# *Univision's Effort to Attract Billennials and Create Programming for the Latinx Family through a Telenovela*

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**Univision's Effort to Attract Billennials and Create Programming for the Latinx Family through a Telenovela**

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of the requirements of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities, as defined in the Honor Code, and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College as a whole.

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## Introduction

"*Billennials are largely the first generation that doesn't have to decide if they want to be solely Latino or America. By not choosing, they've changed the way marketers appeal to them, the way giant corporations think of them, and they will undoubtedly change American culture*." (Phippen)

For long as I can remember, my family has turned on the television each night, Monday through Friday to watch a telenovela on Spanish-language TV giants Univision or Telemundo. When the telenovela begins, my parents and younger siblings sit together to anxiously wait for the next plot twist or the opening song so they can sing along. As I grew older, I thought about how these soap operas weren't just for entertainment, they represented how the media portrays Latinas/os, even if the shows weren't and still aren't diverse enough. In my case, they showed me what it means to be a Mexican woman, even in the U.S., and that family is everything, despite some very complicated relationships. But can these melodramatic serials that so many Latinas/os in the U.S. watch on a nightly basis be the subject of academic attention? As a cultural, social, and economic phenomenon, telenovelas have proven to be worthy of examination for being an important mediated site of cultural identity for immigrants that come to the U.S. from Latin and South America, and the Caribbean. My parents are Mexican immigrants so I grew up speaking Spanish but I learned English in school. Although I watched countless telenovelas in Spanish as a child, I now watch more English films and shows on Netflix or Hulu. Univision labels Latinxs like me as billennials. As a college freshman, I remember constant promos for a new telenovela that premiered on September 22, 2015: *Antes Muerta Que Lichita* (I'd Rather Be Dead Than Ordinary, *AMQL*). From the beginning, I noticed the difference from the traditional telenovelas I was used to as a child. It was a telenovela made for me, the bilingual

millennial that grew up seeing the rise of social media. *AMQL* promised to provide something for every generation, to *mamas* (mothers) and *abuelas* (grandmothers), and specially something more substantial for bilingual millennials like me.

Although I will be looking at a telenovela produced by Mexico's Televisa, it is important to see how the Spanish-language network Univision, with which Televisa has an exclusive contract, broadcasts this telenovela to the overall Latina/o community in the U.S. The U.S. Hispanic population in 2016 was 56.6 million and this group carries 11.3% of the entire purchasing power of the nation (Wentz). This is therefore a sizeable and lucrative target market that cannot be ignored, but one that is rapidly changing in terms of its varied media uses and tastes, especially across generations. What my research hopes to do is investigate how television networks like Univision have integrated new media into telenovelas so that loyal viewers are able to immerse themselves more fully in their favorite televisual world, while new and *younger* viewers are attracted to a traditional genre that has been made more relevant to them by its reinvention and its transmedia products. As Yvonne Villareal writes in the *Los Angeles Times*,

> *Jane the Virgin*'s Gina Rodriguez may star in a TV show based on a Venezuelan telenovela—and her character may devour Spanish soaps with her *abuela*—but when she was growing up in Chicago, the programs she plopped herself in front of the tube to catch were apple pie sitcoms such as 'Growing Pains' and 'Family Matters'. (Villareal)

The actress confides that she never watched telenovelas when was growing up because she "lived for those [American] shows." Univision calls this generation "billennials" since they may have Hispanic or Latinx roots, but they prefer mainstream English media content above any ethnic programming. Billennials outnumber immigrants who share the same ethnic and culture heritage but have become the source of the expanding Latino market. While Latinx and Hispanic

immigrants used to be the faithful target audience for Spanish-language media, that demographic is no longer who Spanish language networks must pursue. Univision is the fifth-largest U.S. broadcaster with a nightly audience of 2.8 million, and Telemundo averages 1.4 million viewers every night, but the two networks know their survival depends on luring billennials into their viewership (Villareal). As Telemundo President Luis Silberwasser says of this demographic, "They have their choice of the best programming, regardless of language. What that requires for us in finding success is innovation—the kind of innovation that the Spanish-language marketplace has never seen before. It's been a market that for decades has programmed the same way that it always has been, in a very traditional way" (qtd. in Villareal). Considering Telemundo is the competitor of Univision, he is right that innovations within traditional forms of programming can help maintain cultural 'authenticity' but create content that is more relevant to the times.

This drive to therefore become more relevant to a younger and more intercultural audience is reflected in the changes to the telenovela genre on both networks. The important point that Frances Negrón-Muntane, director of the Center for Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia University, makes is that:

> When a group becomes more assimilated into the fabric of society, the functions of [media] outlets—in this case, Spanish-language networks—change because the needs and wants are different. It seems like they're at a crossroad. They are used to achieving tremendous penetration. But there is a series of shifts and transformations that have happened, and they now realize they need to account for that if they want to continue to thrive. (Qtd. in Villareal)

Add to that the fact that according to "a 2015 Ypulse report, about 40% of Latinos under age 32 watch content on their smartphones five or more days a week" (Villareal). Networks have had to rethink how they can make media content more exciting and mobile friendly. One of the central questions at the midst of the debate of how to engage billennials is whether Univision or Telemundo will have to sacrifice their Spanish-only identity and integrate English-language programs. Therefore, as a communication student, it is interesting to see how the industry impacts, and is impacted by culture, and how both are decided ultimately by economics.

