

THE REPRESENTATIONS OF LATINA ACTRESSES IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
HOLLYWOOD COMMERCIAL FILMS

THESIS

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## DEDICATION

For and in honor of my parents,  
Efren and Lucy Villanueva,  
who have always stressed academics and  
understood the importance of my academic endeavors.

And in loving memory of my grandparents,  
Tommy and Lydia Rodriguez.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Hollywood actors have long been critiqued for their successes and failures both cinematically and personally. Glamorous movie stars receive even more attention as the media zero in on the characters and stereotypes they play, and also on their backgrounds, lifestyles, trials and tribulations. Likewise, for many decades, plots, genres, and themes of movies have been analyzed by media writers and scholars across the globe. As time has gone by, studies on the movies and the actors have become more specific with analyses of movie eras, how movies reflect socio-historical contexts, how the movies and film industry are influenced by technological innovations, as well as how men, women, races and ethnicities are portrayed. In recent years more literature has emerged addressing with more details the representations of races and ethnicities and whether the roles assigned to ethnic/racial minorities are positive or negative reflections of different groups of people. In terms of Latino images in particular, several qualitative studies have been conducted evaluating Latina/o actors and their roles. However, to date no quantitative study has been conducted assessing how Latina actors in Hollywood films have been portrayed in selected roles or character types.

This thesis bridges the gap in this field by providing primarily a quantitative and to a less degree some qualitative assessments of Latina representations in a selection of

top grossing (blockbuster) films during the first decade of the twenty-first century (2001-2010). A foundation and justification for the study is cultivation theory.

Cultivation theory is used because it suggests that media contributes to the creation of a culture's frameworks or knowledge and underlying general concepts (Gerbner, 1990, p. 255). Thus the way that Latina/os are socially and culturally portrayed on the silver screen may affect how the general public learns about them. The images on screen specifically present to audiences certain depictions of habits and lifestyles about different types of Latina/os. These depictions may leave positive or negative impressions on U.S. Latinos looking for cultural connections. Consequently those images may potentially impact not only Latinos, but all audiences, especially people who have limited and frequent firsthand interactions with Latinos of diverse backgrounds. The cultivation of the Latina/o cultural process may occur due to resonance in which a film viewer sees things that are most harmonious with the film viewer's everyday life (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 328). In addition, cultivation occurs a second way: by mainstreaming, in which for heavy viewers, film symbols will "monopolize and dominate other sources of information and ideas about the world" (p. 328). According to these authors, "(p)eople's internalized social realities eventually move toward" the culturally dominant reality more closely associated with realities seen in film as opposed to any objective reality" (p. 328). Therefore, whether or not an audience member at a movie is intentionally looking for a character or a social situation to relate to, he or she is nevertheless learning, albeit even if just subjectively, about people and culture. According to Beltrán (2009), entertainment media are one of the most important places where ideas, myths, fictions, ideologies, and social models are produced, displayed, negotiated, and challenged.

Latina stars are the heroines and idols “that populate and invigorate this landscape” (Beltrán, 2009, p.5). Cultural studies theory explains how “individuals or social groups use media to create and foster forms of culture that structure everyday life” (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 201). Baran and Davis advocate that media have become a primary means by which people experience or learn about many aspects of the world around them. Even if people do not learn things directly from the media, they learn about them “from other people who get their ideas of the world from media” (Baran & Davis, 2009, p. 201).

In essence, systematic analysis of the images of Latinos in general, and of Latinas in particular can, help us better understand how an important segment of the Hispanic population and its culture are being portrayed in popular culture in the US and the world. Furthermore, by understanding how Hispanic culture is portrayed, we will have insight into the images of Hispanics prevalent in the dominant culture.

### **Objectives**

This study seeks to assess how Latinas have been defined to U.S. society in their portrayals in the top grossing films of the silver screen during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Defining images may include both ethnic and gender stereotypes that further may be categorized as being positive, neutral, negative, or ambiguous. To that end, the study seeks to answer these questions:

- (a) How have Latina actresses been portrayed in the selected films between 2001 and 2010?
- (b) What classifications apply to the characters and roles played by Latina actresses?

(c) Have the characters and roles played by Latina actresses been positive or negative?

Upon answering these questions, the findings from this research will allow for comparisons with what previous studies have found about the representations of Latinas in film.

## **Background**

**U.S. Hispanic population.** The U.S. Census Bureau (2006) reported that the Hispanic population steadily increased from 1970 to 2000 and was projected to grow every decade through 2050. In 2000, Hispanics became the largest multicultural group (Hispanic Market Overview, 2011, p. 6). The most recent released 2010 Census data indicate that the Hispanic population accounted for more than half of the growth in the total U.S. population. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The U.S. Census Bureau revealed that between 2000 and 2010 the Hispanic population grew 43% increasing from 35.3 million in 2000 to 50.5 million in 2010. By 2010, Hispanics comprised 16% of the total U.S. population of 308.7 million. Given this demographic shift, it is important to identify whether there is also an increase in representation in Hollywood films, which are conveyers of social and cultural patterns and issues for a large part of the American public.

**What encompasses a Latina?** For the purpose of study, Latina entails women of Latin origin in the United States, as well as women from the Spanish speaking Latin American countries, Spain, and even Portuguese-speaking countries such as Brazil and Portugal. Thus, all women with Latin or Hispanic ancestry will be subject to scrutiny in their portrayals in the selected twenty-first century films.

But defining a specific type that fits all Latinas is challenging if not impossible because Hispanics are of different races. Rodriguez (1997) reports that her friend, Victoria Medina, founder and president of The Studio, an organization designed to help Latinos pursuing the acting business sent out a casting call for an actress to play a Latina part. Three women she regarded as genuine Latinas showed up. One was fair-skinned, blond and tall. The second was tan and of medium build with dark hair and eyes. The third had darker skin and was of African descent. This is the “reality of Latinos in the U.S.” (Rodriguez, 1997, p. 1). Examples of all three include Cameron Diaz who falls under the first category, Selma Hayek who is representative of the second, and Lauren Velez who is a Latina actress of African descent. All three types of Latina actresses may answer the when a casting call uses the generic Latina term. However, as this study documents, those who present Latina characters on film seek only certain images that don’t usually represent all three types. Also, Latina actresses, depending on their physical features may portray Latina or non-Latina characters.

Nevertheless, certain stereotypes of Latinas have been predominant in the visual entertainment industry. These are presented in the literature in the next chapter and serve as a guide for the analysis of this thesis.

### **Organization of Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters.

Chapter I introduces the objectives of the study, the current situation in the United States of Latinos or Hispanics and definitions of Latinas.

Chapter II looks at related literature concerning representations of Latina/os and other minorities in film. It includes the background on the history of Latina/o presence in

film and other media. The last section presents the more detailed research questions that guided this study.

Chapter III discusses the methodology of the study. This includes the time frame for the study and how the sample was chosen and narrowed down. Also, coding issues are clarified and included is an explanation of the validity of the data.

Chapter IV presents the findings and answers each of the research questions, which are presented in Chapter II. This is presented in table format. Also, this chapter reports the statistical analysis of data. The statistical results are presented both as table formats and as graphic representation with a bar graph.

Chapter V provides a summary of the research and analysis along with conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for future research on this topic.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins by reviewing past literature concerning representations of Latina/os in film. It includes the background on the history of Latina/o presence in film and other media and also a description of the specific stereotypes that are then used to guide the quantitative assessment of this study. The last section presents the more detailed research questions that guided this study.

#### **Earliest Works**

There have been several works documenting the progress of Latina/os in film both in front of and behind the camera. Those writings have contributed to assessments of portrayals of Latinas beginning with the silent film era of the 1920s that focused on turn of the century images and the Mexican Revolution.

