priest, and

Shirley Chisholm, the first African American to run for president of the United States of the United States” (Tong, 2009, p. 25). NOW was the first to take a stance against sex discrimination. Other feminist scholars such as bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa voiced their concerns in ideological, social, political, economic and personal differences within all women. The second-wave brought awareness on issues such as reproductive rights, equalities in the work force and legal equalities.

The third-wave of feminism is often associated with young women being involved in feminist movements from the 1990s to the present. One particular characteristic which separates the second and third waves is the belief that “third wave feminists have emphasized the importance of individuality and diverse personal experiences when defining their own politics” (Mahoney, 2016, p. 1006). Third-wave feminist scholars such as Rebecca Walker and Barbara Findlen criticized that the second-wave feminist movement categorized women as having the same shared life occurrences and characteristics, therefore not taking into account the diversity of female experiences. “The rejection of essentialist and white heteronormative assumptions has been key to the development of the third wave. Intersectionality is regularly cited as being one of its defining features: it has enabled third-wave feminists to articulate what they see as the significant contribution of third-wave feminism to the feminist movement” (Evans, 2016, p. 416).

Clarity in the ideologies within the waves can be complex and open for discourse. A new emphasis on third-wave feminist is to bring awareness through personal narratives on the diversity among the identities of women. “The third wave is more interested in the differences among women and how those differences shape their personal and political issues. It offers new form of community where third-wave feminists, connect, share their experiences, and unite” (Yu,

2011, p. 883). There have been overlapping points of oppression; furthermore, some scholars argue that it is possible that the fourth wave already exists (Evans, 2016). For this study, I remained focused on the third-wave since intersectionality falls within its spectrum.

## **2.2 *Marianismo***

“*Marianismo* is a gender role construct that describes the expectations and norms for some Latina women (and girls) based on a collectivistic worldview in which interdependence and familial hierarchy are the cultural norm” (Sanchez, et al., 2016, p. 396). Traditionally, *telenovelas* embody the concept of *marianismo*, meaning that protagonist women’s roles are portrayed as being virtuous and caregivers. In addition, women are often represented on television as demure, passive, and subservient to men (Hussain et.al, 2015). The female characters just like many Latinas in real-life often keep traditional women’s roles in which they put others first. Most women do not willingly accept to be independent or single, but rather prefer to be married as a key marker or rite of passage to into living a successful life. In *marianismo*, women are often dependent on their husband to provide the basic necessities. Therefore, women don’t always have a say on how finances will be controlled within the household and may subjected to abuse and constant oppression.

*Marianismo* in women also means maintaining a content husband despite any negative situation. According to Arredondo (2012), “*marianismo* is still considered a Latino cultural value” (2012, p. 314). *Marianismo* is exemplified in various forms of media, such as those noted by Tatar in 2010 based on *corridos*. It is also noted that women can be *bravas* or fierce when they do not embody the characteristics of *marianismo*. Another example is Villegas’s study on television commercials in which “dependent women tended to display characteristics perceived as positive in *marianismo* (helpful, rewarded by their family) whereas independent women were

more sexualized” (p.327). Being independent could be detrimental for women who may choose to be single as society may not see them in a favorable and respectable light.

Significantly, many scholars have noted that *telenovelas* have an influence on women. Most studies also indicate that the ideals of *marianismo* are often hurtful toward women’s transition and empowerment in the workforce, education and their daily lives. For example, Sifuentes states: “To this extent, the melodramatic genre constitutes an important element of development of female models, as it basically presents almost the same female representations over the years (2014, p. 985). Other than *telenovelas*, many studies have been conducted on *marianismo* and its influence on the ideological construct of women’s lives which relate to medical, psychological, educational, economical, and social dilemmas.

In most classic *novelas*, the main female character displays characteristics of *marianismo*, or being pure and virginal. Women in traditional roles clearly define their sexual behavior as being modest and seeking lifetime monogamy. Women’s strength often comes from their spiritual connection to the Virgin Mary. Females are in charge of teaching the children about religion and morality; they avoid confrontation. *Marianismo* has the potential to be viewed as a negative role for women, which may be due to the notion of women subscribing to a self-sacrificing and passive role. (Hussain et al., 2015, p.74). On the other hand, men are considered to be the head of the household as they take care of the economic and societal structures, while the women who exemplify *marianismo*, take care of the domestic duties at home and care-giving. “*Telenovelas* (re)produce a traditional female model, which primarily connects women to the role of mothers, wives and housewives, leaving the public sphere as a field that is mostly of male work” (Sifuentes, 2014, p. 988). Through *marianismo*, women may see their roles in life as being limited by not reaching their potential such as obtaining an education to pursue a well-

paid career, thus promoting self-reliance and independence.

*Marianismo* is a reoccurring theme within many studies based on *telenovelas*. Reference to Kjeldgaard and Nielsen's study in 2010 indicated the following:

“They analyzed responses to a Mexican *telenovela* by young consumers, and their results suggest that young Mexican females negotiate between the traditional roles that are valued by parents, religious organizations, and society and more modern and equalitarian perspectives. However, the authors evidenced that the consumers who are willing to rebel against the ideals of *marianismo* are still afraid of being seen as promiscuous or not worthy of value among men” (as cited in Villegas et al., 2010, p. 330).

In contrast to *marianismo*, female roles which exemplify male power have historically represented characters who are ambitious and malevolent. They are clearly defined to be the opposite of femininity and beauty (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003). One has to examine whether *La Reina Del Sur* emanates the ideals of *marianismo* or if the storyline indicates that *telenovelas* are evolving and shifting toward a new direction for women. If such shifts exist, one also has to consider if they are detrimental or empowering toward women.

### **2.3 Patriarchy and *Machismo***

“The term ‘patriarchy’ was introduced to distinguish the forces maintaining sexism from other social forces, such as capitalism” (Rubin, 1975, p. 169). As in other societies, many Mexicans value a patriarchal society. Steve Stern described the patriarchal society in México during the late 1700s to the early 1800s; he contends that men had the dominant role in a household which was determined by being the bread-winners and decision-makers. Another concept of patriarchy was the ruling by male elders over property and inheritance which was

passed down to the male offspring. Women were subjugated to be the caregivers of the husband's family and were restricted to partake outside of the family dynamic. Males' governing role defined procreation, sexuality, and women's work (1998).

Even though México's patriarchal society still exists, during the twentieth century, there was a shift in the patriarchal social framework. For example, women were no longer expected to work hard labor to sustain the family such as hand-grinding corn for tortillas and other related chores. Families no longer upheld the father-elder structure since more families opted to become independent in sustaining in their own way of life. Due to free-housing for women, some did not solely depend on the men's income to have a home and make a living. Women gained the ability to earn their own property. Youth strayed from the unconditional respect for their elders, this in turn hindered the ideals of patriarchy. Therefore, the archetype of patriarchal regime has slowly been disintegrating. However, it is important to note that single women led families continue to show a disadvantage in financial gain as they face stigmas which disenable them to have equal status as men (Stern, 1998).

One must also keep in mind the idea of *machismo*, which also plays a role in a patriarchal society. According to Julee Tate (2014), "In recent years, *telenovela* productions have directly addressed topics like 'male macho patterns of behavior' and their negative ramifications on women, including domestic violence and limited opportunities for self-actualization in the public sphere" (p. 54). Many scholars have addressed *machismo* as being repressive toward women. For example, society might have the notion that men are better than women (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003). These assumptions are often accepted as part of the male superiority in patriarchal societies. Both men and women may find this notion as a way of life.

The terms *macho* and *machismo* have been used to describe the stereotypes of Mexican

male characteristics as being aggressive, dominant and repressive toward women. In a study by Josué Ramírez, he explains that the term *macho* originated as part of the rural vernacular to describe male plants or animals. The term *macho* was also physiological in nature as it described phallic idioms. Through social tensions and discourse, urban societies coined the term to ridicule men of low-socioeconomic status and ethnicity, not necessarily directed toward the male gender in general. However, traditionalists closely associated the term with describing financial providers, reproductive roles, and protectors (2008).

In 1950, Octavio Paz, a Nobel laureate in literature, published his essays in the *Labyrinth of Solitude*, in which he connected the term *macho* to Mexican males. To support his argument, he used Freudian-like psychoanalysis by connecting the Spanish Conquest of México in which Hernán Cortéz dominated his indigenous mistress called “La Malinche”. Within his essay, he clearly describes Cortéz to be the authoritarian by penetrating “La Malinche” as she surrendered and became objectified. Paz’s example, possibly could have dubiously explained a woman’s submissive role within a patriarchal and misogynistic culture. Josué Ramírez brought to light that other psychoanalysts used Paz’s work to reinforce their theoretical publications based on *machismo* and its connectedness to the Mexican culture. Notably, Ramírez remarked that although he did not support Paz’s argument, he recognized that the work may have had an influential impact on the perceptions of the Mexican culture (2008).

Ramírez conducted his study by interviewing 74 young adult students from UNAM and through the use of ethnography, he interviewed both women and men on the subject of *macho* and *machismo*. Overall, the students were able to associate the terms to the origins of their familial framework, although it became a negative connotation which modernist Mexicans preferred to be disassociated from. Through narratives and life charts, Mexican students

indicated that the term *macho* was negatively associated with peasants or poverty stricken rural males who are negatively dominant within their own family structure. As modernized Mexicans, criticism toward rural males as not being progressive was interrelated with *machismo*. His study revealed that U.S. Latino views in comparison to modern day Mexican views of the terms were dissimilar. For the young adult Mexican students, *macho* and *machismo* was used to refer males from a lower-social class, usually from the rural areas, rather than the generalized negative perception of Mexican male behaviors (Ramírez, 2008).

Despite the fact that Ramírez observed acts of misogyny, sexual harassment toward women, male chauvinism, and resistance to social change, he found that most of the informants provided narratives which indicated that they wanted to be disconnected from the stereotypes and cultural expectations which accompany *machismo*. Research solely included narratives from informants with urban backgrounds. Ramírez admits that even though the participants associated *machismo* with rural families, he did not pursue to interview members from the countryside. His study showed that there continues to be an inequality in the work force and educational rights among genders, however, the newer generations of Mexicans have been vociferously shifting away from the stereotypical cultural norms linked with *machismo* and México (2008). This work examines if *La Reina Del Sur*'s storyline and its portrayal of women continues to follow the traditional mode of women's oppression within a patriarchal society associated with the negative connotations of *machismo* or if it is providing an alternative narrative promoting gender equality and liberation.

## **2.4 Misogyny**

Culture and society determines the division between sex and gender. MacKinnon describes how every culture will define what the norms of sexuality are and therefore will



determine how women in particular are treated. MacKinnon (1987) stated the following:

Dominance eroticized defines the imperatives of its masculinity; submission eroticized defines its femininity. So many distinctive features of women's status as second class-the restriction and constraint and contortion, the servility and the display, the self-mutilation and requisite presentation of self as a beautiful thing, the enforced passivity, the humiliation-are made into the content of sex for women. Being a thing for sexual use is fundamental to it. This identifies not just a sexuality that is shaped under conditions of gender inequality but this sexuality itself as the dynamic of the inequality of sexes (p. 318).

*Telenovelas* target both men and women viewers, still; the portrayal of female roles in particular could be quite dangerous toward women. *La Reina Del Sur* included scenes in which female roles were dominated through rape, abuse, forced prostitution, and coerced sex. "Culture produces meaning, as vital cultural products, *telenovelas* participate in the production of meaning about gender in México" (Beard, 2003, p. 87). This indicates how the series portrayal of women can be detrimental in how culture and society accepts the oppression of women. "In the permissible ways a woman can be treated, the ways that are socially considered not violations but appropriate to her nature, one finds the particulars of male sexual interests and requirements" (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 319). During the beginning of the series, Mendoza's character experiences a brutal rape. When she escapes to Spain, she finds work at a bar and brothel in which women are subjected to dress scantily and become sex workers in order to make ends meet. Shortly after, Mendoza is framed then coerced to have sex with a drug lord in order to be released from jail and avoid extradition to México. Other scenes include women being

objectified by working in strip bars while dressed in a risqué manner.