Within communication studies, I argue that it will beneficial to understand a phenomenon like this to learn more about how much influence interactive platforms like phone apps and the internet have had in reworking the telenovela and, in the process, the way that Latinidad culture and issues are represented and defined for the viewers, with a growing emphasis on appreciating ethnic and cultural differences within the larger group. Latinas/os, spend a lot of hours watching telenovelas through their laptops and phones. We can't deny this does not affect their social life but it also changes their social media usage and what matters to them. This concept can help us understand the future of television as networks connect traditional programming with different types of experiences on social media platforms and via mobile phone apps, so that important target audience like billennials can stay engaged, even when they are on the move.

In order to start thinking about the reworking of the telenovela, it is important to examine the start of Spanish-language television in the U.S. and its evolution to become an important part of the ethnic culture industry in America. Part of what has contributed to their success in the U.S. has been their distribution and telecasting of telenovelas from Latin America. Today, however, Telemundo and Univision have altered their programming, especially telenovelas, to make them more appealing for younger generations raised the American way, and who therefore, find the

imported programming less appealing. The networks also recognize that moving content off the traditional screens onto new mobile devices drives greater engagement and allows the programming to become an all-immersive experience for viewers. At the same time, I am interested in the ways that these television networks have reconstructed a Latina/o identity that is pan-ethnic and appealing to even mainstream Americans. With new identity categories like "Latinx" and hyphenated identities that stress national origins, bilingual millennials are able to distinguish themselves from the homogenizing Census term "Hispanic." It is therefore crucial to study the intersection of culture and political economy in seeing how Spanish television networks in the U.S. are negotiating multiculturalism and addressing billennials at a time when politically the message is that to "Make America Great Again" makes any kind of non-white identity un-American or foreign.

As such, my objective is not to critique or disagree with Univision's efforts to attract billennials but rather to understand how important billennials are to understanding the Latinx identity. Since "Latino" is a Spanish-language word uses masculine noun, I use "Latina/o" as a more gender-inclusive term during my first two chapters to describe the community. In order to start thinking about the reworking of the telenovela, Chapter 1 talks about the importance of examining the start of Spanish-language television in the U.S. As explained further in the chapter, today Telemundo and Univision have altered their programming--especially telenovelas--to adapt to post-web generations like me. Chapter 2 illustrates the ways that the Latina/o identity has been constructed and reinvented by Spanish-language TV networks and U.S. media. In this chapter, we see the emergence of the term "billennial" and describe the reworking of the traditional telenovela format into a product, like webnovelas, that fits this generation.

In Chapter 3, I take in consideration fairly recent terms like "Latinx," which is embraced by bilingual millennials and confirm that U.S. marketers are using the pan-ethnic term "Latinidad" to sell to Latina/o consumers. Because billennials are big users of digital technology, Univision has had to expand the worlds of its programming and create something 'authentic' for audiences. Scholar Henry Jenkins' theory of convergence culture in particular can be used to describe the transmedia elements in *AMQL*. To further understand billennial media, in Chapter 4 I analyze *AMQL*'s narrative and media content and recent efforts to cater to this new audience. Recently, we have seen digital media content like *mitu*, a mostly English-language site that caters to Latinas/os who want to be politically involved in the U.S. Ultimately, I hope to add to the conversation that if producers and marketers want the genre of the telenovela to continue being the top programming, they must adapt to new media and produce narratives that are closer to bilingual, Latina/o millennials.

## Chapter 1: Spanish-Language Networks and Telenovelas in the U.S.

### The Start of Spanish-language Networks in the U.S.

"Hispanic"[1] media began as a way for U.S.-based Spanish-speaking audiences to consume and experience the homeland they had left behind in countries in Latin America (Davila 45). Although American-Hispanic media has been primarily developed for the U.S. audience, it continues to this day to depend on transnational Latin American media conglomerates and the media products they export. These strong Latin American connections from the beginning have enabled U.S. Spanish networks to grow which until recently, meant that it was not a U.S. media enterprise. However, as the current contract negotiations that I discuss in a later chapter between Univision and Televisa show, U.S. Spanish-language television networks have started to rethink content and the platforms by which they may engage younger, U.S. Latinas/os.

The flow of Hispanic media into the United States began from Mexico when in 1961, Emilio Azcárraga, the main figure behind Televisa's Mexican TV empire, established the Spanish International Network (SIN)/Spanish International Communications Corporations with stations in San Antonio and Los Angeles (Wilkinson 34). Rather than buying intermittent time from American stations, Azcárraga bought entire stations to secure the importing of programs that would serve the information and entertainment needs of Hispanics across the U.S. (Wilkinson 34). At the time, non-citizens could not own more than 20 percent of any U.S. TV station but Azcárraga and Televisa continued to retain operational control of the stations. The station bought in San Antonio was KCOR-TV that began as part of a radio station opened by Raoul A. Cortez (Gibens 238). Cortez, who owned the first Spanish language radio station in the

[1] The term Hispanic is the label of preference within the older model of the media industry to represent the Spanish-speaking and primarily Mexican immigrant audience in the United States. Because it has been widely rejected by the population for being a market of homogenization, for this project, I use the term "Hispanic(s)" in this historically specific manner.