One of the earliest works to focus on Latinas in Hollywood film is Rosa Linda Fregoso's (1993) *Bronze screen: Chicana and Chicano film culture*. Fregoso explores film culture specifically by, for, and about Chicanas and Chicanos. Chicanos is the term which many Mexican-Americans identified themselves as during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, Chicana/o producers documented the social and political activism of the Chicano Movement. Their films introduced social and cultural counter-visions of history, identity, social reality, and resistance politics that, until that time, were often inaccurately presented by filmmakers in the dominant culture.

Fregoso suggested that without newer and different films women wouldn't be viewed in a positive and contributing way the men were. Although she points out what images were considered positive for women, she based her reasoning on informal qualitative data of feminism and gender empowerment. She also restricted her focus to the Chicana era of film and did not address Hollywood films and empowering positive visions that have emerged since.

Rodriguez (1997) declares that in addition to being the largest and earliest Latino group in film, the "Chicanos/Mexicans have the longest history in film" (p. 73). She reveals similarities between the historic depictions of Chicanos, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latinos in film, and addresses stereotypes that were used in the past and are used in the present. She comments that what makes Latina images different from other minority groups is that there are so few images, that they are so narrow, and lately, or at least as of 1997, they are consistently negative and lower class. Berumen (1995) highlights Latinas who were cast in secondary roles with negative characteristics such as the Puerto Rican nurse who was also a heroin addict in *Fort Apache: The Bronx* (1981), the promiscuous Mexican main in *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* (1986), and the Latina cab driver, Esmeralda Villalobos in *Pulp Fiction* (1995) who expresses a special interest in what it feels like to kill a man. In the end, Rodriguez was left asking where the positive representations of everyday Latina women were. To a degree, Rodriguez suggests that the depictions typically represented onscreen may reflect a general perception of the position of Hispanics in U.S. society as is just what cultivation theory predicts.



Other academic scholars have also contributed research and analysis regarding films and especially in the identification of images and representation of Latinos. But those efforts have also been primarily qualitative and subjective. These scholars have defined cinematic film by decades and certain technological and socio-historical eras. In the first two parts of the book *“Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media”* edited by Rodriguez (1997), the authors of the chapters highlight the extent to which Latina/os have been presented and misrepresented in television shows and news stories, and how they have been stereotyped in movies. All those chapters focus on English language television and films produced in the U.S. between 1900 and 1994. There is extensive coverage of how Latina/os are portrayed in the movies, television, and other media (Flores, 2008; Hoffman & Noriega, 2004; Noriega, 1992) as well as the media’s projections on the history of the Latino ethnicity in the U.S. (Rodriguez, 1997). Based on Rodriguez’s and the other authors’ observations, there have been general consensus on certain conclusions. First, Latinos are underrepresented and misrepresented in media. In terms of television news stories much statistical information on coverage exists (Carveth & Alverio, 1996; Pease, Ted, Smith, Erna, & Subervi-Vélez, 2001; Rodriguez, 1997; Subervi-Vélez et al., 1994; Subervi with Torres, Montalvo, & collaborators, 2004; Subervi with Torres, Montalvo, & collaborators, 2005). Latinos have only a small presence in news stories and when shown, they are consistently depicted in stories of poverty and crime related stories (Subervi with Torres, Montalvo, & collaborators, 2005). The most recent Network Brownout Report contained quantitative and qualitative assessments of news stories about Latinos and Latino issues that aired in 2005 on ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News, and NBC Nightly News

(Montalvo & Torres, 2006). Out of an estimated 12,600 stories aired by ABC, CBS and NBC, only 105 (0.83%) were found to be exclusively about Latinos or Latino-related issues. This is a minor increase from 2004 when Latino stories comprised 0.72% of coverage. In addition, a content analysis from two sample weeks of network news coverage found Latinos continued to be nearly absent from general news coverage. Out of 115 stories the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) examined, only four were exclusively about Latinos and only two featured Latinos as news sources. In terms of news magazines, NAHJ found in 2005 that out of 1,547 magazine stories published in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*, only 18 stories (1.2%) were predominantly about Latinos (Gavrilos, 2006, p. 3). Twelve of the 18 stories predominantly about Latinos focused on immigration. In addition, only “five of the 1,547 total stories (0.3%) significantly included Latinos in non-Latino stories” (Gavrilos, 2006, p. 3). For television, the National Latino Media Council (NLMC) (2009) publishes report cards on the four major networks, ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX, in which they monitor the progress and/or shortfalls of the networks’ efforts to diversify their workforce and increase minority vendor contracts in a calendar year. In the 9th annual “Report Cards” summarizing 2009 it was found that the number of American Latinos both in front of and behind the camera has increased. Despite this, NLMC wrote that the increase was just “incremental numbers” for the industry and not reflective of the national population of Latinos (National Latino Media Council, 2009). The Center for Media and Public Affairs revealed that in television programming over a 30-year period, from 1955-1986, Hispanic characters only made up two percent of all characters (Rodriguez, 1997, p. 23). According to the *World Almanac and Book of Facts* (1996), on movies set in areas with

large proportions of Latino residents, Latino themes are not present and Latinos themselves are almost unseen. Latinos are barely to be seen in movies set in New York like *Home Alone 2* (1992), *Ghostbusters* (1984), *Santa Claus* (1994), Latinos are lacking in substance.

Second, Latino images in Hollywood films have become more negative over time. Rodriguez (1997) points out several specific examples. In films set in New York like *Three Men and a Baby* (1987) and *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) the Latinos portrayed reflected stereotypes such as the housekeeper and having thick Spanish accents. Rodriguez adds that images “connecting crime and Latinos are of long standing in Hollywood films” in many major movies such as *West Side Story* (1961), *Zoot Suit* (1981), *Ghost* (1990) and many others especially in the 1980s through 1990s (p. 78).

Beltrán’s (2009) most recent publication provides a strong framework to follow for defining actors and actresses in different film eras. She evaluates the evolution of Latina/o and national identities in the American imagination or what she terms “U.S. eyes” (p. 1) Her research is organized in terms of content analysis of social, historic, and technological phenomena in each movie era. She bases her study on previous scholars’ proposition that media representation and stardom “provides important and telling clues regarding the sociopolitical status of a people within a society” (Beltrán, 2009, p. 2).

### **Latina/os Initial Presence in Film**

The perceptions of Latinas in the past eras were a combination of good and bad images, especially in the silent film era. There has been the assumption that the first Latin wave of stars occurred in the late-1990s with entertainment stars such as Jennifer Lopez, Ricky Martin, and Christina Aguilera emerging. However, Beltrán (2009)

identifies the first Latin wave as occurring in the mid- to late 1920s. This time was known as the Golden Age of U.S. silent films and only a few actors of Latina/o descent were among the top stars. These Latino and Latina actors were hired for their perceived box office potential (Beltrán, 2009, p. 17). They were viewed as attractive, trendy, and marketable as international stars. These stars became known as “Latinidad” which is Latina/o Hollywood actors who were all portrayed as popular, exotic, and received coverage by top glamour magazines. Their ethnicity was in high demand to meet the current fascination of having “an air of mystery and darkly handsome appearances” (Beltrán, 2009, p. 21).

### **Hollywood’s Past Perceptions of Latinas**

The lifestyles of actresses like Dolores Del Rio were featured in film fan magazines such as *Photoplay* which proclaimed her as the leader of the Latin invasion into film. The press drew attention to Del Rio’s aristocratic and educational upbringing and her Mexican heritage. Despite being in demand for her looks, she was at first chosen to play French, Polynesian, or Russian women and not Mexican characters. In addition, critiques of her sex appeal weren’t far behind. A *Variety* magazine critic predicted the comedic World War I film *What Price Glory* (1926) would be a success because of Del Rio. The critic commented Del Rio “registers like a house afire. It is no wonder she had the whole army after her!” (Fred, 1926). Del Rio plays Charmaine, France’s most flirtatious village beauty who had two U.S. marines rivaling for her attentions (Keser, 2007). It is Del Rio’s sex appeal in terms of her looks and physical features that was highlighted by critics and attributed to the success of films. Later, Del Rio was cast in *The Loves of Carmen* (1927) as the title character who is described as a Spanish siren

again highlighting her physical appeal as opposed to her acting talent. Immediately after, fan magazines published articles heavily playing on stereotypical statements in regards to Del Rio's high sex appeal and implying that she Rio inherently was able to pull off the role well because of her ethnicity.