There is a bountiful amount of literature which indicates that the way women are perceived is determined by society and its culture. “Post-Lacan, actually Post-Foucault, it has become customary to affirm that sexuality is socially constructed” (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 319). “Every society also has a sex/gender system – a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be” (Rubin, 1975, p. 165). Based on the fact that *telenovelas* are an integral part of México’s culture, *La Reina Del Sur* may possibly exemplify the objectification of women. Its sexuality and misogyny could potentially be contributing to the oppression of women.

## **2.5 Class**

Not only should one research the perceptions of Mexican women and their class, but also how this interconnects with perceptions of Latinas in the United States. “Since the 1960s, *telenovelas* have used female characters to reproduce an extremely problematic, but tellingly commercially successful, depiction of women and their social power in daily life” (Benavides, 2008, p. 98). Many viewers can associate the class of the characters based on their material possessions, physical appearance and demeanor. In a study conducted by Glascock and Ruggiero, dominant roles were given to lighter-skinned and lighter hair color characters. These characters belonged to the higher societal class and their familial ties and marriage was given more importance than their occupations. In comparison darker-skinned or indigenous characters were portrayed as having service jobs and often part of the lower-socioeconomic class (Glascock & Ruggiero, 2004).

According to Martin-Barbero, “television programs, including ever popular *telenovelas*,

have a huge impact in the production of meaning about gender, race, class and sexuality” (as cited in Beard, 2003, p. 87). The storyline in *La Reina Del Sur* includes women of many ethnicities and levels of social class. The setting for this particular series takes place in México, Spain, United States and Morocco. Therefore, it provides insights of the characters from different regions of the world that may have comparable aspects of gender representations pertaining to their class and ethnicity. *La Reina Del Sur* might possibly challenge the prejudices typically shown in traditional *telenovelas* based on the class, physical appearance and ethnicities of the characters.

## **2.6 Lesbianism and Bisexuality**

According to Robert McKee Irvin, the earliest references to modern Mexican lesbianism became apparent in early 1900s. A novel called *Santa* by Federico Gamboa, a study by Carlos Roumagnac called *Los Criminals en México* and a chronical called *Las Inseparables* by Heriberto Frias described relationships within women. However, they did not define their interrelations as being homosexual or lesbian in nature, instead they described it as Sapphism. Named after Sappho, a Greek poetess who lived in an isle called Lesbos, is synonymous with the idea of women desiring other women, which may have provided a hint of the women’s homonormative relationships in their work. However, Gamboa, Roumagnac, and Frias did not specify or describe the extent of the relationships within the women. “Lesbianism poses an ineluctable challenge to the political, economic, and sexual authority of men over women. It implies a whole new social order, characterized at the very least – by a profound feminine indifference to masculine charisma” (as cited in Irwin, 2005, p. 99). Roumagnac interviewed women in prisons in which he made observations of representations of sexual desire within women. Apathetically, he claimed that the women were not genuine in their interviews and

chose to describe their interrelations with sexual indifference. Sapphist women were recognized as fantasy or aesthetic figures in literature not as moral beings because for its time, lesbianism was unfathomable. Descriptions of the relationships were vague and did not disclose whether they were sexually intimate (Irwin, 2005).

In 2014, Tate indicated, “Another area in which recent productions have attempted to influence patterns of behavior and cultural identity is in relation to attitudes toward homosexuals. Homophobia is a relatively recent addition to the list of topics of social commentary that Mexican *telenovelas* address” (p. 55). In many cases, gay male characters are often flamboyant and a form of comic relief. In Tate’s study, there is reference to a *telenovela* called *Las Tontas No Van Al Cielo*, which first aired in 2008. A character called Candy realizes that she is gay after female co-worker makes advances toward her. Even though there is reference to a lesbian relationship, there is no obvious physical display of affection. However, most studies on homophobia or gay portrayals in *telenovelas* are based on male characters.

It appears that taboos exist when it comes to female bisexual and homosexual relationships in Mexican *telenovelas*. Research on this topic is conspicuously absent and could possibly be new territory to explore. *La Reina Del Sur* provides an interesting dynamic through Mendoza’s relationship with Patricia O’Farrell, a character best known as Paty, a woman from a wealthy aristocratic Irish-Spanish family. Paty becomes sexually involved with women and men, and it is clear that she is bisexual. The relationships and sexual tensions between Teresa and Paty, as well as Paty and Veronica, also known as Lupe while undercover, may bring forward valuable insight on the perspectives of lesbianism and bisexuality within *telenovelas*.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology: Grounded Theory and Qualitative Interviews

#### 3.1 Grounded Theory and Textual Analysis

As previously introduced, Leslie McCall describes that intersectionality is a feminist theory which is qualitative in nature. Third wave feminism and intersectionality allow for participants to share their narratives to bring forth cognizance in social injustices. However, in order to gather and analyze data in a systematic matter, grounded theory was implemented. “Grounded theory methods can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than stand in opposition to them” (Charmaz, 2006, p.9). Therefore, interviewing, textual analysis, memo writing and focused coding were utilized to gather data.

My argument for not using quantitative research methods was that a survey would provide information which was only visible on a surface level. In this case, I was hoping to find in depth data which a survey could not provide. Therefore, not only did I approach my research based on textual information, questionnaires, but I also provided the opportunity for my participants to share stories about their experiences in watching *telenovelas* and possibly how they relate to their individual life experiences. As textual analysis indicates, the use of images and text can provide the opportunity for the participants to interpret the messages conveyed. In addition, the *telenovela* itself provided the strongest tool for textual analysis, as the participants drew from their viewing experience and provided their own analytical perspective. “The debate is no longer about quantitative versus qualitative methods; the debate is about method itself- the philosophical underpinnings of what we choose to ignore by only engaging in this false bifurcated debate” (Hurtado, 2003, p. 216).

Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss founded grounded theory in 1967 as a method to

conduct research in the field of social science. Just as many research methods have evolved, so has grounded theory. Some of the earlier epistemological issues were addressed by Strauss and Juliet Corbin as they collaborated to revise the method. However, one of the latest scholars in grounded theory is Kathy Charmaz. For the purpose of this research, I will refer to the use of terminology and strategies provided by Charmaz's practical guide. Glaser and Strauss "urged novice grounded theorists to develop fresh theories and thus advocated delaying the literature review to avoid seeing the world through the lens of extant ideas" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 6). In contrast, "Charmaz saw the area of literature as enhancing the researcher's overall perspective as long as it did not deter the creative process" (Uri, 2015, p. 138). Therefore, in accordance with Charmaz, a literature review was provided, prior to interviewing participants for this study.

This particular method of research lent itself best to conduct my study. Through the implementation of ground theory, one cannot assume or predict the outcome of data. In this case, there was no hypothetical question to address, but rather inductive reasoning was instrumental. This pragmatic approach required for data to be collected through intensive interviews, memos, several phases of coding, and theoretical sampling. Rather than commencing with a theory to prove or argue a concept, theoretical sampling was instrumental in developing a theory or theories which emerged at the conclusion of the study. "Grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the world we study and a method for developing theories to understand them" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10).

### **3.2 Data Collection - Participant Selection and Procedures:**

After approval from the UTEP's Institutional Review Board, participants were selected based on gender, age and ethnicity. Latina women ages 18 and older were approached for this study, based on their interest in viewing *telenovelas*, in particular *La Reina Del Sur*. Once the

participants were selected, they were given a consent form with information on the purpose and confidentiality of research. Both English and Spanish forms were provided based on the informants' choice of language. In order to obtain participants for this study, snowball sampling was implemented. However, those who were approached and chose not to participate were not coerced or negatively impacted.

Grounded theory indicates that as a researcher, one may implement the use of various tools in order to obtain data. The instruments used were interviews with color images and open-ended questions in regards to perceptions of women stereotypes and viewing experiences; please see Appendices A and B. "Intensive interviewing will 'reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives" (Charmaz, 2006, p.14). Memos were produced as part of data collection during interviews to record emotions, expressions, and other information which a voice recording could not provide. The interviews were digitally recorded, then transcribed. For interviews which were conducted in Spanish, the transcription of the original language was produced then translated to English. For the purpose of avoiding confusion and translation within this thesis, the English translations were used when referring to commentaries by the participants.

The beginning phase for the data collection required initial coding. Common words and descriptions were noted as they were categorized according to the themes covered in this study. Transcripts of interviews and memos were analyzed for correlations and similarities, which throughout this study was noted as participants shared their perspectives and experiences. Through grounded theory, focused coding was used in order to synthesize and categorize data, in which explanations were documented throughout.

When the women were interviewed, I gathered certain commentaries which I felt agreed

with certain categories which ultimately became part of the chapter sections within the analysis. In regards to their narratives, I felt that if I desegregated and analyzed each narrative by small sections or common words, their content could possibly lose meaning. In this study, I focused on bringing forth the voices of the participants by allowing their narratives to be heard which is in agreement with the third wave feminist studies. Therefore, I felt it provided a clearer understanding of the message they conveyed.



## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS – Women’s Perceptions

#### 4.1 Demographics

When women were approached for this study, approximately eight candidates declined to be interviewed. Even though they were familiar with the *telenovela* and some had seen a few episodes, they felt the *novela* had too much violence which was a reminder of the current events in México. Two women felt the *telenovela* was immoral and therefore chose not to support such entertainment; this will be discussed later in the chapter. Other reasons for not interviewing were due to nervousness to speak about the *telenovela* in itself, as its theme dealt with cartels. Despite the declinations, it was rather effortless to find women who were familiar with *La Reina Del Sur*. Many informants were able to refer other women to be interviewed since they shared that they had prior conversations about *La Reina Del Sur*.

Sixteen women were interviewed for this study. Their ages ranged from 22 to 69 years. The women identified themselves as Mexican, Latinas, Hispanics and Mexican-Americans. One woman, “Ale” identified herself as a Colombian. When it came to their education, there was an array of levels such as high school, some college, associates, bachelors and a doctorate. The participants reported to be in the following occupations: custodian, certified nurse assistant, therapist, full-time student, teacher, bartender, retiree and a doctor of physical therapy. In addition, three women identified themselves as lesbians while most identified themselves as heterosexuals and one chose not to answer. However, discussion on sexual orientation will be presented at a later chapter as it pertained to the plot of *La Reina Del Sur*.

Women were also interviewed in both English and Spanish. One woman, “Isabel” mentioned that she mixed her language between English and Spanish; therefore, she didn’t claim

either to be her primary language. “Ale” mentioned that she learned to speak Spanish first, yet, while living in the United States, she opted to use English as her primary language. When she visited Colombia or was in the vicinity of family, she would speak Spanish. Depending on circumstances, either language was considered “Ale’s” primary language. However, much discussion was brought upon the differences in dialect when comparing Spanish in Colombia to México. For this interview, and to facilitate my understanding of her interview, she chose to use English, for the most part. For participants who chose to interview in Spanish, transcriptions in the original language were produced, followed by English translations. For this study, commentaries from English translations were used. To protect their identity and in accordance to IRB requirements, the participants chose pseudonyms.

## 4.2 Demographics Chart

Participant Demographics						
Participant Psedonyms	Age	Highest Level of Education	Nationality/Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation (optional)	Primary Language	Viewing Habits
Bridgette	22	Bachelors	American/Latina	Heterosexual	English	Watched alone.
Perla	25	Associates	Mexican American	Heterosexual	English	Watched with her mother, saw part of LRDS for the second time.
Ale	30	Doctorate	American/Latina Columbian	Heterosexual	English and Spanish	Watched alone.
Laura	30	High School	Mexican	Heterosexual	Spanish	Began watching with husband, but ended up watching alone.
Katy	32	Some college	Mexican American	Lesbian	Spanish	Watched alone, but shared conversations about LRDS with mother.
Betty	33	Some college	American/Latina	Heterosexual	Spanish	Watched with parents and brother, all grown adults.
Chely	40	High School	Mexican	Heterosexual	Spanish	Watched alone.
Margie	45	Associates	American/Hispanic	Lesbian	English	Watched with partner.
Tere	47	High School	Mexican	Heterosexual	Spanish	Watched alone.
Rachael	48	Associates	American/Hispanic	Lesbian	English	Watched with partner.
Rosa	51	Bachelors	American/Hispanic	Heterosexual	English	Watches telenovelas alone.
Alma	52	High School	Mexican	Heterosexual	Spanish	Watched with husband, which was rare on his part.
Sara	54	Bachelors	Mexican	Heterosexual	Spanish	Watched with husband.
Lety	58	Some college	Mexican	Heterosexual	Spanish	Watched alone, but shared conversations about LRDS with close female friend.
Irene	60	High School	Mexican	chose not to answer	Spanish	Watched alone, but shared conversations about LRDS with coworkers.
Isabel	69	High School	American/Latina	Heterosexual	English and Spanish	Started watching in her 40's, now watches with husband and family.