U.S., had previously broadcast programs in Spanish that addressed the needs of the Mexican American and immigrant communities ("Spanish Language Broadcast…"). At that time, radio stations across the U.S. and Puerto Rico were the only media platforms that hosted programming in the Spanish language. During the 1960's, staff of the few New York City Hispanic advertising agencies stated that their business was more centered on local radio stations than any other media platform (Davila 45). Until the late 1980s, SIN/SICC devoted over 90 percent of its network hours to programs directly aired or imported from Mexico (Davila 46). It was in August 1986 that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved Hallmark Cards Inc. and First Chicago's acquirement of SIN/SICC for nearly $300 million (Wilkinson 121). It was renamed in 1987 as Univision and is now considered the largest Spanish-language television network in the world (Wilkinson 36).

Simultaneously, alongside the network's success with the Spanish-speaking population, competition arrived when the network Telemundo, was launched by U.S. corporation Reliance Capital Group in 1987. Telemundo's programming brought in Mexican and Venezuelan imports, dubbed American movies and U.S.-produced shows (Davila 46). Towards the end of the 1980s, competition between Univision and Telemundo intensified, leading these networks to focus on retaining Hispanic viewers through both imported and domestic programming (Wilkinson 127). Telemundo's programming mainly consisted of telenovelas and series, many of which are produced by the network itself through its Telemundo Studios unit, though some are syndicated from outside media companies like Caracol Television, a Colombian private national television network.

Then came changes in the ownership of these companies. Although the network was profitable, Hallmark sold Univision in 1992 for $550 million in shares divided amongst

Hollywood producer A. Jerrold Perenchio, a Venezuelan TV network named Venevision, and Televisa. Telemundo also saw ownership changes when in 1997, a partnership of Sony Corp. and Liberty Media paid $539 million to control about 70% of the network and station group (Wilkinson 11). However, in 2001, NBC Universal group paid $1.98 billion for Telemundo as it saw that it had become a viable competitor with Univision. Despite the established presence of these two Spanish-language networks, a third competitor, Azteca America, entered the US market in 2001 through a partnership with Pappas Broadcasting of Visalia, California. Azteca America is the north American extension of Grupo Television Azteca, the second largest television enterprise in Mexico that emerged from the privatization of a government-owned network in 1993 (Wilkinson 11). In 2003, Univision merged with Hispanic Broadcasting Corp., the largest Spanish language radio group at the time, giving rise to concerns about whether such mergers would affect content diversity across media platforms. Another ownership change happened for Univision in 2006 when the Perenchio-Venevision-Televisa partnership sold Univision to Broadcast Media Partners for $12.3 billion, which reflected the increase in Univision's profitability.

During the 1990s and early part of the millennium, Univision and Telemundo would rapidly grow and expand due to the burgeoning Spanish-speaking population and viewing audience, innovations in online and mobile communication technologies and the desire on part of advertisers for new revenue streams (Coffey 203; Wilkinson 215). As revenues grew during this time, more streamlined services appeared. Spanish-language networks like Univision and Telemundo laid the groundwork for Hispanic broadcasting in the U.S., which led to development of paid television services. Univision now owns cable-based television network Galavisión, which had previously launched in 1979 as the first national-level Spanish language cable service

(Wilkinson 12). Galavisón offered what U.S. television networks did, but also the Latin American staple: telenovelas. It was during the mid-1990s that large players in U.S. cable television, like HBO, ESPN, MTV and others launched Spanish language services such as HBO Olé (1990), Fox Latin America (1993) and MTX Latino (1993) to establish presence as media globalized (Wilkinson 12). Another noteworthy development during this time was the establishment of bilingual and English language networks aimed at Hispanic/Latino viewers. Mun2 began in 2001 as a project by Telemundo to attract English-speaking Hispanic/Latino youth by using the code-switching "Spanglish" (Spanish and English). Here, we see the network's play on words by using "mundo," meaning "world," so audiences speak to the blend of influences from two worlds: the Hispanic/Latino Spanish-speaking world, and the mainstream American world in English. Part of what was happening during the 1990s and 2000s was the "Latin Boom" in U.S. popular culture with artists like Ricky Martin and Shakira crossing over to the English market. Spanish- language media was already being changed by technological shifts such as the analog-to-digital transition and the more accurate number of viewing audiences (Wilkinson 220). The use of the internet allowed Spanish-language television networks to spread their presence, as I discuss in later chapters.

The evolution of Spanish-language TV networks to accommodate the integration of immigrants into American mainstream culture had to be balanced with the desire to create a U.S. Hispanic market and appeal to its lucrative consumer power. It is important to understand that in the beginning, Spanish-language networks were not thought to be a worthwhile investment. This has been evidenced by the various ownership changes that Univision, Telemundo, and Azteca America had to undergo. It was only when U.S. television networks saw the potential in the delivering Hispanic/Latino consumers to advertisers, adding their own cable-based networks,

that Spanish language networks became politically and economically important to the Latinidad immigrant communities. In 2013, Univision made history by beating the big four U.S. broadcast networks, CBS, ABC, NBC and Fox, in the summer ratings, during which, a month-long survey showed that a large percentage of primetime viewers between the ages of 18-34 years were watching the Spanish-language programming (Fernholz). This was a turning point for not only U.S. television networks, but Spanish-language networks that faced the possibility of losing their cultural influence.