The actors and authors who gave testimonies in *The Bronze Screen* (2002) documentary revealed how Latiness was perceived in terms of physical features. They relayed their personal experiences to exemplify the happenings in Hollywood film throughout the decades. For example, during the 1940s pin-up era, Rita Hayworth was considered the all-American dream girl. She was actually born Margarita Cansino and was of Spanish descent. In the 1930s she retained her original name and played Latina characters. However, her transition into the all-American, specifically Anglo, girl was attributed to the push of Hollywood which set out to "deLatinoize" her by way of dying her hair blond from dark and then tingeing it red and changing her name (Racho & De Los Santos, 2002).

Twenty years later, Raquel Welch for her breakout role in *One Million Years B.C.* (1966) was told to dye her hair blond. When Welch was interviewed for the documentary *The Bronze Screen* (2002), she commented she was shocked by that request to dye her hair, but she did it nonetheless. She explained the producers' reasoning behind a different hair color was because Welch's role was a good guy. The told her, "You're a good girl. Only the bad girl has dark hair" (Racho & De Los Santos, 2002). In addition, many other popular older and modern Latina/o actors gave testimony that they were strongly advised to change their names because more than likely they would not get popular roles or that their name was just too hard to say and it was not pleasing to try.

## Latina/o Stereotypes

In his 2002 book *Latino images in film*, Berg analyzed numerous writings about stereotyping and pointed out that this concept is the result of the combination of category-making, ethnocentrism, and prejudice that emerges from eleven theses on common characteristics of stereotypes no matter if they are individual or collective, mediated or not. He focused on social scientific theory to survey psychological and sociological perspectives in order to clarify some more prominent stereotyping features, and to develop a working definition of the stereotypes. He argued that building on social science theory “provides a way to connect film criticism with lived experience” (Berg, 2002, p. 3). Thus, Berg set out to operationalize “stereotyping, to analyze how it functions in film, and then to apply that knowledge to the critical analysis of the depiction of Latinos in U.S. cinema” (Berg, 2002, p. 3). Using those theoretical frameworks he then identified six main stereotypes of Latinos/as images in film which are one of the strongest factors that contribute to how Latinos are perceived. He categorizes the Latino stereotypes as *el bandido*, the male buffoon, and the Latin lover. Latinas are categorized as the harlot, the female clown, and the dark lady. *El bandido* was antagonist to the Anglo clean-cut cowboy. According to Berg, he is “dirty and unkempt, usually displaying an unshaven face, missing teeth, and disheveled, oily hair” (p. 68). *El bandido* often has scars and scowls and behaviorally is “vicious, cruel treacherous, shifty and dishonest; psychologically, he is irrational, overly emotional, and quick to resort to violence” (p. 68). The creation of the stereotype of *el bandido* is attributed to the “prejudices and attitudes of the time that had been constructed and nurtured by the historical experience of the Mexican-American War, Manifest Destiny, the Monroe

Doctrine, and segregation” (Berumen, 2003, p. 19). This stereotyped image became available to the widespread audience of cinema and thus gave negative perceptions of the Latino population to the public. *El bandido* has since evolved in contemporary film to be either the “*cholo*” gangster from the hood or the slick, clean, suit-wearing drug lord (Berg, 2002, p. 68-69). The male buffoon is a secondary character who, as the name implies is not smart and often slow to catch on to his surroundings. Berg points out that what makes this character funny and “what audiences are give to laugh at, are the very characteristics that separate him from Hollywood’s vision of the WASP American mainstream” (p. 71-72). Key identifiers include him being simpleminded and unable to master English. In addition, like Ricky Ricardo from the television series, *I Love Lucy*, the male buffoon “childishly regresses into emotionality” like when Ricky would explode into Spanish rants (p. 72). The Latin lover is for the Latino males the most redeeming character. He is “the dashing and magnetic male Other” (Berg, 2002, p. 76). The Latin lover is the “possessor of a primal sexuality that made him capable of making a sensuous but dangerous – and clearly non-WASP—brand of love” (p. 76). The Latin lover has been a constant screen character played by several Latin actors from Ricardo Montalbán and Antonio Banderas. Berg declares that these actors unfortunately reiterate the combination of characteristics of: eroticism, exoticism, tenderness tinged with violence and danger, all adding up to the romantic promise that, sexually, things could very well get out of control” (p. 76).

According to Berg, the harlot is the female stereotype that corresponds to *el bandido* “in the American cinema, particularly in Westerns” (p. 70). She is seen in the cantina girl. The harlot is a “secondary character, lusty and hot tempered” (p. 70). The

harlot is “a slave to her passions, her conduct is simplistically attributed to her inherent nymphomania” (p. 71). Berg states there is no deeper motivation for her actions provided to movie viewers; the harlot is “basically a sex machine innately lusting for a white man” (p.71). The female clown, like her male buffoon counterpart, is a secondary and comic relief character. Berg points out that female clown, “like the harlot, exemplifies a common device that the Hollywood narrative employs to neutralize the screen Latina’s sexuality” (p. 73). Berg adds on that this is a necessary requirement because the hero in a film “must have a reason to reject the Latina in favor of the Anglo woman, thereby maintaining the WASP status quo” (p. 73). In order for that to occur, the Latina’s sexual allure must somehow be null and void. Berg states this happens by her character being sullied by the fact she is promiscuous and criminal in adherence with the harlot stereotypes or that she is ridiculed in that she is portrayed easy sexually or is simply silly and comical (p. 73). She is a *senorita* who is flamboyant and colorful. Some of the best examples stretch back into the 1920s to 1940s with actresses like Lupe Vélez. She is considered the “classic female clown ... best known for her role as the ditzy ‘Mexican Spitfire’ in a series of eight films” (p. 75). Another example is Carmen Miranda who displayed “exaggeration to the point of caricature, another way to elicit derisive laughter and belittle the Latina Other” (p. 75). Miranda is known infamously for donning “multicolored costumes and fruit-covered hats” while performing “splashy ‘Latin’ musical numbers” (p. 75). According to Berg, the female clown “tradition of exotic, comical and oversexed Latina show-biz performer lives on” (p. 75). The dark lady is the redeeming character for the females. Berg states she “is virginal, inscrutable, aristocratic—and erotically appealing precisely because of these characteristics” (p. 76).



She is a Madonna that lives by good morals. She is cautious, reserved, and opaque where “her Anglo sister is direct and forthright ... boisterous ... transparent” (p. 76). It is “her cool distance that makes her fascinating to Anglo males” (p. 76). The dark lady is exemplified in the Puerto Rican immigrant, Maria from *West Side Story* (1961) who attracts the attention and love of the Anglo-American, Tony.

Berg’s analyses have proven valuable in coding characters still present in today’s Hollywood films. Sometimes these stereotypes are combined or altered superficially. For example, Penélope Cruz and Selma Hayek star in *Bandidas* (2006) in which they portray the title name as well as humorous female clown actions. Thus, although the stereotypes may have evolved and changed some, the “core defining—and demeaning—characteristics have been consistent for more than a century and are still evident today” (Berg, 2002, p. 66).

Berg’s uses film theory for seeking to grasp the nature of the medium of film, and uses film criticism, an interpretive method to better understand the complexities of Latina/o characters in this medium, are great contributions to the field. However, in spite of the contributions of his analyses, they lack empirical quantitative assessments of the presence of Latina/os in film.

### **The Substance of the Latina Character**

Rodriguez (1997) comments, that for the most part, images of Latinas have been one dimensional and simple. The Latina character has no more substance than her being “passive, dependent, and with an unreserved sexual appetite” (Rodriguez, 1997, p. 2). According to Rodriguez, the Latina character is always dependent on a man, easy, promiscuous, and weak whether she is a spitfire, prostitute or more rarely a secretary.