Note: Nationality/Ethnicities describe the participants' choice as their own identifiers.

### 4.3 Early Exposure to *Telenovelas*

Interestingly, 14 out of 16 women indicated that *telenovelas* were part of their childhood or adolescence. One participant revealed her opinion about Mexican women and their connection with *telenovelas*.

I think that Mexican women have always seen *novelas*, always. Since I was a little girl, the little girls watched with their mothers, with their grandmothers, or with the aunts. But always you would see a *novela*. You always get hooked with the *novela* since the moment it begins until you finish it. I don't know why as Mexican women, we have always watched *novelas*. (Laura, 2017)

As the women recalled some of their favorite *telenovelas* from the past, they seemed to have enjoyed them, as most laughed or smiled as they described what they watched with their families. Some of the *telenovelas* mentioned were *Mundo de Juguete*, *Marimar*, *María la Del Barrio*, *María Mercedes* and *Los Ricos También Lloran*. One of the well-known actresses mentioned many times was Thalía. Other actresses mentioned were Angelica María and Veronica Castro. “Irene” thoroughly enjoyed watching *telenovelas* because of Jose Luis “El Puma” Rodriguez, as she seemed to have had a crush because she found him to be handsome.

They also indicated that the previous *telenovelas* were often watched in the company of their mothers, grandmothers, and friends. The themes often presented in the *telenovelas* were of love, romance, and suffering. For example, two participants mentioned that *Mundo de Juguete* was about a little girl who did not have a mother; most of the cast was constructed by young child actors. Other *telenovelas* had a love theme, yet the scenes were not as explicit as today's *telenovelas*. Many participants mentioned that *telenovelas* of the past were quite innocent and wholesome on many levels. Most voiced that today's *telenovelas* often show violence or topics

such as drugs and sex which seem to be prevalent trends in *telenovelas*.

One participant shared that she often discussed *telenovelas* with her coworkers and friends. However, she had tried having conversations about *La Reina Del Sur* with others and had encountered similar experiences as I did when looking for potential participants.

Yes, I have done it (discussed *La Reina Del Sur* with others), and a lot of people did not like it because of the violence and because it is about *narco*-trafficking. And they don't like it that is all they have told me. "Oh, how can you watch that *novela*, it is about *narcos* and all that. No, they are too strong (violent), I don't like them." That is what the majority, of all the people, from ten people, about eight told me that they do not like the violence. (Tere, 2017)

#### **4.4 Choosing to Watch *La Reina Del Sur***

Some of the women, such as "Tere," indicated that they watched the *telenovela* based on the rumors and its popularity. She disclosed that the action-driven plot attracted her and made her a faithful viewer. For "Betty," a Mexican-American, it was her brother who drew her to watching it. "My younger brother would watch...so I was intrigued like, 'Why is he watching it?' and I thought, 'Oh, cause the girls are hot,' you know, and they were there in skimpy little outfits. You know, that's what I had thought, and he was like, 'It's a good storyline.'" For "Rachael," also a Mexican-American, she described the following, "Well, my partner suggested that we watch the *novela* and I reluctantly started but I got interested. It was very interesting, even though there was poor acting, but it was a very interesting story."

Other participants such as "Katy" indicated that the life of the main character, Teresa Mendoza, lured her to watch. She was fascinated with the different facets of her life which led her to become a drug lord. The story-line of a woman and her success in the drug world was

captivating. At times, she made reference and comparisons to another *telenovela* called *La Viuda Negra*, which aired on *Televisa* in 2014, with its main character, Griselda Blanco which was played by Ana Serradilla. This *telenovela* was also loosely based on the life of a woman originally from Colombia who rose to fame and wealth by becoming a powerful drug lord during the 1970s and early 1980s (Lopez, 2014). However, “Katy” did not care for some of the scenes in *La Reina Del Sur* and opted to skip a few episodes which she did not find interesting. The evolvment of Mendoza’s character was enough to keep her viewing. “Lety” mentioned that the story-line on *La Reina Del Sur* was loosely based on the life of Sandra Ávila Beltrán also called “La Reina Del Pacífico,” who became a wealthy and powerful drug lord. Eventually, she was caught and sentenced to prison. Just like Teresa Mendoza’s final episode, “Lety” was left wondering what had happened to *La Reina Del Pacífico*.

For “Katy,” “Lety,” “and “Laura,” the fact that the leading role was a woman drew their fascination, since action driven leading roles in *telenovelas* and real drug lord accounts are male-dominant areas. “Margie” said, “Just the interest of that, knowing that there’s a woman who does drug trafficking, when there’s always males doing the drug trafficking so, I was just curious about it.” For some of the women, especially those who identified themselves as Mexican, they felt it was relative to events in México dealing with drug cartels, violence, and such. “Lety” commented, “To me, it is life in México in a *novela*.”

“Ale,” a Colombian, explained, “It kind of reminded me of the stuff that was going on in Colombia and one of the other sit-coms that I have watched. *Narcos*, which has to do with Pablo Escobar, so similar theories, but that’s more with the drug cartel in Colombia, and it has all male leads, not any female leads. So I found it interesting that this was like, a female drug lord.” Even though they recognized that involvement in drug trafficking was extremely dangerous and

harmful, the idea of action and calculated decision-making coming from a female role encouraged their viewership.

Because it was very strong (violent), like I said, but I like to watch strong *novelas* and strong movies that contain, well what is going on today, during these times. During these times... there are crime groups. Like everything that is going on gets my attention, how they have the ability to do so many things. That gets my attention, all that....I like action. (Tere, 2017)

In another situation, a participant felt that the events in *La Reina Del Sur* were relative to what she had experienced. She compared the constant fleeing of Teresa to stay alive to what other Mexicans may have encountered. “Laura” shared her story:

I am from Juarez, right? I have lived similar scenes like hers, in regards to shootings. Being in front of a traffic light, then there are shootings and you have to think to run or hide, don’t stay there standing. Or step on the gas and flee, you don’t have to be involved, but they don’t care, they make a scene with shootings, but they don’t care who they take, right? (Laura, 2017)

As “Laura” described the events of her story, she was obviously still shaken by the experience. From time to time, there was nervous laughter as she described the events of that fateful day. She described helping her mother get into the car, when she suddenly noticed through the rearview mirror that nearby, a man with a weapon was approaching another person inside a car. She had to think quickly and sought refuge for her mother and her at a nearby food stand. She heard weapons firing and sirens. Once the shooting was over, she helped her mother once again to get in the car, and then stepped on the gas. As she drove out of the area, she saw bodies of police officers and *sicarios* lying on the streets. She wanted to drive out of the area as soon as

possible. Once she arrived to the middle of the international bridge to return to the United States, she felt she could breathe again.

When “Alma” was asked why she thought people were attracted to this *telenovela*, she answered the following:

Now it is much more trendy, all that *narco*. It was the first one she (Kate Del Castillo) made; I think it was the first one she made of that kind. And it attracted many because right now, unfortunately, there is much movement, about *narcos*, a lot of drugs and so much more. I think that's why. And it is a very negative message, right? Unfortunately we see it, and we know it is a reality because as we often say that reality exceeds fiction, right? And yes, it is true because right now we're seeing it with our young people, as they are. They are wrong in that aspect. I say that's why. All, power, weapons, drugs, lures us. I include myself because I saw it (laughing nervously). Fortunately, I don't do any of that. But it is... I say that's why. (Alma, 2017)

Just as “Tere,” one of the participants received criticism for watching *La Reina Del Sur*. She disclosed her mother's discontentment when she found out that she was watching a *narco-drama*:

Like I told you I'm Colombian, and I was born there. We, my mom and myself, immigrated to the United States at a young age due to the whole Pablo Escobar situation that was going on with the drug cartels. My mom owned her own boutique and it was either getting robbed or alcohol bombed, so just for safety reasons, we didn't come as refugees, but technically we were fleeing from all the violence going on in Colombia at that time. So, I was at home watching the *Narco*



series on Netflix, and she happened to come in while I was watching it, and she was really pissed like, “Why are you watching this?” And I said, “Oh, I don’t know, it got a lot of reviews on Netflix.” So I asked her, “¿le molesta?” and she said, “Yeah, well I already lived through all that. I don’t want to see it on TV.” She won’t watch the ones that have to do with anything Pablo Escobar related or drug trafficking related. (Ale, 2017)

For some of the informants, they looked forward to a captivating plot and sheer entertainment. Some described that the complexity of female roles kept them beguiled to finishing the series. The following was described as reasons to keep watching:

First of all, it’s who (Teresa Mendoza) becomes powerful because she becomes one of the main girls (boss) from the cartel. Two, Conejo (Marcela) is a cougar and starts going out with a younger guy. Three, there’s lesbians in there or bisexual women, so there’s a little bit of everything in there. So, it’s a very different soap opera versus a woman and a man situation. This is a variety of a lot of drama, it’s very interesting. (Margie, 2017)

In addition to the previous, some participants explained that the accessibility of watching the series on Netflix or You Tube was a decision-maker. No longer did they have to wait on a daily or weekly basis to watch each captivating episode. For “Isabel,” she mentioned that her husband would sometimes become frustrated when she did not run errands or was constantly watching the time in order to return home to watch the next episode. Some of the women such as “Margie,” “Rachael,” and “Bridgett,” admitted to binge watching the series, another advantage was the omission of commercials. At the same time, some participants claimed to have fast-forwarded some of the episodes when the content was not to their liking. Nonetheless, they appreciated the

convenience of being able to watch at their own time and with fewer interruptions.

#### **4.5 Teresa Mendoza**

Unlike traditional lead female characters in *telenovelas*, Mendoza's character seemed to be different. Coming from a humble and vulnerable beginning, she transformed into a drug lord as she gained control of drug trafficking operations and became wealthy in the process. Within the storyline she was often sought out by other cartels led by powerful men, as they seemed to be threatened by her acquisition of contacts, merchandise and power. She smoked, drank tequila and used inappropriate language. She organized meetings with other male cartel leaders and made her presence known when she would demand that they acknowledge her presence by speaking to her about business matters instead of her male associates. Her intelligence and organizational skills with money matters seemed to be recognized by others, and her beauty captivated the attention of many. As previously mentioned, many participants indicated their intrigue to watch a woman leading with this character.

In terms of Teresa's role, I like the fact that she's not playing like a damsel in distress type; she is more of a powerful figure. And well, the other women I can remember are the prostitutes; I just feel like a lot of Latinas are always portrayed as house wives or, excuse my language, but *putas* (whores). Yeah, they don't usually have like, a strong leading female role, it's usually very stereotypical.

(Ale, 2017)

Ironically, Mendoza was at times protected by Oleg Yasikov, "El Ruso" or the Russian drug lord. He helped her find contacts for the merchandise and he took part in eliminating Mendoza's opponents. In addition, he provided advice and protection when Mendoza needed him. However, none of the participants mentioned Yasikov as being pivotal in Mendoza's success.

Another character who provided constant protection by being her body guard and at times confidant from the middle of the series to the end was El Pote. Only one participant, “Laura,” made reference to his loyalty in defending her and sacrificing his life so she could escape. Instead, most of the participants made disclosed that it was refreshing to see a leading female role outside of the usual. “Perla” for example felt that women in most other *telenovelas* were usually stereotyped by showing them in roles where they cooked, cleaned or served others. When asked if they ever wanted to be a character, a participant answered:

I think everyone secretly wants to be Teresa in the sense that she became the strong powerful woman, very independent, she kind of knows herself, but in the same way, we all don’t want to go through all the things she went through to get to that point. We just want to be there, and I think that’s what makes this one so interesting, this *novela*, because we all want to be at the top, you know? We want to be able to know ourselves, be strong, be independent.” (Bridgett, 2017)

When the participants were asked which character impacted them the most, they overwhelmingly admitted to choosing Teresa Mendoza, and the second choice was Paty. The participants described Mendoza as powerful, intelligent, and sensual. Chely revealed the following, “She was like a computer with mathematics. That is what I liked most about her. Although for business, she was (snapping her fingers), like she had a photographic mind. Everything she saw, she remembered.” “Rachael” commented, “I admire Teresa Mendoza, I really do, you know, just she’s gone through so much, her qualities are strong natured, brave, organized and business savvy, and I like that part.” It was often brought up how women liked Mendoza’s sense of business and tenacity.