**Telenovelas: Traditional Narratives in Contemporary times**

Telenovelas have been a staple of Hispanic media and are a popular cultural form of programming and important to the producing country's cultural and national identity, as many scholars have noted (Casas Pérez 407, McAnany and La Pastina 829, Pearson 400). The cultural power of telenovelas was evident considering the partnership between the U.S. Census Bureau and Telemundo to promote the 2010 Census in the telenovela *Más Sabe el Diablo* (The Devil Knows Best). Because an estimated 1.3 million Latinos were not counted in the 2000 census due to language barriers or fear of government paperwork, the telenovela was used to inform Latinas/os about the purpose of the census (Castañeda 4). Today, telenovelas still continue to be viewed daily by Latin American families in the U.S. and globally. The power of telenovelas could also be supported by the way they create consumers and communities, how they work as venues for social messages, and how they reinforce the status quo (Castañeda 6). Telenovelas' narratives and choice of characters and scenes have shaped consumers depending on the country viewed. Telenovelas are popular with Latina/os regardless of race, gender, age or immigration status. They have until this point, remained part of a melodramatic tradition that has customarily drawn on women as its primary audience.

The history of telenovelas are linked with their U.S. counterparts: soap operas. Soap operas in the U.S. started during the 1940s on the radio and became popular during the 1950s. Sponsors themselves were producing these programs as entertainment platforms for promoting products that targeted housewives (Barrera & Bielby 4). These soap operas were based on characters that followed the structure of housework and continued to teach women how to be a domestic housewife. Univision's owner, Televisa, in its efforts to increase its viewer base, decided to shift control of the production and distribution of telenovelas from sponsors to producers in order to make sponsors buy advertising spots, thus adding to television revenue as well. Because these producers were hired to create programming that could reach the broadest set of consumers, telenovelas were distinctive because they had narrative closure, unlike soap operas, and there was a definite beginning, middle and end to every story. It was the middle that got audiences hooked because of the high melodrama, which in turn, enabled telenovelas to become the popular prime-time evening form of televised entertainment.

Telenovelas are also significant ideological products that reflect important aspects of the region they are produced in: class differences, for instances, are the focus in Mexico's telenovelas, and bureaucratic corruption in Brazilian novelas (Barrera & Bielby 6; Pastina *et alt*. 2). During the 1980s, they became the number one cultural export of Latin America to the U.S. (Barrera & Bielby 5). Telenovelas have been the preferred media genre for women in Latin America and have bonded women across different generations (Casas Pérez 407). During its 1998-99 prime-time schedule, Telemundo decided to drop telenovelas, which caused its ratings to plummet and therefore, the network returned the telenovela format during its evening programming (Barrera & Bielby 4). Martin Barbero has done extensive research on telenovelas' use of melodrama that he argues is the central reason for their appeal of telenovelas (279). The

incorporation of digital technologies in the late 1980s affected television production, distribution and reception, and so did the internet in the mid-1990s (Wilkinson 5). Accompanying the changes in television formatting and delivery options, as well as new possibilities in terms of cross-platform synergies as television content and fan groups spread across the internet, the format and content of traditional media genres like telenovelas also changed.

Telenovelas were the essential form of programming for Televisa's production and broadcasting monopoly in Mexico for nearly four decades while the TV empire became the leading exporter of the genre (Wilkinson 2016; 190). From the beginning, the telenovela plots have typically involved a heterosexual love triangle in which a beautiful, poor girl falls in love with a rich, handsome man from a higher social class. Despite efforts to include current social issues in more recent Televisa telenovelas, in general, the plots still show a disconnect between the televised melodramatic fantasies and the reality of the viewing Mexican audience (Pearson 401). Scholars Barrera and Bielby describe the significance for viewers:

> Viewing telenovelas was not a passive experience, but rather an active form of engaging with a text and culturally interpreting it to fulfill the need of feeling closer to their heritage. The language of the novelas served to maintain participants' fluency in Spanish if other opportunities were not present and to bring familiarity with the slang used in Latin American countries. (11)

Therefore, telenovelas have been vital in helping Latinas/os in the U.S. stay connected to their cultures of origin and in keeping fluency in the Spanish language. It is also important for immigrant viewers in the U.S. that they remain informed about the nation and community of the old homeland while staying entertained.

**Univision and Telemundo's Modern Programming**

Spanish-language television networks have recognized that if they want to maintain their hold on the current Latina/o market, they need to actively attract current audiences by catering to their interests. Today, telenovelas must integrate aspects of the U.S. experience and English-language that appeal to the younger Latina/o generations. Telemundo, for example, delivered programming like the Spanish-language version of "Big Brother" in 2016 and narco-novelas, telenovelas centered in the drug world, like *El Señor de los Cielos* (2013-present), which had 2.68 million total viewers at the start of its third season (Villarreal). Narco-novelas have especially attracted not only younger Latinas/os but English-speaking audiences who watch shows like *Narcos* (2015-present) on Netflix. Univision's contribution to modern programming comes in the form of music shows like "La Banda" from Simon Cowell and launching over-the-top digital networks and apps. In this sense, Telemundo has been trying to differentiate itself from Univision by promoting more real-life based programming.