She is a woman who is always ready for love and sleeps with a man that she may never ultimately be united with or she uses sex to get her to the top. A Latina woman may occasionally be depicted as a strong character, but is eventually subdued by a man who quenches her *caliente* (hot) passion and saves her from her misery (Basinger, 1993; Butler Flora, 1973; Fregoso, 1993; Lopez, 1991; Rodriguez, 1997). In *The Mask of Zorro* (1998), the character Elena Montero played by Catherine Zeta-Jones reveals in a confessional she needs forgiveness for having impure thoughts about a man, Zorro. Based on her initial introduction with him, she identifies him as a bandit. It is a definite clash for her to yearn for a bandit when she has aristocratic upbringing as the daughter of a Don, Spanish royalty. In the confessional she says, "I try to behave properly the way my father would like me to, but I'm afraid my heart is too wild... I had impure thoughts about a man... I think he was a bandit or something. He wore a black mask...But something in his eyes captured me. I felt warm, feverish... lustful" (*The Mask of Zorro*, 1998). At one point in the movie Zorro steals a map from Elena Montero's father and she confronts him to get it back by engaging in a swordfight. Ultimately, she is bested by Zorro, a man, who teases her throughout the swordfight by stealing kisses that angers her and throws her off technically and emotionally. In the end she is seduced by his charms and both share a passionate kiss in which she is unsatisfied and frustrated when he exits leaving her leaning in for more. Although Elena is a strong, educated, and overall a good girl, the theme of having her rebellious desires quenched by a man, Zorro, are subtly present. She chooses passion and excitement over a potential suitor in the form of a captain who works for her father.

Despite these great contributions from the aforementioned scholars, there is still no research that quantitatively measures the representation of Latina actresses in terms of role type, character type, screen time, and the most prevalent presence in genres.

Analysis of those issues is the focus of this thesis.

### **Research Questions**

The goal is to evaluate the current representation of Latina actresses and to determine if there have been significant changes in the representations of female Latina actresses and characters. Upon doing so, this study will see if the images have evolved to having more substance than previous eras that displayed Latina women as being passive, promiscuous, sexual, and dependent (Berg, 2002; Rodriguez, 1997). In order to do so, the following research questions will be answered.

RQ1. What is the number of films with discernable adult Latina actresses portraying adult characters in the first decade of the twenty-first century?

RQ2. Of the discernable speaking roles by adult Latina actresses, how many were Latina and non-Latina characters?

Research questions three and four involve role type, which includes being categorized as lead or main character, supporting, or background, and character ethnicity. Previous films have shown it is not unlikely to see Latina actresses play non-Latina characters. Regardless of the character's ethnicity and race, representation of Latina women may still be assessed and interpreted on-screen. Thus,

RQ3. What are the most dominant specific role types Latina actresses playing Latina characters are portrayed in?

RQ4. What are the most dominant specific role types Latina actresses playing non-Latina characters are portrayed in?

RQ5. Are Latinas characters presented in distinctive Latina stereotypes?

RQ6. Are Latina actresses as Latina characters presented in distinctive gender stereotypes associated with women?

RQ7. Are Latina actresses as non-Latina characters presented in distinctive gender stereotypes associated with women?

RQ8. Given the role types and Latina and gender stereotypes, have most of the representations been positive or negative?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This study proposes to evaluate the representations of Latina actresses in Hollywood commercial films and by employing a content analysis technique to explore the significant roles portrayed by female Latina actresses in the last 10 years. A content analysis is an appropriate research technique “for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications” (Berelson, 1952, p. 74). It is a research tool that focuses “on the actual content and internal features of media” (Busha & Harter, 1980). According to Busha and Harter, it helps determine the presence of concepts, themes, characters and other features within texts or sets of texts, or in this instance film, “and to quantify this presence in an objective manner.”

#### **Sampling Process**

To determine Latina representation in Hollywood commercial films a critical content analysis will be conducted on select top 10 grossing films of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the years 2001 through 2010. The reason for selecting only the most successful movies in terms of gross revenues is because such films are the ones most likely to have been viewed by a wide range of American audiences across the country and possibly around the world. The time frame selected is arbitrary, but a new century is a milestone worthy of assessment to see if there has been progress from previous decades and the past century. The sample selection, analysis of data, coding and

statistical analysis for the Latina actress representation in film was conducted during the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011.

### **Sample Selection Criteria for Film Exclusion**

The ranking order and film names for the top 10 grossing film of each year were referenced on both the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDb) and Box Office Mojo websites. Only those films with plots pertaining to present-time U.S. society were subject to analysis for Latina representation. Excluded from further analysis were films that presented the following criteria:

**1. Animated and documentary films.** Animated films were excluded as they are not real life depictions of everyday scenarios within US society. In addition, documentary films were excluded because although they do document reality, they do so with focus on specific themes or subjects and with no plotted story or set. Further justification for this decision is that both film types respectively have their own Oscar categories of “Documentary (Feature)” and “Animated Feature Film” that distinctly separates them from other Hollywood films (History of the Academy Awards, n.d.).

**2. Alternate realities.** Films solely based in alternate realities such that of a made-up world not with a based setting or a connection to Earth were also excluded. For example, *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy (2001, 2002, and 2003) is set in a fictional world called Middle-earth.

**3. Pre-modern and pre- twenty-first century films.** Films set predominantly in past time periods were excluded as they are not relatable to current real-time scenarios. Films that depict plots from past time periods are not able to reflect images of modern social, political, and economic eras. For example, a clear choice for exclusion is the film

*300* (2006) as it is set in 480 B.C. Another example includes *Walk the Line* (2005) that covers from the Great Depression through the late 1960s and depicts social class and equality changes during the Civil Rights Movement that cannot reflect present scenarios or images. The choice to not exclude futuristic settings is justified by the hope that futuristic settings should reflect current social trends.

**4. Foreign films.** Also excluded were foreign films, foreign country settings, and languages other than English. However, these movies were subject to a thorough overview before exclusion as they may or may not reflect American society and Latin images. Films that take place partially in foreign countries were not be automatically excluded from being analyzed if a connection to the U.S. could be made in terms of partial setting in the U.S. country, U.S. associated settings, or involvement of American people. Mannerisms and associations to American and possibly Latina culture have the opportunity to still make an impression on a movie viewer.

**5. Language.** In addition to the aforementioned conditions for exclusion, language could have also been a factor, but not a sole reason to exclude a film. For example, the blockbuster, *Fearless* (2006) starring Jet Li was excluded because the majority of it was filmed in Chinese and is set in the backdrop of China. On the other hand, the movie *Under the Same Moon (La misma luna)* (2007), though filmed the majority of the time in Spanish with English subtitles, is set with the backdrop of the south and west regions of U.S. as the protagonist travels across the country. Thus, the latter film would be applicable to evaluate for images of Latinas.

In addition to the films that qualify, the theatrical released versions were then chosen to be observed. The stress of using the theatrical version is because they are the

films released in theaters and most likely viewed as such by the public. Other versions such as extended version or director's cut were not used as they are not the original versions of the films and the audience these reach would probably include most of the same that saw the original release. Other versions are more likely to reach a much narrower group than the public that saw the original theatrical release.

### **Sample Criteria for Actress and Character Inclusion**

**Latina actress identification.** The films of each year that qualify for analysis were then checked for the presence of Latina actresses listed in the credits. Only adult Latina representations were analyzed. This means only adult actresses and thus only adult characters were considered. Actresses, at the time of filming, who were under 18 years of age, were excluded from this study in keeping with the focus of adult representation. The researcher identified a Latina actress's ethnicity by referencing her surname, biographical information as well as ancestry that was accessed by her official website, work resume, and supplementary websites.