“Katy” in particular critiqued Teresa Mendoza’s character which will be discussed later,

however, she did mention, “The one that could have impacted me most was when she (Teresa Mendoza) is cold blooded, how could she make her decisions like who lives and who doesn’t.” “Katy” also admitted to watching the *telenovela* because of Teresa Mendoza’s character, if not she wouldn’t have watched. “Margie” described liking Mendoza for the following, “She’s very brave in what she’s doing. I don’t think a lot of women would do what she was doing and become a heartless person from one day to another, which she had to do, and get revenge in just killing a person.”

Throughout the course of the series, she had sexual encounters with several men, while two were against her will, as she was abused through rape and coercion; the others were by choice for love, casual sex, or with intent to gain favor. In one particular situation, she chose to carry a sexually intimate relationship with a married man, knowing that he already had children and a previous affair with one of her closest friends. With the exception of one, the rest of the participants did not make any negative references to Teresa’s consent to have sexual encounters with various men. Most commented that it was normal and though they did not generalize, they felt it was accepted in today’s society. However, “Katy” felt differently, as she described Teresa would exploit others. In addition, she found that Paty used men as well as women.

Throughout the series, Teresa is recognized for her beauty and sensuality. The title to the series comes to light when a reporter compares her physical attributes to that of an Aztec Princess, then retracts his comment and compares her to a queen, hence, *La Reina Del Sur* or The Queen of the South. From the beginning, her beauty seems to be an asset and possibly facilitates her interconnections with powerful men. As her character evolves, Teresa’s capacity in drug trafficking may seem equal to other cartel leaders who are men. “Traditionally, women who appropriate male power in Mexican *telenovelas* are antagonistic, their excessive ambition

contravening the rules of good/beautiful femininity” (Lewkowicz, 2015, p. 281). Possibly fitting into a new mode, Teresa’s gain of power through the use of her sexuality may have resulted in a dichotomy of empowerment or oppression. However, based on the interviews, all of the participants felt she became empowered at the end of the series due to her decision-making and strong character. She faced many challenges of which some are particularly associated with being a woman. Against all odds, she became a powerful entity and overtook her enemies, who were dominant men.

For many participants, they were lured by Mendoza’s character breaking the pattern of women’s roles in *narco-telenovelas* by exemplifying a female character who obtained status comparable to men. Many admitted that it was the first time they had seen such a role for a woman. Even though she kept her femininity throughout the series, there was a masculine aspect to her. For example, she was not afraid to associate and deal with men. She did not outwardly flirt to gain the attention of a man or did she speak in a demure manner. During the beginning of her preparation to embark in trafficking via the ocean, she learned to assemble a boat motor, while blindfolded, as she is shown to be smeared with oil and grease, just as a mechanic. She also participated in moving drugs from one place to another in which she was the sole female who served as a driver and a lookout. However, she consistently showed her femininity and sensuality by making her presence known as she dressed elegantly and wore refined make-up and hair.

Her beauty and sexuality may be perceived by viewers as tools which are used to her benefit. However, the majority of the participants did not mention that her sexuality helped her gain status. Instead, they admired her perseverance and gumption in acquiring her empire and vanquishing her enemies. “Margie” and “Rachael” admitted that they found it unusual to be

supporting and admiring a character who was a drug lord. They were excited for her when she outsmarted other cartels or the Drug Enforcement Agency or DEA.

A participant was asked about sexuality within the women's roles in La Reina Del Sur:

I don't have a problem, and it doesn't bother me, and sometimes, it might sound ugly, but sometimes, we, women have to use our sexuality to get certain things. It might not be like, materialistic, but sometimes, we might have to you know, be a little sweeter, whether it's with another female or a male, it's just, and our charisma I think, as a woman. (Betty, 2017)

However, when characterizing the strengths of Teresa Mendoza to real life, she commented,

There's certain things you go through in life, and that you're exposed to, and you yourself allow, 'cause no one else is going force you to do certain things, right? So when I watched this *novela*, I, you know, put myself in certain situations, and it's just, how could I have handled the situation differently, or I wish I could have been as tough as her. You know? Or maybe a little bit, stronger to stand up for myself, or not be so scared. (Betty, 2017)

The participants overwhelmingly found Mendoza's character to be empowering towards women as some also mentioned that they wished they had her traits to be resilient and strong-willed.

Teresa Mendoza appears to defy the norm of *marianismo*. For example, Mendoza was sexually intimate with various men and often expresses not wanting marriage. Two of her love interests, Raimundo "El Güero" Dávila Parra and Santiago "El Gallego" López Fistera were serious and monogamous relationships at two different times in her life, however, she did not marry either and yet they chose to live together. In comparison to traditional customs of waiting to have sex until marriage, after El Güero passing, she had a casual sexual encounter with a man

she met for the first time and without knowing his name. On another occasion, she had a sexual relationship with Teo, her lawyer. She was aware that he was already married with children and was Paty's former lover. She also chose to be intimate with Coronel Abdelkader Chaib, in order to form an alliance and gain access to cocaine. It seemed that when Teresa chose to have sexual encounters, it was not always for love, but also for strategic gains, and casual pleasure.

Another fact that clearly was a contrast with *marianismo*, which is an actual norm among many Latin cultures, was Mendoza's choice to smoke and drink tequila while she was pregnant as she realized that her lover had betrayed her. Typically, women are shown to be caregivers and to unselfishly sacrifice themselves for the family. Clearly in this case, Mendoza's character did not think about the repercussions of harming her unborn child. From the beginning, there was no reference to Mendoza wanting a child. Due to her position in the business, she expressed not wanting a family of her own. When she found out that she was going to be a mother, she was most concerned about dealing with the betrayal of the unborn child's father.

Despite the fact that most described her to be strong and fearless, some felt that Mendoza's climb was destined not by choice. Simply they felt men such as her boyfriends had involved her and she could not turn back or she would be killed. "Irene" described that the road had taken her there, and she could not get out of it or she would be killed. However, there was criticism about her choices and decisions. "Rachael" observed:

"Well, I don't know how this is love, but she must've loved him (El Gallego) so much that she slept with somebody else (Coronel Chaib) to get him the job he wanted, which was to traffic drugs, and he (El Gallego) got the job, because she did that. But, she decided to work with him that day; she started working with him just to be with him."

Some of the women felt that Mendoza had the option of choosing not to pursue a life in drug trafficking. Most importantly, a few of the informants voiced that Mendoza's choice of men to love could have been avoided and she should have known better.

#### **4.6 Kate Del Castillo**

The female actor in the leading role also made a difference in attracting viewership. "Lety" began watching due to the Kate Del Castillo's former work. Most of the women indicated that they were fans of her work and the intensity of her acting. According to "Lety," she described Teresa Mendoza as "Well they made her very sexual, sensual so that people would want to see her more... so she could have an audience to raise the ratings... I'm going to see it...as it is, that woman (Kate Del Castillo), attracts a lot of people with her work, and she has us there." She also mentioned how Kate Del Castillo had starred in another *telenovela* called *Muchachitas*, which was one of her earlier *telenovelas*. After *La Reina Del Sur*, she starred in *K-11* as a transgender woman held in a prison. She was unrecognizable as she was tattooed and her make-up was gothic-looking. She transformed herself into Mousey, a boss within the confinement and a force to be reckoned with. "Lety" commented that her work was versatile and she was obviously a fan. In addition, she admitted to watching the *telenovela* in its entirety, then revisiting some of the episodes for the second time.

"Sara" also admitted that she followed Kate Del Castillo's work, "the first time when I watched it (*La Reina Del Sur*), I wanted to see it because it was her (Kate Del Castillo). That's the reason, because it was her. Not the plot, it was her." She also mentioned that she had seen the *telenovela* twice in its entirety. "I also like the fact that she made it in Hollywood, right? I mean, that she's already here, so, I have respect for her in that matter." "Alma" also described that what attracted her to watch *La Reina del Sur* was "I like how Kate Del Castillo acts, then I



started to see it. And the truth is, I got hooked, it hooked me.”

A few of the women that were approached to be interviewed made the connection of Kate Del Castillo and the recent Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán headlines.

She (Kate Del Castillo) stayed caught in the character in some way. Because when the *novela* finished, she sent a message via social media to El Chapo Guzmán that she admired him and that he should be México’s president. How can you say it, he (Guzmán) was more amiable, more attentive with the people than the president that we have. I don’t know how El Chapo is, but what I have heard is that he is everything she said he was. From where he is, well I say, how brave to do all that, right? Now she is in trouble... Yes Kate, because she was no longer in her character, was no longer as *La Reina Del Sur*, when she made that comment. She did so as Kate Del Castillo. (Alma, 2017)

When “Irene” was asked about the *telenovela*, she answered,

Kate Del Castillo, she is a very good actress, she works well and normally she, like now, she is going to have another *novela*... I think she is a very good actress and I like her type of *novelas* because they have a lot of action....there is a lot to comment and say, that she is in a dangerous situation, you saw all the hype with El Chapo and other stuff. She likes danger...she took a lot of risk...she was very confident in herself to have done that.

On March 18, 2016, Diane Sawyer conducted an interview with Kate Del Castillo on ABC’s *20/20*. Del Castillo was described as an outspoken and rapacious woman who had challenged the Catholic Church for its conservative views on women’s sexuality. She is known to be the proprietor of her own tequila brand which she drinks publically. Just as Mendoza’s

tendency to challenge herself with dominant male activities, Del Castillo takes on recreational sports such as racing cars alongside with men. She discussed her relationship with Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, a powerful drug lord for the Sinaloa cartel. Sawyer described that some acknowledged him as “the most powerful drug lord in the history of the world.” First, she exchanged texts in which she pronounced her admiration for him and disclosed her distrust for the Mexican government. She also described him as powerful and that he could do great things for México and its people. His corresponding texts seemed to indicate that he would protect her.

Del Castillo was able to arrange a secret meeting with Guzmán and Sean Penn, a well-known actor and director. According to the interview, the discussion was based on discussing the production of a movie based on Guzmán’s life. They traveled deep into the Sinaloa Mountains and stayed at his compound, which was heavily guarded and hidden. She described him as a gentleman and that he never smoked, cursed, or drank and those around them followed suit. Shortly after, Del Castillo and Penn made national news for their meeting with Guzmán as well as his capture. It was speculated that Del Castillo was under close surveillance and her encounter with Guzmán led Mexican authorities to finding and arresting him. This was a great feat since Guzmán had previously eluded the Mexican government and had escaped from a prison through an elaborate tunnel.

Within the interview, Del Castillo claimed that she would no longer visit or live in México as her life was in peril. In addition, Mexican authorities were investigating her for a possible connection with Guzmán and money laundering. She expressed that her involvement with Guzmán was taken out of context and it was possible that he had a crush on Teresa Mendoza, not necessarily her, although Sawyer seemed to differ on her perspective. Some felt Guzmán’s encounter with Del Castillo was a reckless move which caused his captivity.

About Del Castillo's new work, "Irene" shared that she would be starring in a new *telenovela*. Therefore, many fans are anticipating seeing her new project. According to *Variety*, Del Castillo starred as Emilia Urquiza in the *telenovela* called *Ingovernable*. The series became available through Netflix on March 24, 2017. Del Castillo played México's First Lady. Her character helped her husband become president; turmoil happens in which she has to flee. Eventually she would kill him due to his corrupt dealings. Del Castillo has stated that it was fictional, but described that the main character would be compelling and the plot was action-packed. Again, just like Teresa Mendoza's character, it seemed that she portrayed a role of a strong and intelligent woman.