As part of the 2015-2016 programming line-up, *Antes Muerta Que Lichita* (I'd Rather be Dead Than Plain--henceforth *AMQL*) was a telenovela produced by Televisa that aired in the U.S. through Univision. *AMQL* was a unique experiment since it was one of the first to be filmed in 4K high-resolution in Mexico, and released with additional transmedia elements, character blogs, and an embedded webnovela in the series itself. The producer, Rosy Ocampo, stated that the script was "completely original," something more difficult to achieve with Mexican telenovelas since they have been borrowing heavily from more successful international telenovelas over time (Georgi).The protagonist was Alicia "Lichita" Gutiérrez, portrayed by Maite Perroni, a beloved Mexican actress, and starred Arath de la Torre as Roberto, the protagonist's main love interest.

However, the telenovela did not just premiere on Univision alone, as previous telenovelas had. With its premiere, Univision launched the App, UniNovelas to "foster novelovers" in the telenovela community, creating a telenovela immersive media world, where fans could access the cast and storylines, and participate in interactive polls (Valencia). Aside from the app, the network released a character-produced blog, supposedly written by the *AMQL* character Alicia herself as she maintains one within the narrative of the telenovela. It also changed its usual format, with the protagonist breaking the fourth wall to address the audience and leave them in suspense. A re-mediated telenovela like *AMQL* gives audiences a chance not only to talk about twists in the plot through online forums, but to actually influence the narrative direction through interactive polls using the app. On the telenovela's website were tutorials by the novela's various cast of characters, and content for and by fans, such as holiday e-cards, fan art, etc.

*Antes Muerta Que Lichita* has been a unique experiment in providing interactive platforms through which the audience can engage with the show, its characters, and consume various media elements that are within the show, such as a novela within the novela itself. One of the telenovelas that has been researched the most is *La Fea Mas Bella* (Ugly Betty), which has some close elements to *AMQL*'s plot. Although *AMQL* does not simply replicate Ugly Betty's plot, in both telenovelas, the female protagonist does not look like the typical beautiful female lead and instead wears clothes that do not emphasize an oversexualized female body, while also having thick eyebrows. As the title *Antes Muerta Que Lichita* suggests—"I'd Rather be Dead than Plain"—the contrast between inner beauty and outer beauty is a strong moral aspect of the telenovela, as is the emphasis on hard work and earning one's success by staying good, no matter the struggles. At the same time, traditional telenovelas have the "Cinderella-type story," complicated family relationships, and the class struggles. And *AMQL*, despite its efforts to show

empowered female protagonists, followed the traditional narrative as previous telenovelas' Cinderella-type narrative.

Audiences were also excited to discover that the novela inside *Antes Muerta Que Lichita* would be available to them as the webnovela *Corazon Enamorado*, that writers called, "a novela inside a novela" (Valencia). Tomás López-Pumarejo writes about the economic aspect of webnovelas, a new type of marketing genre popular among immigrants. *Corazón Enamorado, AMQL*'s embedded webnovela, is as López-Pumarejo describes, a "new media" format that makes fun of the traditional "Cinderella-story" telenovela (40). It has become a powerful techno-cultural device online and attracts audiences who are more susceptible to further consumer exploitation by advertising companies. This melodramatic webnovela is a parody of the traditional aspects of the telenovela genre. A Spanish piece, specifically about *AMQL* emphasizes that this webnovela is the first to be written by the same writers of the telenovela so "it feels like the same product" and there is therefore, a continuity of experience across platforms. The author adds, "*Corazón Enamorado* looks more like a cartoon and a web series than a traditional telenovela" which also gives it a younger look and appeal. By using webnovelas a way to make fun of traditional telenovelas, writers are already transforming this popular genre to attract the tech-savvy, bilingual Latina/o millennials. The biggest advantage of the genre-extension is that, "The telenovela [has been] reinvented because it is the first time that there is a telenovela for other platforms, the digital and for the audience 'millennial,' for the youngsters, who are used to seeing the content when and whenever they want to" (Notimex). This new, revamped telenovela format brought a new and unique kind of media product to reconstruct the Latina/o audience.

In essence, Latina/o media began as way for Latinas/os in the U.S., immigrant or U.S. born, to experience Latin America. The growth of Spanish-language TV networks in the U.S. became the force behind the way that marketers advertise to the culturally specific Latina/o market. With Univision's beating of the four U.S. broadcast networks, the potential for attracting new audiences was seen. Moreover, one can see that telenovelas were initially created as entertainment platforms for promoting products to housewives, the targeted audience at the time, adding onto the fact that telenovelas began for economic profit. With the addition of cross-platform synergies and fan groups, the content and distribution of traditional telenovelas changed. Notably, viewing telenovelas for Latinas/os in the U.S. means being actively engaged with the text to stay connected to their heritage and keeping fluency of the Spanish language. Webnovelas, therefore, are the reinvention of telenovela for Latina/o millennials. Thus, this is important to keep in mind as one understands the digitization of the telenovela because of young Latina/o millennials.