**Character evaluations.** Characters were subject to exclusion before evaluation. Characters that are portrayed as persons under the age of 18 were excluded since only adult representations are the focus of this study. Despite the fact that a character may be played by an actress who is an adult, the character would not be evaluated. In addition to underage characters being excluded from evaluation, characters that are animated, not human, or shown strictly in a non-present time period were excluded as they are not reflections of present time human people. These exclusions correspond to the criteria for exclusion of films. Lastly, the focus of the study and analysis was only included Latina actresses with speaking parts. Non-speaking actresses and characters were considered as



extra and were not included for evaluation in this study because these do not have substantial presence in a film nor make a substantial contribution to a plot.

Once adult Latina actresses and adult characters were selected, their respective names were provided to the coders for evaluation of Latina stereotypes, gender stereotypes, image portrayals, ethnicity, and role type (more on this further below).

### **Coders**

Three coders were used to evaluate and supply data for the presence of social roles, ethnic and gender stereotypes and positive or negative images. All coders were given thorough coding instructions with different categories to code data. The coders analyzed Latina actresses and their characters by watching the theatrical released versions of the chosen films on DVDs owned, rented, or available on Netflix.

### **Coding Categories**

For stereotypes, coders were given a supplemental definition list with terms associated with five ethnic stereotypes, specifically those associated with Latina/os (Berg, 2002). All three stereotypes predominantly associated with only Latinas of female clown, harlot, and dark lady were kept as categories. Two Latino stereotypes of Latin lover and *bandido* were modified accordingly as Latina lover and *bandida* since in contemporary film there has been observation of an emergence of Latina/o stereotypes being altered superficially as well as being represented in combination. Therefore, despite that in the past Latina/o stereotypes were gender specific, they have evolved to being applicable to both genders. An example of this is the aforementioned film, *Bandidas* (2006) in which Cruz and Hayek portray bank-robbing bandits. These stereotypes' core characteristics and meaning are still evident. The stereotype of the male

buffoon is the stereotype most like its female counterpart, the female clown, thus it was consolidated into the one name.

In addition to the ethnic stereotypes, other gender stereotypes and roles commonly associated with women were assessed. The definition list included descriptions associated with some well known gendered stereotypes of women most found by the researcher. Coders identified with a yes or no as to whether they witnessed a character depicting actions and characteristics associated with the following stereotypes: single mom, tomboy, alpha female, old maid, and pink-collar worker (Girls, 2003). The stereotypes were developed by the researcher based upon information from academic class work and other research (Girls, 2003; McKinney, 2010). Single moms are women who may be a single mother because she is divorced, widowed, or chose to have a child on her own. An alpha female is a woman is a leader, who feels a sense of superiority or dominance over other females. She may have others seek her guidance, feels extroverted in social situations, believes males and females are equal, and is driven (Ward et al., 2009). A tomboy is a girl who behaves in a manner usually considered boyish that can include clothing wear or engaging in sport. Old maids, otherwise known as spinsters, emerged in “the early 19th century when the thankless task of spinning cloth had been pushed off to unmarried women as a way to earn their keep in the home” (O’Brien, 1973). Mustard (2000) elaborates that modern interpretation “conjures up a mental image of a childless, frumpy, middle-aged woman who is somewhat depressed.” According to Mustard, a spinster usually lives alone or with an extended family. In addition, she “is considered a societal outcast living in the shadow of others” (Mustard, 2000). Pink-collar workers is a business term developed to describe jobs predominantly women work. These jobs

include those of clerical work, waitress, in the food service industry, teaching, nursing and others. They are sometimes describes to have “predictable hours and infrequent overtime” that allow for domestic chores such as caring for children and household maintenance (Hunt, 1993).

The coding instructions also included definitions regarding and guiding questions on what constitutes positive and negative imagery. Assessing positive and negative images was studied because these are usually easy to observe and also leave impressions with the viewers of a film. The definitions and questions were developed by the researcher in conjunction with thesis advisor, who is a nationally recognized researcher on issues related to Latinos and the media. It was thus agreed that the definition for positive would imply that during the time a Latina actress is on-screen, she engages verbally and physically in collaborative and kind behavior; she is empathetic and works towards improvement of herself and others. On the other hand, if during the majority of the time a Latina actress spent on screen she was shown screaming, shooting guns, being abusive to others, letting herself be abused, engaged in drug use, sales or abuse, and/or a criminal role, then the actress was for sure presented and would be coded as having a negative role. Coders were instructed to answer two questions when evaluating a character in a film:

Would you characterize that for majority of the film this character is consistently throughout the movie, one that is \_\_\_\_\_.

Overall, the impression that you had was that by the end of this movie this was/turned out to be a \_\_\_\_\_ character.

The answer choices for both blanks included a four choice answer scale that assigned the value of 1 for positive or mostly positive, 2 for negative or mostly negative, 3 for equal/sometimes positive and negative, and 4 for neither positive or negative/ambiguous. In order to identify and classify if a Latina actress is portraying a Latina or non-Latina character coders utilized the methods of identifying physical features, first name or surname, and ancestry of a character that were displayed or described in a film.

While the techniques for measuring stereotypes and positive or negative imagery are subjective to an extent, the overall calculations reveal mutual consensus.

Lastly, with data regarding role type, coders assigned as a value to an actress for having 1 the starring or leading role, 2 for a supporting role and 3 for a background speaking role.

### **Reliability**

Each Latina actress was coded in the films and added to a data set for statistical evaluation. The Holsti formula was calculated using all variables to gauge intercoder reliability. The Holsti formula was modified to calculate for all three coders' responses. The overall result of the intercoder reliability was a satisfactory level of agreement of .97.

### **Time Frame**

The sample selection, analysis of date, coding, and statistical analysis for the Latina actress representation in film were conducted during the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The films and actresses were systematically narrowed down based on the methodological criteria to evaluate twenty-first century present time representations. All statistics were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Frequencies were run first. Second a Cross-Tabulation of character's ethnicity and role type was done as well as ethnicity across 10 years, and lastly role type and year. Third, a Cross-Tabulation was completed of Latina ethnicity and Latina stereotypes, character ethnicity and distinctive gender stereotypes. Lastly, the count and percentages of positive and negative were tabulated.

#### **Films with Latina Actresses and Number of Latina Actresses and Characters**

The first section of the finds answers Research Question (RQ) 1, which asked: What is the number of films with discernable adult Latina actresses portraying adult characters in the first decade of the twenty-first century?; and RQ2, which queried: Of the discernable speaking roles by adult Latina actresses, how many were Latina and non-Latina characters?

After the evaluation of the top 10 grossing films from each year for discernable Latina actress and character presence was completed, the sample size included 17 instances of Latina actresses in 16 films. Table 1 details the films subjected to analyses. There was the potential of having a sample size of 100 films. However, only 47 films

reflected present-day US society. Of those 47 films only 21 had adult Latina actresses credited in the films, of these 18 were pre-screened and found to have discernable presence of Latina actresses. Three films that had Latina actresses were excluded because based on this researcher's criteria the actresses' presence was not discernable. Those excluded actresses either played only extra background characters with no speaking parts or the actresses' scenes were cut from the final theatrical version of the film even though the credit was kept. In either case, those three excluded Latina actresses' participation in the films did not contribute anything to the public's understanding of Latinas and their lives in modern U.S.

Table 1.

*Method to Narrow Down Number of Films with Latina Actresses*

Year	Top 10 films	Films that meet qualifying criteria	Films listed to have adult Latina actresses	Films screened to have discernable adult Latina actresses
2001	10	3	1	1
2002	10	4	2	2
2003	10	7	3	3
2004	10	5	2	1
2005	10	4	2	1
2006	10	4	2	2
2007	10	6	2	1
2008	10	4	1	1
2009	10	7	5	5
2010	10	3	1	1
Total	100	47	21	18

Of the 18 films screened for discernable adult Latina actresses the total number of credited actresses for each year was assessed and totaled 24 women (Table 2). This study focused on adult characters as well as adult actresses. Therefore, the number of potentially evaluated characters was reduced since some adults played non-qualifying characters or non-speaking ones. The overall number of adult actresses and characters thus totaled 17. Due to the fact that some characters did not qualify for evaluation some of the films that had previously qualified were nevertheless excluded because they did not have adult Latinas in meaningful roles. This means that of the 47 films with the potential to include Latina presence (i.e., if each of those had included a Latina actress) only 45% actually listed Latina adult actresses. This means that 55%, that is the majority of the top ten grossing films of the first decade of the twenty-first century did not have Latina actresses in the films. Of those that did, only 38% included Latinas as characters. However, based on the criteria listed above, of the 47 applicable films, only 34% could be included in the sample to study images of qualifying adult actresses and characters.