#### **4.7 Perceptions of Misogyny**

*La Reina Del Sur* had many instances in which misogyny was portrayed. In the first episode, she was chased by El Gato and El Pote as she found out that El Güero had been killed and her life was in danger. Toward the end of the episode, she was taken by El Gato as he brutally beat and raped her. He cut off her red laced panties with his knife as he disregarded her feelings and emotions. Her body seemed lifeless, as if to repress the brutal act she was experiencing, but suddenly a tear was shed, then she placed her hand in her purse and reached for a gun, then she shot El Gato. From the beginning violence against women was shown. However, as Mendoza's character evolves, she overcomes and seeks revenge against men who abuse women.

Some of the participants felt that women working in a bar or brothel was a clear example of being abused and having very little choice. "Perla" commented that she disliked Ramiro "El Ratas" Vargas, for the way he treated the women in the strip bar. He was one particular character who was shown to be belligerent and exploited women within the strip bar. The

women were shown to be scantily dressed as they sat on the laps of the men or danced on poles. El Ratas objectified the women as he paid them while had physical contact with the women, by placing his hands on their bodies and plunging his head on their breasts. “Alma” remembered the following, “I think women... for example, there are many very ambitious women who will really reach an extent to achieve their purposes, but is in the underworld which some call it, right? Then to me it represents women with like very low self-esteem.” In the series, various men approached to solicit Mendoza. Her female coworkers informed her that she could earn a lot of money with her body by becoming a prostitute. Mendoza did not criticize the other women for working as prostitutes; however, she chose to work in book keeping instead, even though it did not pay as much.

“Alma” explained how Fatima’s character had impacted her because the character had to leave Morocco, a place where women were not treated as equals, as she described. In addition, Fatima had to steal her son to get him back in her life which was a risky operation orchestrated by Mendoza. “Chely” appreciated Fatima’s character indicating that women such as herself will do everything they can for their children. Some of the participants also discussed that the depiction was accurate, as some female characters had to resort to do acts such as prostitution to make ends meet. “Laura” felt that Mendoza’s character represented a woman who liberated others by standing up to men and their advances. However, there was one incident in which a repulsive drug lord, Marcel, wanted to have sex with Mendoza. “Alma” made reference to this episode, “It impacts me so much when a man abuses a woman. And moreover when I’ve seen programs that, I try not to see them...because they really get to me, when they abuse of women. And well when she avenged, when she made him (Marcel) pay.” In this particular episode, Mendoza was framed and sent to jail in Medellin, Spain. She was in danger of being extradited

to México where she would certainly be found and killed. In order to avoid extradition, she had to agree to have sex with Marcel in exchange for a bribery to have her released. A scene is shown in which disgustingly she enters his home as he hands her a risqué outfit and she reluctantly obeys to wear it.

Another misogynistic character was “El Frances,” a French drug lord who controlled heroin addict female prostitutes. Mendoza described how she was disgusted with El Frances’s victimization of the prostitutes. In all cases, the perpetrators were Mendoza’s enemies and she sought and found vengeance. Mendoza’s character was clearly against the misogyny of women. She was driven to defend and protect her friends from injustices. She liberated the heroine addicted prostitutes once El Francés was killed. In turn, she tried to provide a better life for her friends as they worked for her in her new empire. Even though her character was dealing illegally, some viewers found her to be a heroine with integrity and morals. This may have attributed to why the participants admired Teresa Mendoza.

Currently, there are other *telenovelas* being shown in *Telemundo* and *Univision*. As previously noted, *narco-dramas* are much more prevalent than before. The success of *La Reina Del Sur* may have been launched the production of more *narco-dramas*. According to “Rosa,” a loyal viewer of *La Piloto*, she is intrigued by the leading female role who becomes a drug lord. The plot is also about a woman who comes from humble and violent beginnings. In her case, she is raped by her step-father and she flees from home because she has no family support. She builds connections with a handsome boyfriend then learns to pilot a plane in order to transport drugs. The story line seems somewhat familiar to *La Reina Del Sur*.

The content of misogyny is also apparent. Even though misogyny did not seem to be discussed by the participants as much, it does exist in *narco-telenovela*. However, the acts of

violence such as rape for the protagonists in *La Reina Del Sur*, *La Piloto*, and *La Viuda Negra* (these were *narco-dramas* mentioned by informants during their interviews) seemed to be a driving force for the protagonists. As usual, lead female roles transformed their character, physical traits, and principles in order to obtain power and wealth, then avenged. When the acts of misogyny were mentioned, the participants seemed to empathize with the protagonist while appreciating the idea of avenging and often eliminating their abuser. However, I had to question whether *narco-dramas* are now becoming predictable by contributing to negative stereotypes through which acts of misogyny toward Latin and Mexican women are shown as a premise to the discovery of the inner strength within the protagonists.

#### **4.8 Perceptions of Social Class**

During the beginning of the series, Teresa Mendoza was poor and worked by exchanging money on the streets. Her appearance and language seemed to be stereotypically relative to a woman of lower-socioeconomic class. She had street smarts, but was innocent of the cartel ways. She formed amorous relationships with “El Güero Dávila” and “El Gallego,” who both happened to be light-skinned, fair-haired, young, and attractive men. Teresa Mendoza was medium-dark skinned with dark-hair and brown eyes. Even though, not much was divulged about El Güero’s and El Gallego’s upbringing and social class, they seemed to be at a higher social level than Teresa Mendoza, perhaps due to their acquisitions while working as drug traffickers. El Güero served as her provider and the source for interconnections with Don Epifanio, a powerful drug cartel boss in México. While El Gallego in particular, served as her mentor as he taught her the ways of drug trafficking.

The participants were shown pictures of Teresa Mendoza during the beginning of the series and compared to end of the series, please see questionnaire. Most of the women found her

to be somewhat innocent and naïve at the beginning. “Perla” felt she looked “slutty” and uneducated as she was trying to find money. “Bridgett” felt Mendoza was trying to find herself. Some of the women described that at the beginning, Mendoza felt protected, possibly because of her relationship with El Güero. “Rachael” described Mendoza’s beginnings as very much in love. However, at the end of the series, participants described her as elegant and educated. In comparison to the beginning, many agreed that she looked unhappy, without feelings, yet very successful with her business.

Most of the women agreed that there was no clear distinction among social classes. Most recognized that Paty had come from wealth. However, when they discussed Teresa, they felt she had gone from rags to riches and climbed in social status through her business. Basically, they recognized that being corrupt could possibly contribute to the character’s fame and fortune. Despite the stereotypical characteristics, most did not recognize that Teresa Mendoza’s character did not have the physical features of a leading heroine, which could have been light-skinned with light eyes. However, Mendoza’s enemies varied in physical traits and ethnic backgrounds.

Paty, however, was tall, thin, blonde, and European-looking. She was also wealthy and came from an aristocratic family. Paty was shown to have the finesse of a classy woman by having the right taste in clothing and having the right connections in social scenes. Her connection with Teresa Mendoza was important, as Paty seemed to be the person who helped transform her outward appearance by introducing her to finer and expensive acquisitions. In one instance, there was obvious discrimination through the first interaction between Paty and Fatima. Paty immediately demanded for Fatima to serve her. She continued as she insulted Fatima by using the accent and dialect of a stereotypical peasant. Paty immediately made her stance known that she did not feel Fatima was an equal by marginalizing her. Shortly after, Mendoza became

aware of the act, and immediately put a stop to it, as she told Paty in a stern voice that Fatima was not a servant but a very close friend. She also gave her an ultimatum; Paty either accepted Fatima or Mendoza would leave. Paty resolved to grudgingly accept Fatima.

“Lety” had commented that some of the earlier *telenovelas* were about a poor girl marrying a rich prince. This particular *telenovela* did not follow the same plot. Being that the main theme was acquiring wealth and power through trafficking, possibly the plot did not allow for the stereotypical plots from *telenovelas* from the past. When asked if distinction among classes existed in this *telenovela*, “Irene” commented, “Well, they were corrupt... I don’t know about social classes, they were corrupt. They were there because they were corrupt and not because they had class.” “Chely” mentioned that Paty was rich, and then she compared her to Mendoza: “At the end, they did the same. They congealed in something, both. Social class didn’t really matter.”

#### **4.9 Perceptions of Lesbianism and Bisexuality**

As previously mentioned, studies show that lesbianism and bisexuality seem to be absent from previous *telenovelas*. *La Reina Del Sur* offered the opportunity to discuss these topics. *La Reina Del Sur* is breaking new ground by providing an interesting dynamic through Mendoza’s relationship with Patricia O’Farrell character best known as Paty, a woman from a wealthy aristocratic Irish-Spanish family. Paty is a fashionable, tall blonde who is well known for being scandalous and a rebel. The dynamic in both women is not common in *telenovelas* since Paty is bisexual. Even though Teresa expresses not having any interest in pursuing a lesbian relationship, they engage in an intimate kiss after having a few drinks of tequila while in prison.

Other characters do speculate that they are lesbian lovers since they move in together and



form a partnership, but Mendoza clearly states that she is most interested in men. Paty appears to be distraught when Teresa forms an intimate relationship with Teo, her former lover. At the same time, she has strong romantic emotions for Teresa which are not reciprocated in the same manner. Teresa states that even though she loves Paty, she prefers to be intimately involved with men. Paty's character and her interaction with Mendoza brought forward valuable insight on the perspectives of lesbianism and bisexuality.

As previously indicated, three participants identified themselves as lesbians. Therefore, they provided much insight which they often found related to their own personal experiences or ideals. "Margie" describes how she felt as she realized that there would be a lesbian relationship,

As I was watching the *novela* of course, I have a friend that's gay, and I was telling her about the *telenovela*, that she should be watching it, and I asked her if she watched *La Reina Del Sur* and she told me, "Well, I only watched two episodes," I'm like, "Girl you gotta watch this *novela*, there's actually lesbians in the *telenovela*" and she's like, "What? Are you kidding me!? I didn't know that." So she was shocked for me to tell her that there were actually lesbians in the *telenovela* because we hardly ever see any homosexuals being shown in *telenovelas*. It's always a relationship between a man and a woman, so it's boring. So it's something that we as a gay society, lesbian society, can relate to. So, it was enjoyable to watch, actually.

The *novela* represented women from different walks of life. However, many did speak in length about the relationship between Teresa and Paty. Most found it to be normal, for example, Chely stated, "For that, I am very open, there are no blinds. For me, that is not bad. Everyone chooses their role in life, their preference. I also respect that." "Perla" felt that based on Teresa's and

Paty's kiss that they were simply exploring. She also found Paty to be annoying because she was irresponsible and a drug addict. Other women felt they had a close friendship. "Margie" said, "I can kind of relate to Paty. Falling in love with somebody that you really liked but nothing ever happens because the other person's straight, and you're the one that's gay, but you have a very good relationship, because I experienced that." The relationship between Paty and Teresa did not fall short from criticism. "Katy" stated:

"Let's say when she (Mendoza) was inside (jail) she became a lesbian and started to go out with the Spanish woman. When she gets out of jail, it seemed like she forgot. And Paty was the same, she used men and she used women. The only one, from DEA, she (Veronica) was the only one that was more conscious and congruent with let's say that she was a lesbian. Well, I didn't like that because that can actually happen with any woman, it may seem easy to be with a man as with a woman. For me, no, you either are or you're not (lesbian). (2017)

Furthermore, "Katy" went on to explain that the roles in this *telenovela* were confusing, as they transmitted the wrong message that women who found themselves in the company of lesbians would transition into lesbians. "Katy" felt that programs like these were part of the reason why society did not respect the lesbian community. She continued to describe her criticism on bisexuality:

"For me, bisexuality, the truth, I believe or I have heard, and I have gone to a psychologist, he/she told me, it is worse to be bisexual than to be a lesbian. It's not that it is bad (bisexuality), simply it is more confusing. So I believe there (in the *telenovela*), they make it look so flippant, like if nothing happens in life, but it is not like that. (2017)

As previously mentioned, one potential participant indicated that she stopped watching *La Reina Del Sur* because she found the idea of homosexuality to be immoral and against her religious beliefs. Therefore, she felt uncomfortable discussing the content of the *telenovela* and she declined to provide an extensive interview. While yet, one of the common ideas many participants shared was the shock value in knowing that lesbian relationships were shown. Even though they mentioned that it happens in real life, they were not expecting these scenes to be shown. One participant had her own concerns about these scenes:

Paty was always after her. She fell in love with her (Mendoza), but you respected that. However, it was also the first time that I saw something like that on TV...When they kissed... I really, really, don't agree with that. But now it's accepted, but this was ahead of this time, I think. This scene, this moment, when they're two girls that are kissing on TV, on a *novela*,...I work with young girls and I overhear sometimes when girls were not really that innocent, like this girl (Mendoza), how she was at the beginning. There can be influence by others, and I don't like when other women, let's say, want to influence girls. When I think about girls watching this moment when they're kissing, I think they're giving them ideas... I think they should leave that for whomever likes to be homosexual, not trying to put images on people and still in girl's minds or young people's minds. (Sara, 2017)

“Margie” also mentioned the reality of being criticized as a lesbian by other men. She referred to one particular scene as Don Epifanio alludes to Teresa and Paty having a relationship. “I believe it happens. I've heard Mexican men like, when they found out about the rumor of Teresa falling in love with Paty, they were saying that, ‘Oh now Teresa's turned into a carpet muncher.’ So,

cutting her down after she's become a lesbian, I've come across that with men, before." Margie described this scene with some agitation.