## Chapter 2: Constructing the Latina/o Identity and the Emergence of Billennials

### Post-network Latino-oriented TV

It is well-known that the television industry in the U.S. operates to deliver viewers to advertisers, and thus maximize its profits. Today, Hispanics account for 17% of the U.S. population and according to the industry trade magazine *Advertising Age*, advertising spending on Hispanic media alone in North America, totaled $7.83 billion in 2016. Addtionally, the 2016 U.S. Presidential election tapped into about 27.3 million eligible Hispanic voters who are adult U.S. citizens, and in the age range that appeals most to prospective marketers (Wentz). Communications scholar Guillermo Gibbens explains that the rise of Spanish television networks in the U.S. has been due to the combination of three factors (1) The Hispanic community wanting to look for ways to express its cultural identity, (2) the apathy shown by U.S. English language commercial broadcast networks (like ABC, CBS, and NBC) to include more positive Hispanic role models and narratives in programming and (3) the need to provide more than just news to the Hispanic audience that had immigrated from Central and South American nations (237-238). Both politicians and marketers are realizing that the Hispanic target audience is of vital significance both in terms of votes and spending power. One of the half-hearted ways in which U.S. English language networks have tried to include more positive Latina role models is by creating narratives such as Disney's *Elena of Avalor (2016-present)*, with the first princess inspired by Latin American cultures and their traditions. It is interesting to note that Latina/o inclusion came in a form of a Disney princess, a powerful media influence in young girls' lives in this consumerist society. Silva Olivas, co-producer and head writer for *Elena of Avalor*, shares that:

> As a Latina, I couldn't help but bring some of my own experiences to the characters. Elena's grandparents are as vibrant as my own *abuelos*. My grandmother watched telenovelas, and my grandfather played guitar and serenaded her well into the night. It was obvious that they had this whole life before we were even born and we learn from their victories, their failures and their wisdom from it all. (Barco)

Although the protagonist, Elena, is a considered a Latina princess, it is interesting to see the techniques writers use to translate her culturally. For example, she has the Latina dark skin, dark brown hair, red lipstick, and huge gold hoop earrings. In the first episode, sixteen-year-old Elena sings in a musical number with her royal team as she plays the guitar. There are also characters who reflect the diversity of Latin American cultures. It is also a positive move for the community to have a Latina writer as the head of the series. This is clearly a departure from the typical programming aimed at Latina/os that has been, for decades, focused on Spanish-language telenovelas and fútbol by networks like Univision and Telemundo.

Anthropologist and American Studies researcher Arlene Dávila addresses the impact of Spanish-language and Hispanic oriented advertising on Latina/o consumers in her book *Latinos, Inc*. Her work is particularly significant as it discusses the desire for differentiation among Latinas/os, with the growing realization that what used to be regarded as "a static and marketable" target audience, is, in fact, "a fluid and heterogeneous population" (24). As Dávila points out:

> One of the greatest contradictions of the U.S. Hispanic media…has been that while supposedly geared to the United States and not Latin America, it has nonetheless been highly dependent on transnational Latin American media conglomerates and developments, dynamics which the United States has been very much involved in

> fostering. This is evident in the evolution of the Spanish TV networks, the most important force behind the growth of a culturally specific Hispanic market. (Dávila 24)

Similarly, while targeting American Hispanics with sponsored messages dates back to the start of Spanish-language media at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was in the 1960s that "independent brokers began buying intermittent time from English stations for Spanish TV" because they recognized Hispanics as a separate audience from mainstream American television viewers. By 1982, SIN claimed that it was reaching 90% of Latina homes through its "sixteen-station network, its one hundred repeater stations, and more than two hundred cable systems." When it later became Univision, the "twenty owned and operated stations and twenty-seven affiliates throughout the United States" has provided visibility to the Hispanic market as a visible ethnic niche (alongside the African American and Asian communities) that also gave Hispanic Americans legitimacy (Dávila 26). There has also been a more recent but significant shift from importing Latin American and Mexican programs for the American market, to producing programming domestically that will also appeal to Latin American markets. Even so, many of the actors on the shows are often from Latin America so that their 'authenticity' adds to the shows' credibility when the latter are syndicated outside the U.S. Thus, the development of Spanish television in the United States has been an intercultural endeavor.

Latin American media scholars Juan Piñon and Viviana Rojas (2011) have argued that the changes of policies and technology have generated new media products that speak to the redefined Hispanic market differently. Building off the work of Amanda Lotz (2007), they observe that "The rise of the Latino-oriented television industry is also a result of a new television industrial order that has been labeled as *post-network*, which is characterized by innovative systems of video distribution, increasing multiple-channel options, and new strategies

of narrowcasting and audience segmentation" (Piñon & Rojas 130). This "multichannel universe" increased space for new programming were responsible for the emphasis on the youth market. Furthermore, they add, "the Latino-oriented television industry is expanding its reach and is consequently changing the range of discourses of *Latinidad*" [italics in the original] (Piñon & Rojas 142), which includes: accessible programming centered on a Pan-Latino identity that is "ready to be exported from Miami to Latin America." This is made possible using a diverse spectrum of global actors and cosmopolitan world cities even as "this Pan-Latino identity excludes distinctive ethno-linguistic identities such as Chicanos, Nuyoricans, English-speaking Latina/os, and Afro-Latina/os." During most of the 20th century, the Spanish language was a defining aspect of Hispanic media and it wasn't until the 1990s when industry observers noted the potential of bilingual media (Wilkinson 3). This has also resulted in hybrid programming and "the inclusion of bilingualism and the use of Spanglish" as reflective of the integration of Latino immigrants into American society. Most importantly, the expansion and growing strength of the Latino television industry in the U.S. the scholars argue has resulted in the "production of a sanitized English-language *Latinidad*, manufactured by U.S. mainstream English media ready to be exported for global audiences' consumption" (Piñon & Rojas 142-43). This is crucial because the influence of the U.S. on Latina/o media has grown but with consequences, especially when we explore the concept of *Latinidad* in the following chapters.