Table 2.

*Total Qualifying Latina Actresses, Characters, and Films*

Year	Number of credited adult actresses listed in each film	Number of qualifying adult characters screened with discernable speaking roles	Number of adult actresses after determined number of characters	Total Number of films after qualifying actresses and characters
2001	1	1	1	1
2002	3	3	3	2
2003	2	3	2	3
2004	3	1	1	1
2005	2	1	1	1
2006	2	2	2	2
2007	2	1	1	1
2008	1	1	1	1
2009	6	4	4	4
2010	2	0	0	0
Total	24	17	16	16

*Note:* There were a total of 17 characters in which one character reprised her role in two different films. She was played by the same actress in both films.

The total number of films with discernable Latina actress presence and qualifying characters was 16. In these films there were a total of 17 characters that were evaluated. Each year had at least one applicable film and actress playing a discernable character except 2010. The following qualifying films, actresses, and characters in order by year and grossing number were coded (Table 3):



Table 3.

*Films, Actress, and Character Names Coded in Grossing Order*

Year	Grossing Number	Film	Actress name	Character name
2001	5	Rush Hour 2	Roselyn Sanchez	Isabel Molina
2002	1	Spider-Man	Sara Ramirez	Cop at Carjacking
	1	Spider-Man	Maribel Gonzalez	Lady Dogwalker
	8	Men in Black II	Rosario Dawson	Laura Vasquez
2003	4	The Matrix Reloaded	Gina Torres	Cas
	5	Bruce Almighty	Saida Pagan-Rodriguez	Newscaster
	9	The Matrix Revolutions	Gina Torres	Cas
2004	4	Meet the Fockers	Alanna Ubach	Isabel Villalobos
2005	10	Mr. & Mrs. Smith	Theresa Barrera	Janet - Associate #3
2006	4	X-Men: The Last Stand	Dania Ramirez	Callisto
	10	The Pursuit of Happyness	Tina D'Elia	Shelter Worker
2007	6	I Am Legend	Alice Braga	Anna
2008	1	The Dark Knight	Monique Gabriela Curnen	Det. Anna Ramirez
	1	Avatar	Michelle Rodriguez	Trudy Chacon
2009	2	Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	America Olivo	Frisbee Girl
	7	Star Trek	Zoë Saldana	Uhura
	9	Alvin & the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel	Anjelah Johnson	Julie Ortega

*Note:* Rank based on gross revenues the film derived the year of its release.

Based on the data of this first part of the analyses, the answer to RQ1 that asked the number of films with discernable adult Latina actresses is that 47 of the 100 films qualified with present time, real life plots and of these, only 16 films had discernable adult Latina actresses portraying adult qualifying characters. This means that 34% of films that could have included Latinas given their plots and settings did so. The percentage would be a bit higher if the study were to include characters from non-modern time periods, characters that are underage high school students or characters who are of

an alien species. Assessing these latter representations was not within the goals of this study.

With respect to RQ2, the data reveal that within the 16 films, of the discernable speaking roles by adult Latina actresses, 53% were clearly identified as Latina characters and 47% were non-Latina characters (see Table 4).

### **Research Questions 3 and 4: Role Types Played by Latina Actresses**

Research Question 3 and 4 sought to assess the lead or main character, supporting, or background roles played by the Latina actresses when shown as Latina characters or non-Latina characters. As Table 4 shows, the data reveal that in none of the 16 studied films and 17 discernable characters was there ever a Latina actress cast in a lead role, be it when the actress was cast as a Latina or as a non-Latina character. When Latina actresses were cast playing Latina characters they were most often cast in supporting roles; these constitute 47% of the roles given to Latina actresses. Latina playing non-Latina characters were cast equally—four in each—in supporting roles and in background but speaking roles; these categories constitute 23.5% of the roles given to Latina actresses. In one case (6%), the Latina actress portrayed a Latina character in a background but speaking role.

Table 4.

*Character's Ethnicity-to-Role Type Cross-Tabulation*

		Role Type:			
		Lead Role	Supporting Role	Background, But Speaking	Total
Character's ethnicity:	Latina	0 (0%)	8 (47%)	1 (6%)	9 (53%)
	Non-Latina	0 (0%)	4 (23.5%)	4(23.5%)	8(47%)
	Total	0 (0%)	12 (71%)	5 (29%)	17 (100%)

When the data are tabulated to assess the number of Latina and non-Latina characters in the selected top 10 grossing films year by year over the course of a decade, Figure 1 reveals a mixed outcome. Every year, except 2010, a Latina actress was cast in a role as an adult character in one of the top grossing films. However, in 2003 and 2005 the Latina actresses did not play Latina characters. While no discernable patterns were identified, it is evident that there are few roles given to Latinas, that there are no patterns of increase in the casting of Latina actresses, and that there was a total absence of Latina actresses in the most recent year of blockbuster films.

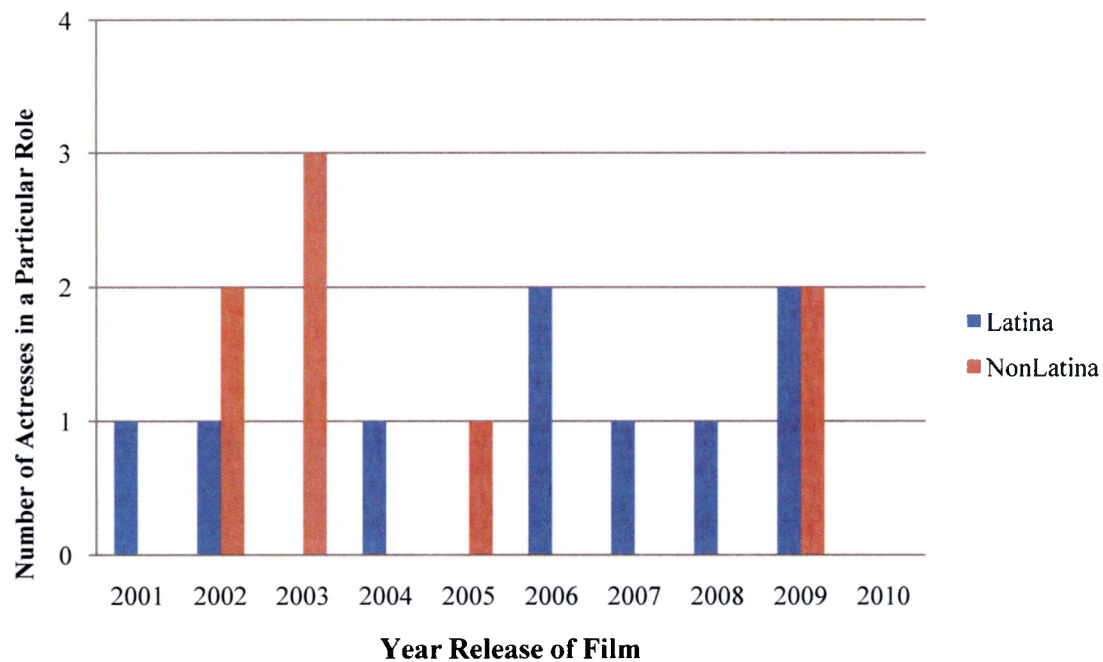


Figure 1. Latina and non-Latina characters portrayed by adult Latina actresses from 2001-2010.