"Rachael" criticized that the portrayal of the masculine lesbians within the jail were not placed in a favorable situation. Not only did they portray them in a malevolent manner, but the leader of the gang called Macuca was also a murderous predator who took advantage of other younger and prettier women. Macuca and her group of masculine women attempted to kill Teresa Mendoza, but instead a young innocent character was killed when she was trapped in a deliberate fire within the bookery. Even though "Rachael" was glad to see that finally there were lesbians being portrayed in *telenovelas*, she wasn't in full support of their representations. She felt that the masculine lesbians as she described as "butch" women were shown in a negative stereotype.

For "Margie" and "Rachael," Paty was one of their favorite characters. They felt her love for Teresa was genuine even though it was not reciprocated in the same manner. Teresa made it known that she loved Paty as a dear friend. Even though Paty at times bragged to others about their business, Teresa always forgave her despite Oleg's advice and warning to stay away from Paty. Rachael also liked the relationship between Paty and Lupe. She was disheartened when Paty learned about Lupe's true identity and betrayal. Casually, she mentioned that she found Sara Maldonado who portrayed Lupe as very attractive. "Margie" mentioned that the episode which impacted her the most was when Paty committed suicide because she was hoping to see her in a loving relationship. "Margie's" eyes welled as she described the scene of Mendoza casting Paty's ashes into the ocean. She was in disbelief that the episode had made her feel emotional.

## **5.0 The Feminist Perspective**

For this portion of the study, I simply asked all the participants toward the end of the interview the following question: What is feminism to you?

One of the participants did not feel she could answer the question. Two participants expressed that they were not feminist as they also defended men. “Chely” felt that a feminist was a woman who would try to be more than a man, and more than a woman. “Tere” explained that feminism meant equality and that women could do almost as much as a man, then she firmly admitted to not being a feminist. I repeated what she had said to clarify her statement, without a doubt, she admitted to not being a feminist.

Interestingly, most of the other women felt they were feminist or sympathized with feminism. “Lety” who identified herself as a Mexican, described herself as a feminist and believed that men and women are equal on many levels. In a conversation with one interviewee, “Irene,” who happened to be very soft spoken and timid, I was taken aback as she described passionately what feminism was and how it related to her everyday life:

Feminism....to have your rights, not allow one to be squashed by a man. Because they are men that want to hover, to hover over them (women). Because they want to be superior. Not that we are superior simply that we have the respect which we deserve like the women that we are. And for that we have to earn it. If someone arrives and they tell you, I am here and I want to place my rules and well that’s not the way it is, it’s not like that. If you are referring to, like a woman, here (work), simply there are many men who are machos.

She continued to describe how women are often not allowed to speak and that their opinions are not taken in account by men.

Well they think that like the men that they are, they are more superior to one. I

have lived through that I tell you, it's a thing that there are adult people that have that in their mind and they will never take away, it will never go away. Well then with them it is different because one works for them. Here we are working for them; one has to level that off, but out there (pointing her finger as to indicate outside of the facility). Well my decision and word, respect me. (Irene, 2017)

The rest of the participants agreed that feminism was seeking equality among both men and women. "Rosa" for example, describes that as a divorcee, she has had to rely on her own to take the both roles in a household which are stereotypically designated for a specific gender. She continued to describe that she felt empowered because she learned how to do work that is typically designated for men. She also described that if one sets their mind to it, then one can learn to take on new tasks.

"Kate" described feminism as the following:

Feminism to me is to defend our rights as women. Always in the norm, that I feel we can earn equally to men? Well I feel we can. If we do the same work? Are we intelligent? Of course we are intelligent. That we are never going to have the same strength as men? Of course not, but we can be at the same level, without being more than they are, simply to have equality. To me that is feminism, defend women in front of men, but let's say if there is violence, if there is verbal abuse, but always treat with the same respect because if there is hitting, we are always going to lose. Always there has to be a duality. I have always been a feminist, I always defend my gender, but I also know that men are valuable.

When relating La Reina Del Sur to feminism, "Bridgett" commented, "I feel like feminism is equality for everybody. It's mostly bridging the gap between the women and the

men, but at the same time it doesn't mean bringing the men down, and I feel like this *novela* slowly like, makes the men seem like scum. But, I feel like compared to other novelas, it's completely perfect for feminism because she rises above on her own."

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Concluding Remarks about Women's Perceptions

In the beginning of my study, I brought forth the discussion of *telenovelas* and their influence on Latinas. In particular, I focused on *La Reina Del Sur*, a *telenovela* which topped ratings in a 19 year history, including English programming from ABC and NBC networks. This *telenovela* proved to be a notable success, perhaps due to the change in the protagonist which was now portrayed by a strong female role.

Based on studies, viewers tend to be women, and men usually do not admit to being viewers. In 2001, Barrera and Bielby stipulated that information on men's perceptions or viewing experiences is limited, due to its year span and shift in storylines which now include action-packed scenes, perhaps it is time to reevaluate the male gender's viewing habits and perceptions on *telenovelas*. For women living in the United States, *telenovelas* offer a familial connection to their language, culture, and customs. This particular medium has been an integral part of many Latino families' routine or experiences. However, Latino/a viewers are no longer limited to watching the traditional *telenovelas rosa* with the "Cinderella" syndrome. A genre of this medium which seems to be emerging with great success is the *narco-telenovelas*.

Conversely, much criticism has come with this genre since scholars feel that they exemplify violence and oppression against women. Many participants correlated the violent drug-related occurrences in México to the storyline in *La Reina Del Sur*. Campbell's research verifies the atrocities and victimization of women and innocent bystanders due to the drug war incited by powerful cartels (2011). In addition, he indicates that the drug cartels have infiltrated government and society on many levels which was also exemplified within the story line as Teresa Mendoza's blatant mistrust toward the Mexican government. Roberto Saviano indicated



the following, “The criminal economy is a winning economy; the drug trade totals more than \$300 billion a year worldwide, so these bosses inhabit the very top of the pyramid” (2016, p. 38). It seems that the end to the drug war has no visible end, which perhaps will continue to galvanize the continuation of *narco-dramas*, some which may be loosely based on the lives of the real cartel bosses.

*Telemundo*, a television network which predominately has the following of Spanish speaking viewers had an astonishing success with the broadcast of *La Reina Del Sur*. Notably, *La Reina Del Sur* was the first *telenovela* to be called a “super series” by *Telemundo*. (L. Castaneda, personal communication, March 23, 2017). Moreover, they have crossed over to English-only speaking viewers by having subtitles for those who may not understand Spanish (Brock, 2011). They continued to include in network programming of other *narco-telenovelas* which seemed to be favorably accepted by Latino viewers. Nowadays, one has accessibility to many *narco-dramas* through Netflix and YouTube. The ratings such as those from *El Señor De Los Cielos* which surpassed *La Reina Del Sur* indicates the insatiable appetite for viewers to continue demand this genre of entertainment. With the recent announcement of *La Reina Del Sur 2*, it is evident that *Telemundo* will continue to deliver *narco-telenovelas* in order to please and retain its viewership (Lopez, 2017).

This brought to light how *telenovelas* have been part of cultural practices and can relate to complex social issues, especially in women. The goal for this study was to examine the perceptions of women’s issues including intersectionality of class, misogyny, and stereotypes of Mexican and Latin Women. *La Reina Del Sur* was a tool which I utilized for Latina women to provide their own interpretations of how the plot and characters could relate to society as well as their own personal experiences. “The subject of knowledge to address real-life social issues and

problems and the application and the use of this knowledge to solve problems of inequality have been fundamental to the intersectional project promoting social justice (Dill & Kohlman, 2014, p. 165).

In Chapter 2, I provided a brief overview of the feminist waves and how I came to choose the third wave, specifically intersectionality, for my study. Unlike the second wave of feminism which seemed to associate all women within the same group and with the same form of social injustice, third wave feminism recognizes women to be diverse. Third wave feminism allows women from different backgrounds and identities to provide narratives for critical analytical discourse. Third wave feminism relates to today's feminists' movements in which despite diverse backgrounds and experiences, women will connect by bringing consciousness to social injustices.

In addition to the literature review, I provided a description of *marianismo* and its pertinence as a cultural norm in a patriarchal society. Examples in which *marianismo* could affect women's roles and progressiveness in education and work force were stated and supported through research studies. The subjugation of women living within a patriarchal society was also described. Literature suggests that within a patriarchal society, *machismo* can also exist which can lead to deleterious consequences toward women. I also disclosed through Stern's studies the recent shifts in a patriarchal society toward a more progressive México. Ramírez's ethnographies also brought forth the general misconceptions and negative connotations of *machismo* and Mexican males. Despite their acknowledgement that women still experience oppression and there continues to be resistance toward social change, they also brought to light that México has been moving toward a positive social transformation. In addition, the concept of *machismo* can be perceived differently when compared to modernist Mexicans and U.S. Latinos.

Josué Ramírez explained that the term *machismo* is often generalized by U.S. Latinos as a dangerous stereotype imposed on Mexican men which describe them as having the propensity to be abusive toward women. Therefore, within this section of the review, it provided the premise for critical discourse analysis whether *La Reina Del Sur*'s portrayal of women followed or challenged traditional cultural norms and whether other women perceived its content as liberating or oppressive toward the female gender.

A new category to closely examine was lesbianism and bisexuality. A brief historical account of the traces of lesbianism and bisexuality within literature context during the early twentieth century was introduced in which it was described as Sapphism. The significance of the account emphasized the sexual indifference toward women's sexual identity. Given the time, lesbianism and bisexuality in women was inconceivable as it may have threatened social construct within a heteronormative society. Sapphism alluded to the relationship among women as a fantasy or for aesthetic desire not for moral aphorism (Irwin, 2005).

Due to what seemed to be existing taboos on these types of relationships within the *telenovelas*, literature and research was extremely limited and almost nonexistent. Interestingly, I wanted to analyze women's perceptions on this particular topic because the lack of research in this area engaged my interest in finding new discoveries on this possible archetype; therefore, in-depth interviews were critical. *La Reina Del Sur* also dealt with various social classes. The main character, Teresa Mendoza, started from a low socioeconomic level and transitioned to a higher societal class. A study by Glascock and Ruggiero indicated that class of the characters followed stereotypes based on their physical traits, mannerisms, and possessions (2004). The characters' ethnicities were also determinants of the occupation, social class level, and dominance within the storyline.

In regards to Chapter 3, I described the methodology used within my research. The implementation of grounded theory would be my best approach in gathering data through qualitative interviews. I provided a brief history of grounded theory and its founding fathers, Glaser and Strauss. Noting that grounded theory had developed and transitioned throughout the years, I narrowed my approach in collecting and analyzing data by utilizing Kathy Charmaz's practical guide (2006). In accordance to IRB specifications, the participants' identities were kept confidential and pseudonyms were chosen. I sought participants through the snowball effect. Before conducting interviews, I explained the informed consent and interviewed in accordance to their preferred language, either English or Spanish. Transcriptions were produced and used for the analysis. Seeking to research as a third-wave feminist, pursuing disclosure through narratives opened the opportunity for informants to share their experiences as it related to the *telenovela* and their personal and political perspectives.