Christopher Chavez, in his book, *Reinventing the Latino Television Viewer*, states that, "In the process of creating an ideal imagined audience, media institutions shape the contours of particular communities in order to present a comprehendible, credible, and desirable market" (3). Since the Latina/o audience was not a "given," Spanish-language networks in the U.S. have had to create this "ideal" audience that can bring in the most profits. Chavez also found that Spanish-

language television is associated with terms like "traditional," "pride," and "comfortable," while English-language television is associated with terms like "educational," "informative," and "modern" (71). This is particularly interesting because for younger generations of Latinas/os, the Spanish language is now associated with "tradition" and a culture they were never really born into, while the English language appeals to them because it is the language of modernity and "fitting in." By taking something traditional and familiar like the media genre of the telenovela and reworking it to create a transmedia experience, Spanish-language television networks in the U.S. are therefore exploring new means to attract the lucrative young, and vibrant audience known as billennials.

**Emergence of Billennials**

Telemundo calls them "Generation M", and scholars began to call them "the new Latina/o", while Univision network coined them "billennials." *Billennials*[2] is a new term created by marketers and television programmers who've realized that young Americans who have grown up in Spanish-speaking homes don't necessarily care for the traditional telenovela styles on Spanish language networks. Spanish-language TV networks current naming of the bilingual millennials demonstrates their constant process of inventing and reinventing the Latina/o viewer. Billennials are Latina/o millennials who are heavy users of emerging technologies, bicultural, and proficient in two languages (Chavez 65). In the last four years, there has been a growth in the Hispanic population of "millennials more comfortable with English or more comfortable with Spanish," a fact that has more weight when one considers that 44 percent of the Latino electorate are millennials, according to a Pew Research Center, which defined the generation as ages 18-35 years. As Suzanne Gamboa writing for *NBC News* notes, "Millennials have been seen as more

[2] Billennials refers to the children of Hispanic and Latinx immigrants who have grown up in America and therefore feel more at home with American culture and the English language. Although scholars and networks use different terms, for this project, I will use billennials.

multicultural than other generations for a few years. Multicultural marketing, though not new, has taken on added significance because of the demographic overlap of millennials and Latinos. *About a fifth of all millennials are Latino*" [italics mine]. This makes billennials an important demographic whose culture and voices should not be ignored.

During the 2015 Upfront Conference, leading Spanish-language television networks like Univision and Telemundo, presented their strategies to appeal to this audience. Executive vice-president of marketing at NBCU Hispanic, the Hispanic division of NBCUniversal said, "digital is not another layer of our business, *it is* our business" (qtd in Martinez). The Millennial generation consists of those born 1980-2001, a generation that saw the rise of digital life and know the power of branding and publicity (Rosenbaum). Latina/os represent 21% of the overall millennial population in the U.S. many of whom are what we call billennials. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center Report:

> Hispanics are the youngest major racial or ethnic group in the United States. About one-third, or 17.9 million, of the nation's Hispanic population is younger than 18, and about a quarter, or 14.6 million, of all Hispanics are Millennials (ages 18 to 33 in 2014)…
>
> Altogether, nearly six-in-ten Hispanics are Millennials or younger. (Patten)

Television networks like Univision and Telemundo are considered cultural producers and have to therefore, compete against other media networks for this billennial segment. Like any other television network, they are mainly profit-driven enterprises and have to deliver audiences that prospective advertisers will find appealing (Chavez 3). According to a 2016 Nielsen report, Bilingual Hispanics spend about 42 hours a week on TV and online, English dominant viewers spend 51 hours a week, and Spanish dominant viewers 44 hours weekly (Cablefax Staff). Randy Falco, president and CEO of Univision Communications offers that "Hispanics represent one of

the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population and are projected to fuel the country's growth. This is our audience," he states, "and we are here to show marketers that in addition to being 57-million strong, Hispanics are young, bilingual, upwardly mobile, socially engaged and digitally savvy" (Petski). Technology use by billennials becomes a way for self-expression, entertainment and strong connection to family and friends. Telemundo tagged these young Latina/os as "Generation M" for being millennials, móviles (mobile), and multicultural. Telemundo broadcasts an award show every year "Latino Premios Billboard" and in 2015, they tried R.A.V.E (Real-time Augmented Virtual Experiences) so that audiences could see the red carpet and stage virtually.