#### Research Question 5: Latina Stereotypes Played by Latina Actresses

RQ5 was raised to assess whether or not the Latina characters in which the Latina actresses were cast confined to any of the distinctive Latina stereotypes that Berg (2002) has identified from previous representations of Latinas. As Table 5 shows, of the nine Latina characters in which the Latina actresses were cast, the most frequent stereotype role was that conforming to the dark lady in which two characters (22%) were depicted. In the selected films, no Latina actress in a Latina role was depicted as a harlot. However, the Latina actresses cast in Latina roles were shown in three other common stereotypes: *bandida*, Latina lover, and female clown, each representing 11% of the Latina roles allowed to Latina actresses in the 16 most successful films of the decade.

Table 5.

*Latina Stereotypes Played By Latina Actresses Cast in Latina Roles*

Latina Character	Latina Stereotype				
	Bandida	Female Clown	Latina Lover	Harlot	Dark Lady
Isabel Molina	No	No	Yes	No	No
Laura Vasquez	No	No	No	No	Yes
Isabel Villalobos	No	Yes	No	No	No
Assistant Shelter worker	No	No	No	No	No
Callisto	Yes	No	No	No	No
Anna	No	No	No	No	No
Det. Anna Ramirez	No	No	No	No	No
Julie Ortega	No	No	No	No	Yes
Trudy Chacon	No	No	No	No	No
Percent a stereotype is portrayed	11%	11%	11%	0%	22%

*Note:* The numbers reflect the number of actresses that appeared in each of the stereotypes. Each stereotype had the potential to show up in each of the nine characters. The percentages reflect the number of times a Latina actress/character was depicted portraying the stereotypes.

The negative stereotype of *bandida* was seen in only one film in the character Callisto played by Dania Ramirez in *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006) ); that character was part of a mutant group of characters set to hurt and destroy humans. The female clown stereotype, another negative stereotype according to Berg (2002), was portrayed in the character Isabel Villalobos played by Alanna Ubach in *Meet the Fockers* (2004). Ubach as Villalobos spoke with an exaggerated Spanish accent and wore colorful tight clothing that accentuated her curves. Her character as a whole is comical. However, even though audiences may consider Villalobos as a specific familiar entertaining female clown, it does not mean that today the Latina clown lacks substance as previously pointed out by Berg (2002). Just as is with the dominant stereotypes that blondes are dumb, was shown to be otherwise when in the film *Legally Blonde* (2001) Elle Woods—who seemed the

typical California sorority princess and elite socialite—proved herself to be a smart woman and successful lawyer while still retaining some of her “blonde” moments, the character of Isabel Villalobos, although considered a clown, was not necessarily a negative reflection on Latinas. She proves that although retaining a colorful, clown personality, she is positive and contributes to society with her catering business, maintaining her home, raising a child as a single parent, and being respectful of others’ wishes. Thus, she was considered unanimously by the coders to be both a clown and positive.

Roselyn Sanchez as Isabel Molina in *Rush Hour 2* (2001) was represented as a Latina lover wooing both Chris Tucker and especially Jackie Chan’s characters into following through with her wishes. She was sexually appealing with her eroticism, exoticism, and tender manner. Out of the nine Latina characters both Rosario Dawson’s character Laura Vasquez in *Men in Black II* (2002) and Anjelah Johnson’s character Julie Ortega in *Alvin & the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel* (2009) were portrayed as a dark lady. The dark lady stereotype is the most redeeming positively associated stereotype. Both characters exhibited the traits associated with the dark lady in being virginal, cautious, enigmatic as well as fascinating to males. Positively, there were no characters depicted as fiery tempered harlots.

#### **Research Questions 6 and 7: Gender Stereotypes Played by Latina Actresses**

The focus of research question six and seven were the gender stereotypes that may have been played by the Latina actresses, be they cast in Latina or non-Latina roles. As summarized in Table 6, in terms of the Latina characters, one of the nine (11%) were portrayed in the role of single mother. There were no Latina characters portrayed as

tomboys or old maids. Twenty-two percent of the nine Latina characters were depicted as alpha females. The gender stereotype most often found in the Latina characters was the pink-collar worker (45%).

Table 6.

*Gender Stereotypes Latina Actresses as Latina Characters*

Latina Character	Gender Stereotype				
	Single Mom	Tom Boy	Old Maid	Alpha Female	Pink Collar-Worker
Isabel Molina	No	No	No	Yes	No
Laura Vasquez	No	No	No	No	Yes
Isabel Villalobos	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Assistant Shelter worker	No	No	No	No	Yes
Callisto	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Anna	No	No	No	No	No
Det. Anna Ramirez	No	No	No	No	No
Julie Ortega	No	No	No	No	Yes
Trudy Chacon	No	No	No	No	No
Percent stereotype is portrayed	11%	0%	0%	22%	45%

The one Latina character in the role of single mother that Alanna Ubach played in the character of Isabel Villalobos. There were no Latina characters portrayed as tomboys or old maids. Dania Ramirez as the mutant Callisto was depicted as an alpha female when establishing her dominance and superiority within her group and against others. In addition, Roselyn Sanchez as Isabel Molina exhibited alpha female tendencies when undercover in a counterfeit gang. Just under half of the Latina characters were depicted in the role of pink-collar workers. Isabel Villalobos who owned a catering business is presented as doing a service industry job highly associated with women. Laura Vasquez

was also doing a service industry job as a waitress. Julie Ortega was a high school teacher.

It can be speculated that certain gender stereotypes work off of and reinforce the Latin stereotypes identified if not complement them. For instance, Callisto is portrayed as an alpha female and this reinforces her *bandida* image as a mutant fighting against normal humans. In *Rush Hour 2* (2001), the character Isabel Molina who is put undercover in a Chinese criminal organization exhibits alpha female traits. These traits might well be necessary for Molina's work in the Secret Service. In order to survive, Molina's character was put in a position that could only be fulfilled by a collected and confident person. Alternately, the image of pink-collar workers seems to complement and reinforce the positive stereotype of the dark lady with the characters Laura Vasquez from *Men in Black II* (2002) and Julie Ortega from *Alvin & the Chipmunks 2: The Squeakquel* (2009). Laura Vasquez, who works as a waitress, is innocent and vulnerable and has worked much of her life with a friend at his restaurant. Julie Ortega, the high school teacher, is depicted as caring to her students and open-minded. Both ladies who work industry jobs likely not highly paid. They contribute to society and seem to be rewarded by their good deeds and steady lives.

The gender stereotypes associated with the eight identified non-Latina characters portrayed by Latina actresses (RQ7) revealed 25% were portrayed as single mothers as show in Table 7. Twelve percent of the non-Latina characters were portrayed as alpha females. There was no representation of non-Latina characters as tomboys, old maids, or pink-collar workers.



Table 7.

*Gender Stereotypes Latina Actresses as Non-Latina Characters*

Non-Latina Character	Gender Stereotype				
	Single Mom	Tom Boy	Old Maid	Alpha Female	Pink Collar-Worker
Lady Dogwalker	No	No	No	No	No
Cop at Carjacking	No	No	No	No	No
Newscaster	No	No	No	No	No
Cas*	Yes	No	No	No	No
Cas*	Yes	No	No	No	No
Janet - Associate #3	No	No	No	No	No
Uhura	No	No	No	Yes	No
Frisbee Girl	No	No	No	No	No
Percent stereotype is portrayed	25%	0%	0%	12%	0%

*Note:* The character Cas appeared in two films and was evaluated individually in each film.

The gender stereotypes associated with the eight identified non-Latina characters displayed two instances of a single mother played by Gina Torres who portrayed the Black woman Cas in both *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003). The non-Latina character portrayed as an alpha female was Zoë Saldana in the role of the Black woman Uhura in *Star Trek* (2009). No non-Latina characters were tomboys, old maids or pink-collar workers.