In Chapter 4, the demographics of the 16 participants were described. A chart was also provided with the pseudonyms, ages, level of education, nationality/ethnicity as they described themselves, sexual orientation, primary language and viewing habits. I felt this visual was necessary to help identify the participants as they were mentioned throughout the analysis. They ranged from 22 to 69 years of age and their educational attainments also differed. Even though viewing habits were not intentionally part of the study, I felt I needed to include this information as to disclose whether or not the viewers were still following the past traditions of watching *telenovelas* as a family custom or if their viewing habits indicated a possible shift in *telenovelas* which are no longer allowable in a traditional family setting. In fairness, the genre discussed in this study referred the participant perspectives on *narcotelenovelas* rather than *telenovelas rosa*. As disclosed in this chapter, most of the women indicated that their viewing habits for

*telenovelas* had changed from their traditional practices indicated by Barrera and Bielby (2001). Some watched alone, while others watched with their husbands or family with grown adults. Although some of the women admitted that it was possible that their husbands became viewers due to the beauty of the female actors or the action-driven scenes, not necessarily the plot. Only one participant, “Perla,” indicated that she routinely watched *telenovelas* with her mother.

Early exposure to *telenovelas* indicated that the majority of the participants had experienced watching *telenovelas* with their families, especially with their perspective matriarchs. Common *telenovelas* were seen by the participants as they recalled with affinity the innocent characters and fairytale-like plots. In agreement with Lewkowicz’s (2015) description of traditional telenovela storylines, “Lety” for example, described that some of the *telenovelas* displayed suffering and crying, but ended with a happy ending. Incidentally, she also mentioned that she would have liked the finale of *La Reina Del Sur* series to have ended much like the traditional format. While “Irene” and “Isabel” described the handsome lead male actors as their attraction to become loyal viewers, other women described being fans of Thalía and other well-known female actors. Nonetheless, the interviews provided information which was in accordance to the studies provided by Barrera and Bielby (2001) in the literature review. For the majority of the female participants, viewing *telenovelas* in past years was part of a cultural experience which they shared with their families.

When looking for participants, I quickly realized that for some women, it was a difficult form of medium to watch. Outspokenly, some women described that *La Reina Del Sur* was a reminder of the violence occurring in present day México. For one particular participant, “Laura,” her close call in being caught in the middle of crossfire in Juárez was not a deterrent, but rather a fascination to the telenovela plot to real-life occurrences. A possible assumption is

that for some potential viewers, the *telenovela* was too close to the realism with violence and the cartel in Latin American countries. There seemed to be an existing binary between women of different nationalities. Distinctly, the women who identified themselves as Mexicans or described living in Latin American countries made a close personal connection to the present day violence in México and Colombia. “Katy,” who identified herself as a Mexican during her childhood and eventually became an American citizen also made the connection to the cartels. “Ale,” a Colombian born participant indicated that for her mother, *narco-dramas* were too relevant to her personal experiences. She specified that Pablo Escobar’s narcotic regime had a negative ramifications on the socioeconomic issues in her native land and as well as her personal life. As for the Latinas who identified themselves as Americans, they did not describe the severity of the cartel to their own lives, they acknowledged that it existed, but did not make any personal connections. Nonetheless, Howard Campbell (2014) described the realistic violence led by drug cartels and its implications in México which closely resembled the vehement events which occur in *La Reina Del Sur*.

As previously mentioned, it was not difficult to find women who had seen *La Reina Del Sur* partially or in its entirety. One commonality among the participants was the attraction to see a woman in a leading role which was against the archetype of most female roles from the past. Some participants mentioned that it was the first time they had seen a women portray a drug lord. During the interviews they indicated that they were lured by Mendoza’s shrewdness and power. Remarkably, it was mentioned that while they knew that Mendoza’s character represented someone who was breaking the law, they admired her and wanted to have her character as in being strong and dominant.

“Popular culture has also become a viable forum for third wave feminist consciousness-

raising. Women are increasingly visible in television, film, music, and other media outlets. There are growing numbers of feminist role models and cultural icons that girls and women admire and respect” (Sowards & Renegar, 2004, p. 543). The dichotomy of admiring a strong female role in a *narco-drama* is the notion of empowerment for young women to become assertive and delegate in their own profession, on the other hand, we have yet to see if young women will be deceptively inclined to pursue involvement within the drug-trafficking world. Although a logical assumption may be that many female viewers are tired of the old archetype in which women were protected by men. Ironically, Mendoza was often protected by Oleg Yasikov, “El Ruso” or her body guard, “El Pote”. However, none of the women acknowledged that his power and protection made a difference in Mendoza’s prowess and success. Instead they acknowledged that her decisiveness, boldness, intelligence, and business sense helped her acquire the status of a drug lord.

Some agreed that they would have liked to see more Latinas portrayed in a positive light or occupation. Some of the negative messages they seemed to disclose is that obtaining wealth in the manner of drug trafficking seemed glorified. Most felt that it sent the wrong message, especially to today’s youth. “Alma” for example, referenced that when one sees a relative encounter a drug issue, it could be horrific, as she had experienced this with a relative. “Katy” and “Tere” also mentioned that for the sake of sending the correct message to society, they should have strong female roles with respectable occupations. Based on the overall perceptions from the participants, *La Reina Del Sur* exemplified empowerment for women in regards to Teresa Mendoza’s character, but it came with criticism based on her acquisition of power. “Alma,” “Katy,” and “Lety” were concerned about the message *La Reina Del Sur* would convey to today’s adolescents in relation to the acquisition of wealth and power through drug-trafficking.

However, they did agree that other female roles such as those portrayed by Fatima, and the other women within the brothel exemplified oppression. It is possible, that for young women the message of empowerment may encourage them to overcome situations in which they may experience oppression. Sowards and Renegard stated:

Popular culture icons have long influenced how young women and others involved in social consciousness become aware of social injustices and their own sense of oppression, yet most academic literature has failed to address the power and influence of popular culture in consciousness-raising. However, this examination of third wave feminist texts reveals that many young women are empowered by female role models and become aware of their own oppression and the possibilities for emancipation through the consumption of popular culture. More importantly, young female audiences take away messages of empowerment from popular television shows and music, even though these texts may be problematic from other feminist perspectives (2004, p. 544).

Kate Del Castillo was undeniably a lure for many participants to watch. Through her headlines and interview with Diane Sawyer, it drew attention for viewers to tune in and see the *telenovelas* for themselves. Her affiliation with the notorious Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, lured others who may have not considered watching to see for themselves the *telenovela*. Some of the participants admitted to being curious about the storyline and Del Castillo’s portrayal of Teresa Mendoza. Kate Del Castillo continues to be a sensation and will soon reprise her role as *La Reina Del Sur 2* (Lopez, 2017). This clearly indicates that *narcotelenovelas* are still in high demand by loyal viewers.

Misogyny continues to be exemplified in *telenovelas*. By comparing narratives about



the storylines which the informants chose to describe a commonality within some of the *narco-dramas* is abuse. Three of the *telenovelas* they described included rape scenes, *La Viuda Negra* (2014) and *La Piloto* (2017) in which the protagonists were victimized by the step-fathers and the other, *La Reina Del Sur* (2011) included a rape scene committed by a *sicario* called “El Gato.” *La Reina Del Sur* included scenes in which women were objectified by working in brothels and in strip bar. Feminists have recognized the severity of violent acts against women which includes rape. On the forefront of women’s human rights is Catharine MacKinnon. In 1993, she argued that rape should be constituted as torture. She notes that rape is an everyday occurrence and has become a phenomenon due to the incompetence of the legal system being able to persecute with stiffer penalties toward its perpetrators (McGlynn, 2008). The act of violence against women may provoke conversation among its viewers. Within the storylines, the victims will do seek justice through a legal system, but rather, they deliver justice through their own means.

Although participants were not able to clearly identify stereotypes of social class within *La Reina Del Sur*, while scrutinizing the content, it existed. For example the protagonist, Teresa Mendoza came from humble means and exemplified the stereotypical characteristics of a lower-socioeconomic persona. Her demeanor, voice, and form of dress were unrefined. When comparing the perceptions of the images of Mendoza from the beginning to the ending of the series, several informants compared her humble beginnings as being uneducated, poor, and needing protection. “Perla” described her as “slutty-looking,” while Bridgette mentioned that Mendoza needed money. Furthermore, the informants also disclosed that the images taken toward the end of the series exemplified a woman of strength, elegance and strength.

Paty, a stereotypical tall blonde of European descent was portrayed as wealthy and with

power from the beginning. While in jail, she was known as “La Generala” (The General) for her authority within the confinement. Paty advised Teresa Mendoza about the finer materials including her wardrobe and physical appearance. One could probably assume that Mendoza’s transformation was initiated through Paty’s finesse and sense of style which may be associated with upper class. Mendoza was also taken care of by El Güero who was had light complexion and eyes. While El Gallego was Spanish and also provided the knowledge she needed to lead in the drug trafficking world. The content within *narco-telenovelas* is quite different from the characteristics of a *telenovela rosa*, however when comparing the physical traits of the characters they seem to represent archetypes. Lighter-skinned and European-like characters such as Paty, Don Epifanio, El Gallego, and El Güero were shown to have knowledge and wealth, while the darker-skinned characters such as Mendoza and Fatima came from a lower-socio economic background, suffered injustices, and were not formerly educated. In agreement with Glascock and Ruggiero’s findings, the storyline seemed to indicate prejudices toward class, ethnicities and physical appearance. However, *La Reina Del Sur* did provide instances in which these prejudices were challenged.

“Third wave feminists share their stories, listen to others' stories, consume popular culture in ways that they find empowering, and create new vocabularies to enhance their own lives, but these activities do not necessarily lead to social activism in its traditional forms” (Sowards & Renegard, 2004, p. 548). Even though they may welcome an activist platform, many third-wave feminists will accept that their own ideologies should not be imposed on others, but rather that readers make their own assertions on how to approach the existing conditions. Through genuine narratives shared by my participants, they evidenced that feminism is not equally perceived by all women regardless of their identity. While there may be negative

implications about feminism, violence and stigmas against women does exist today. Feminist scholars such as Marcela Lagarde have worked diligently to eradicate these injustices. Being on the forefront of the Mexican government to seek funding for investigative work on femicides and bringing awareness on the violence against women has been her plight.

“A little bit of everything,” was the common phrase that most women described when the topic of sexuality, lesbianism, or bisexuality was presented. Most women described that they were surprised or in shock when they saw Teresa and Paty kiss. While others said they would accept it because it was already seen in society, others did not feel as comfortable because they felt it could possibly influence young women to explore. Those who identified themselves as lesbians found the act of kissing to be normal, but they recognized that not everyone would accept it the same way. “Katy” criticized the possible misconception that women could become lesbians based on association, which is what she felt was shown during the time Mendoza was in prison. When the image of Teresa and Paty kissing was shown, “Perla” indicated that Teresa Mendoza was exploring, just as “Katy” had criticized it could happen. “Katy” felt that the misconceptions often led to disrespect of the lesbian community.

“Rachael” also indicated that the portrayal of the masculine females as she described as butch was unfair and discriminatory. The masculine females such as Macuca and her followers were portrayed as being crude, obnoxious, and abusers who preyed on young naïve women. Interestingly, Sowards and Renegard noted that negative archetypes of feminists are often physically described as hairy and ugly. Perhaps far-fetched, but there may be a correlation in the manifestation between the negative perceptions of feminists as radical personas who are man-hating and masculine lesbians shown in *La Reina Del Sur* (2004). Nonetheless, the depiction of women with masculine traits could be perceived in a negative manner.

“Margie” mentioned that she encouraged a gay friend to watch, as this type of relationship was not seen before in a *telenovela*. She also described how she related to Paty, as her interest in someone was not reciprocated due to differences in sexual orientation. She personally identified with the discrimination lesbians may face when they outwardly identify themselves as gay. Her example was being derogatorily labeled as a “carpet muncher” by former prospective male suitors when they became aware that she was not interested in pursuing a heteronormative relationship. Even though *La Reina Del Sur* brought awareness of lesbian and bisexual issues, it also brought misconceptions and could possibly be creating archetypes which could be seen unfavorably.