#### **Research Question 8: Positive and Negative Portrayals of the Latina Actresses**

The final research question was set to assess whether the representations of Latina actresses have been positive or negative. In order to assess such imagery, two additional methodological questions had to be answered by the coders using a four-point scale as described in the previous chapter.

The first was if a character was for the most part a consistently certain type of person throughout a film. The second was how, overall and by the end of a movie, the character turned out to be. The answers to both questions were the same as is illustrated in Table 8 and Table 9 for all 17 characters. Sixty-five percent of the characters were identified as being positive or mostly positive and 6% were found to be negative or mostly negative. In addition, 29% were found to be neither positive nor negative. No characters were judged to be equally positive or negative.

Table 8.

*Consistent Character Judgment Image through Film*

		The character is for the most part consistently throughout the movie was:				Total
		Positive or Mostly Positive	Negative or Mostly Negative	Equal Positive and Negative	Neither Positive or Negative/Ambiguous	
Character's ethnicity:	Latina	8(47%)	1(6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (53%)
	Non-Latina	3 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5(29%)	8 (47%)
	Total	11(65%)	1(6%)	0 (0%)	5(29%)	17(100%)

Table 9.

*Overall Judgment of Character Image in a Film*

		By the end of the movie the character was:				Total
		Positive or Mostly Positive	Negative or Mostly Negative	Equal Positive and Negative	Neither Positive or Negative/Ambiguous	
Character's ethnicity:	Latina	8(47%)	1(6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (53%)
	Non-Latina	3 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5(29%)	8 (47%)
	Total	11(65%)	1(6%)	0 (0%)	5(29%)	17(100%)

### **Additional Findings**

The initial formation of this study was with the intent to include analysis of the variable of non-Latina actresses playing Latina characters. This intent was to show the full representation of Latinas in Hollywood. Although less frequent in occurrence, a non-Latina actress will sometimes portray a Latina character. Latina/os who have so many physical looks can equally be portrayed by non-Latina/os just as Latina/o actors can portray non-Latina/os, specifically Black or Anglo characters. In the silent film era, Rudolph Valentino who is considered the first Latin lover was actually Italian. Italian-American actor Al Pacino played the Cuban immigrant Tony Montana in *Scarface* (1983). Madonna portrayed an Argentinean in *Evita* (1996), and the Welsh actress Catherine Zeta-Jones portrayed a Spaniard in *The Mask of Zorro* (1998). The one and only applicable instance found of a non-Latina actress portraying a Latina character was Catherine Bell, an Anglo woman, who played, Susan Ortega in the comedy *Bruce Almighty* (2003) which stars Jim Carrey. The character Susan Ortega was evaluated by coders, but because it was the only instance of its kind it is considered not sufficient data to make conclusions about non-Latina actresses playing Latina characters. Ortega is a successful head news anchor for a television news station.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study attempted to explore the representation of Latinas in twenty-first century Hollywood film in the top 10 grossing films. Specifically, it is a quantitative study of how adult Latina actresses are portrayed in roles, as well as a qualitative assessment of those representations. In addition, the thesis examined if Latina characters were portrayed in Latina stereotypes, in gender stereotypes, and if they played primarily positive or negative roles.

The data revealed that Latinas were represented in less than half of the highest grossing qualifying films with present-time plots. Overall, there were only 17 adult Latina actresses in visible and discernable characters on screen. One actress reprised a character in two different films. Besides that one instance, there were no other actress seen doing multiple modern time roles.

One significant revelation was there were no Latina actresses in lead roles either portraying Latina or non-Latina characters. The only instance in which a Latina actress had a lead role in a top grossing film in the studied decade was in a film that was outside the qualifying character guidelines, that is in *Avatar* (2009) with Zoë Saldana who was the digitally presented alien being Neytiri. The fact that a Latina actress is not in a lead role in the top grossing films until the end of the first decade and only as a digital and non-human being confirms the continued underrepresentation of Latinas in Hollywood

films. This study shows that Latinas did not comprise even one percent of the lead roles of the 47 studied films. This type of underrepresentation is even more troubling given that now Latinos comprise 16 percent of the total U.S. population. Latinas are thus still relegated not only as a minority image in terms of ethnicity and gender, but in the minority in terms of secondary supporting roles and background speaking roles.

The use of cultivation theory was employed in the evaluation of the characters Latina actresses played regarding Latina stereotypes, gender stereotypes, and the positive/negative attributes of the characters. These factors acted as frameworks to understand the social and cultural portrayals of Latina actresses because film viewers cultivate ideas about the Latina/o culture and consciously or unconsciously assess if the portrayals they observe are in agreement with their everyday life. Heavy film viewers in particular will cultivate impressions about the Latina/o culture based on the symbols such as the ones depicted via the stereotypes. The cultivation can be particularly powerful for the heavy viewers for whom these symbols dominate even more than other sources of information their ideas about the world.

The Latina stereotypes were reviewed in Latina characters only. It was found that the presence of the Latina stereotypes was not very high or significant. Thus, even though few Latina actresses played major roles in the top grossing films of the twenty-first century, they were not contributing to the extension of the traditional stereotyping of this ethnic group.

In terms of gender stereotypes associated with women, overall there weren't significant images in both the Latina and non-Latina characters played by the Latina actresses. Some gender stereotypes were found to be complementary to the overall image

of the character, but nothing consistent. In terms of the Latina characters played by Latina actresses just under half were portrayed in pink-collar jobs. However, that stereotype does not reflect negative or positive imagery.

The final assessment of Latina actresses being portrayed in positive or negative roles revealed that the majority of the characters were consistently positive throughout a film. A small percentage was consistently negative. However, the second highest type of portrayal after positive characters were the characters found to be neither positive nor negative. The results of characters' portrayals overall and by the end of a movie turned out to be the same. This question differed from the first in that it gave the opportunity to reveal if a character that was or the most part coded as negative for the film changed for the better and displayed some redeeming actions that changed the character into a positive character. This is similar to the case in which a character who throughout much of the film is positive, but changed for the worse and ended up being a negative character. However, no character exhibited these types of changes by the end of the films and the percentages of positive, neither positive or negative or negative character did not differ from the reported data of how character were for majority of the films. By the end of the film, the majority of the characters were overall positive with a small percentage considered negative. Overall, several characters were the found to be neither positive nor negative. These characters were mostly background characters with one in a supporting role. Again, while not in major roles, at least the roles that Latina actresses played were more enhancing of the Latina/o culture than denigrating or detrimental to it.

**Limitations**

This study has some limitations. It may not be representative of all actresses in film. Some actresses' biographical and other supplemental information may not have been provided that may have confirmed more Latina presence. In addition, some adult Latina actresses were not accounted for that were part of non-qualifying films or that were non-qualifying characters. Therefore, this study does not quantitatively and qualitatively reflect every one of the actresses with Latina heritage in films during the period under investigation.

There are many types of listed gender stereotypes that are used to label both males and females. However, there hasn't been a study that uses gender stereotypes in a strong methodological form that could be applied in this study. In addition, in this study only five gender stereotypes are used which is a limited number compared to the numerous that exist.

**Recommendations for Future Studies**

This research is just a starting point in quantitatively and qualitatively measuring the representation of Latina/os in the twenty-first century. This study only takes a sample of the top 10 grossing (blockbuster) films from each year from 2001-2010. Future studies may include increasing the sample such as the top 20 or top 50 grossing films as that information is currently accessible. A larger sample size is likely to reveal more data on Latina representations.

Some other variables that this study did not assess, but could be assessed in the future are social class, or if Latinas appear more in certain film genres compared to others. In addition, the quantitative measure of the amount of time a Latina actress

and/or character is on screen compared to total running time of a film may give a more in-depth representation as to the presence of Latina images on screen.

This study should also not be limited to just Latinas, but could be modified to measure the representation of Latinos or Latina/o children. This study is hopefully a catalyst of numerous modified studies that may reveal observable patterns in the first decade of the new century. This study can provide a benchmark for assessing if subsequent decades show any significant changes in representations.



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