“Rachael” explained, “Being a lesbian is not a choice, it’s what I am. If it were (a choice), then I would have chosen the easier way. When you’re a lesbian, you face discrimination; the ideal dream of having a family and children is much more difficult than for straight women. If my partner is sick, I don’t have the right to make decisions for her own well-being.” As a third wave feminist researcher, the narratives and testimonies offer an understanding of social injustices within the diversity of women’s identity. “Sharing personal stories, then, becomes an avenue of consciousness-raising not only for the audience, but also for the individuals who share their personal experiences of oppression and discrimination” (Sowards and Renegard, 2004, p. 542).

“Katy” explained that she found it troubling that within the *telenovela* gay women can easily move from a heterosexual to a homosexual relationship. As a lesbian, she described, “*naces, no te haces*,” or “you are born (lesbian), you don’t become (lesbian).” “Rachael” explained that it took her a long time to come out because she did not want to disappoint her family. Instead, she took a risk to disclose her sexual identity knowing that she could lose her

loved ones. These challenges and dilemmas lesbian women face are not portrayed with specificity within the *telenovela*. There seemed to be contradictory views about lesbianism within the informants. While some agreed that it was normal and felt they were open-minded in accepting the lesbian relationships, others felt that it could provide a negative message for younger audiences as it may encourage exploration and cause confusion in sexual identity. “Feminism has always been a space where analysis is deep and sustained, and where disagreement has enriched understanding of how the intersections of power oppress people. And it is critical to create a more robust infrastructure to help ensure that activists and thinkers do not suffer from fatigue, and that feminism does not become a politics for the privileged” (Winch, 2014, p. 19). On the other hand, the lesbian informants all agreed that there were potentially harmful misconceptions and implications related to lesbianism and bisexuality through the storyline and its characters. However, they agreed that they were readily accepting to watch a lesbian relationship unfold within a *telenovela*, but acknowledged that others may not accept it as a normative behavior between two women.

“Intersectional scholarship is interdisciplinary in nature and focuses on how structures of difference combine to create a feminist praxis that is new and distinct from the social, cultural and artistic forms emphasized in traditional feminist paradigms that focus primarily upon contrasting the experiences of women in society to those of men” (Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 157). Through this study, I provided narratives from exclusively Latina women of different backgrounds. Their ages which included 22 to 69 years of age, their educational levels were diverse as were their occupations. All of the women acknowledge that the violence portrayed in *La Reina Del Sur* was a true depiction of the realities within Latin countries and the drug cartels. However, for women who identified themselves as Mexican or had lived in Latin countries,

found personal connections to the violence shown in the storyline. “The concept of intersectionality as it relates to identity should help us understand the multidimensional ways people experience life-how people see themselves, and how they are treated by others-while also providing a particularly useful lens for examining categorical treatments of race, gender and sexuality” (Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 164).

Despite having different experiences in their viewing of *telenovelas*, they agreed that the content shown on bisexuality and lesbianism in *La Reina Del Sur* had never been seen before in a *telenovela*. This area seemed to have the most contradictions among them. “Because intersectional knowledge is grounded in the everyday lives of people of diverse backgrounds, it is seen as an important tool linking theory with practice. Intersectional work can validate the lives and histories of persons and subgroups previously ignored or marginalized, and it is used to help empower communities and the people in them” (Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 16). Some women found that the content shown could influence younger generations in a negative manner. While others described that as a society we have become more exposed to homosexual relationships which for many were now seen as normal. Due to religious beliefs, another potential participant expressed feeling uncomfortable with lesbian scenes being shown on *telenovelas*. While three women who identified themselves as lesbians also expressed discrepancies among their opinions of the content. Bringing forth the narratives as they relate to the relationships shown in the storyline, specifically lesbian and bisexual relationships in women within *telenovelas*, are areas which are rare within academic work. The representations of lesbians and bisexual women in *La Reina Del Sur* are problematic and could contribute toward already negative stereotypes and stigmas. Intersectionality recognizes the diversity in women and their different experiences, and it also embraces their identity. Based on my findings, I am

hoping to bring consciousness to common misconceptions and acts of oppression portrayed in the medium of *telenovelas* in regards to women's issues pertaining to class, misogyny, stereotypes, and sexual orientation.

## **5.2 Limitations and Implications**

Some of the limitations considered while implementing this study was the understanding that perceptions of *telenovelas* and intersectionality of class, misogyny and stereotypes of women may vary from individual to individual. Family, sexual orientation, and cultural backgrounds were also contributing factors to variances in perceptions of women's issues. In addition, for Spanish language limited viewers, subtitles in English did not always produce the same meaning or effect as for those who fully understand the Spanish language. However, for English-dominant viewers, they felt they understood the messages and plot quite well.

Another limitation was the lapse time in which the series was seen. Some of the women indicated they had recently seen it through Netflix and YouTube. For some women, they had seen the series during its first run in 2011, while others viewed it during its second re-run. Some participants had a difficult time recalling some of the events and names of the characters. At times, the recounting of the details from the plot different when compared to the actual storyline. However, a positive aspect to this limitation was that the most important episodes were present in their memory due to their impact. Nonetheless, the main ideas for this series were still quite present in the women's perceptions.

Interviewing more participants would have been ideal. Listening carefully to their narratives as they compared the *telenovela* to their own life experiences offered various opportunities to synthesize their information. Another consideration would have been to study other *telenovelas* in which it demanded a female leading role in order to formulate a comparison.

To have studied the character of other female leading roles and their impacts on the female viewers could have been insightful, as this could have indicated a shift in *telenovelas* in general. As mentioned in the literature review, traditionally men do not admit to viewing *telenovelas*. According to the women's interviews, it was shared that more men are watching. Most of the women did question whether they were interested in the female actors' sex appeal, the action-packed story-line or both. Interestingly, I would like to research in the future male perceptions on feminism and strong female roles within *telenovelas*.

Despite the fact that only 16 participants were interviewed, their narratives were valuable and in some cases correlated often when there were similarities in their background. However, I found that each person had their own unique epistemological contribution in understanding women's perspectives. As previously mentioned, the study of bisexuality and lesbianism in *telenovelas* is a new area that is worth exploring and understanding. Perhaps this study might shed light on understanding women of different sexual orientations and identities. Through an intersectional lens, it is noted that women should never be categorized as group of women with the same plight. In fact, we share commonalities as we may have encountered acts of oppression which affects us as a gender.



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## APPENDIX A

### Participant information:

Alias or pseudo name:

Age:

Occupation:

Education:

Nationality:

Sexual Orientation (optional):

What is your primary language?

### Questions:

1. At what age did you engage in watching *telenovelas*? Tell me about your experiences.
2. Have you watched *La Reina Del Sur* in its entirety? How long ago did you watch?
3. Tell me about how you came to watch *La Reina Del Sur*?
4. If you did not watch *La Reina Del Sur* in its entirety, why did you stop watching?
5. Based on the episodes you have watched, describe the episode which you remember most? Why do you believe this episode is most memorable to you?

6. Based on the following, describe what this image conveys to you.



7. Based on the following, describe what these images convey to you.



Before



After

8. Based on the following, describe what these images convey to you.



9. Do you watch or discuss *La Reina Del Sur* with others? If yes, what do you talk about?

10. What are some similarities and differences between real life and *La Reina Del Sur* relationships?

11. Have you ever wished you could be one of the characters in *La Reina Del Sur*? If yes, who and why?

12. How do you feel about women's roles in *La Reina Del Sur*?

13. What message did *La Reina Del Sur* convey about women? Explain.

14. Can you distinguish the difference in class in *La Reina Del Sur*? Explain.

15. Do you feel *La Reina Del Sur*'s female roles are either shown to be weak or powerful? Explain.

16. How do you feel about sexuality in women's roles in *La Reina Del Sur*?

17. How do you feel about the relationship between Teresa Mendoza's and Patty?

18. If you have not seen *La Reina Del Sur* in its entirety, do you think you will continue to do so on your own time? Why?

19. Why do you believe people watch *La Reina Del Sur*?

20. If you could change something in *La Reina Del Sur*, what would it be? Explain.

21. What is feminism to you?

22. Is there anything else you would like me to know?

## APPENDIX B

### Información de la participante:

Alias o pseudónimo:

Edad:

Ocupación:

Nivel de educación:

Nacionalidad:

Orientación sexual (opcional):

¿Cuál es su primer idioma?

### Preguntas:

1. ¿A qué edad comenzó a ver *telenovelas*? Dígame acerca de sus experiencias.
2. ¿Ha visto completamente La Reina Del Sur? ¿Durante cuánto tiempo la vio?
3. ¿Por qué decidió ver La Reina del Sur?
4. Si usted no vio La Reina Del Sur completamente, ¿Por qué dejó de verla?
5. Basándose en los episodios que vio, describa el episodio que usted más recuerda.  
¿Por qué piensa que este episodio es el más memorable para usted?

6. Describa qué le transmite esta imagen.





7. Describa que le transmiten estas imágenes.



antes



después



8. Describa que le transmiten estas imágenes.



9. ¿Usted vio o discutió acerca de La Reina Del Sur con otras personas? ¿Qué hablas sobre la telenovela?
10. ¿Alguna vez deseó que pudiera ser una de los personajes de La Reina Del Sur? Si lo hizo, ¿quién fue y por qué?
11. ¿Qué personaje de La Reina Del Sur recuerdas más? ¿por qué?
12. ¿Cómo se siente acerca del rol de las mujeres en La Reina Del Sur?
13. ¿Qué mensaje transmite La Reina Del Sur acerca de las mujeres? Explíquelo.
14. ¿Puede usted distinguir la diferencia de clases en La Reina Del Sur? Explíquelo.
15. ¿Usted siente que los roles femeninos en La Reina Del Sur demuestran ser débiles o poderosos? Explíquelo.
16. ¿Cómo se siente acerca de la sexualidad de los roles femeninos en La Reina Del Sur?
17. ¿Cómo se siente acerca de la relación entre Teresa Mendoza y Patty?
18. ¿Si usted no ha visto La Reina Del Sur completamente, usted piensa que lo hará? ¿Por qué?
19. ¿Por qué piensa usted que la gente mira La Reina Del Sur?
20. Si usted pudiera cambiar algo de La Reina Del Sur, ¿que sería? Explíquelo.

21. ¿Qué es el feminismo para usted?
22. ¿Hay alguna otra cosa que le gustaría compartir?

## APPENDIX C

The following is a list of the *telenovelas* mentioned in this study as well as the year in which they first aired.

*Angelica, Mi Vida* (1988)

*El Chema* (2016)

*El País de las Mujeres* (1998)

*El Señor de los Cielos* (2013)

*Ingovernable* (2017)

*K-11* (2012)

*La Piloto* (2017)

*La Reina Del Sur* (2011)

*La Vuida Negra* (2014)

*Las Tontas No Van al Cielo* (2008)

*La Querida del Centario* (2016)

*Los Ricos Tambien Lloran* (1979)

*Maria La Del Barrio* (1995)

*Maria Mercedes* (1992)

*Marimar* (1994)

*Muchachitas* (1991)

*Mundo De Juguete* (1974)

*Narcos* (2015)

*Señora Acero* (2014)

*Señora Acero 3: La Coyote* (2016)

*Sin Tetas No Hay Paraiso* (2006)

*Sin Senos No Hay Paraiso* (2008)

*Sin Senos Si Hay Paraiso* (2016)

## VITA

Donna García Siañez was born in El Paso, Texas. She graduated from Bel Air High School in 1986. She earned her Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies degree from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1998. She has dedicated many years as an educator at the Socorro Independent School District.

She believes in the principle of learning from every educational opportunity in order to improve on many levels. In 2015, she was offered a Region XIX Dual Credit Scholarship to attend graduate school at the University of Texas at El Paso. Therefore, by obtaining a Master's degree in Communication, she hopes to provide her students the opportunity to obtain college credit while in high school. Equally important, the experience of completing a rigorous graduate program has provided her with invaluable knowledge and life-changing personal growth.

Her research interests include: cultural studies, feminist studies, and positive deviance.

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