There are about 54 million Latinas/os living in the U.S. as of 2013, according to the US Census Bureau, constituting about 17% of the population and 20% of the segment of 18-39 year olds that advertisers pursue. Univision's cable channel El Rey, that is co-owned by film-maker Robert Rodriguez, speaks to its mission to create English-language programming that can attract mainstream television viewers in the U.S. but is specifically designed for Latina/os. "We don't want a sitcom or a drama that is exclusively about anything we stereotypically attribute to a Latino family or household," says Dawn Holiday-Mack, the vice-president of audience strategy and insights for El Rey. "We want them to grapple with things that every household grapples with, but when you look at all the characters, you just don't see white faces. That's what we want to strive for. And diversity behind the camera as well." This seems to offer a challenge to the findings from a 2014 study by Columbia University's Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, that revealed that no Latina/os wrote pilots for American network television during the 2011-2012 season (*The Latino Media*…). However, from TV shows like *Elena of Avalor*, we have seen efforts to include Latina/o writers as head writers. El Rey's decision to attract English-

language Latina/os has resulted in programs such as *From Dusk till Dawn: The Series*, based on the supernatural film directed by Rodriguez and written by Quentin Tarantino. It has also produced the hit reality program *Lucha Underground*, about the Mexican professional wrestling circuit. According to Dawn Holiday-Mack, El Rey's audience is currently about 20% Latina/o, 20% African American, 10% Asian, and 50% white, though the specific demographics shift based on specific programming (Moylan). The growing multicultural diversity among American television viewers means that narrowcasting in television has also moved towards capturing the various ethno-cultural realities of viewing communities so that new audiences can find their experiences being represented as part of the American landscape.

**The Digitization & Reworking of the Telenovela**

More viewers are not watching telenovelas on traditional television sets but through computer or mobile devices, which points to how content production has corresponded to the change to digital (Castañeda 12). Univision's website includes a page titled "Novelas," where they attempt to increase its production of Webnovelas and involve viewers through digital content. Efforts to attract young Latinas/os can be traced back to 2003 when Univision aired *Rebeca*, a telenovela that solicited the audience's input by determining some plot lines through its website. As Castañeda puts it, "The emergence of such devices and changes to audiences' viewing habits thus creates a media environment that fine-tunes production and marketing through the practice of narrowcasting and interactivity" (12). Webnovelas, the online version of telenovelas, emerged in 2007 as a "new media" format that became popular among Spanish-speaking immigrants. Tomás López-Pumarejo's research on webnovelas and Spanish-language television networks argues that Hispanics are mainly drawn to this form of media because its content is familiar to their experiences as U.S. Hispanics and involves a cultural product like

telenovelas (41). This reworking of programming, specially telenovelas, could be due to Latinas becoming an economic and social powerhouse in the U.S. A Nielsen consumer report states:

> Latinas are coming into their own, and this newfound confidence will have an undeniable impact on our consumer-driven society. Hispanic women are increasingly the catalysts in an intercultural marketplace. Not only are they the cornerstone of the Latino family, keeping language and traditions alive, but they are also forging a wider path in the mainstream and using technology to serve as brand and culture influencers. Marketers need to know how to tap this cohort in order to stay relevant and drive consumer engagement in the future. ("Latina 2.0…")

According to the Nielsen report, the young Latina population is undergoing dramatic growth with a 37% population growth between 2005 and 2015, with that 77% of growth coming from U.S.-born Latinas. They found that these Latinas will "exert a strong influence on both Hispanic and mainstream American culture into the 21st century" ("Latina 2.0…"). With this in mind, Univision has realized the power of tapping into the Latina audience and U.S. programming by releasing their "exclusive, Spanish-language broadcast and digital rights to air the Miss Universe pageant through 2019." Contestants are from 88 countries and the televised event "consistently ranks as the most watched and most coveted property and entertainment show around the world" (Petski). Given the popularity of the pageant, it is not unusual for networks to tap into these programs to keep audiences entertained.

Television networks like Telemundo, have capitalized on the popularity of its telenovelas by repurposing their content on the network's website so that loyal viewers, like Latinas, can engage more with the shows. The digitization of telenovelas and production of webnovelas offer new modes of interactivity and expands the influence of digital technologies. Jessica Rodriguez,

executive vice president and chief marketing officer at Univision Communications, reported on how the telenovela has changed during Univision's annual *Leading the Change* forum in 2015 stating that:

> Novelas are about shared experiences. Simply put, novelas go beyond a format or a specific show. They are community. At Leading the Change, I told personal stories about watching nightly as a child over *cafecito* [coffee] with my mom and neighbors in the Bronx. In her [Monste Gomez] words, "novelas marked a generation. They mark every generation." (Rodriguez)

This relates to how the traditional telenovela is already considered a link between generations, particularly bringing together transgenerational women. As Rodriguez states, these telenovelas are about shared experiences. Latina/os can relate to them, despite the narrative changes over the decades.

*Tenemos que hablar* ("We Need to Talk") was a Spanish-language Univision webseries released in 2015 designed to attract billennials and embraces drama, comedy, profanity and the popular text message inserts, emojis. The bi-national series was filmed in Miami and Mexico, and featured YouTube sensations to attract the billennial audience. The show featured the lives of two young people who depend heavily on social messaging apps and media to keep in touch across countries. Sameer Deen, senior vice president of Univision Digital, stated in a press release, "Hispanics consume 12 hours of online video a month, two percent higher than the average U.S. audience. Launching 'We Need To Talk' is part of our commitment to delivering a wide range of Engaging Millennials love that ubiquitous content" (UCI PR Team, "First Billennial Spanish…"). This new media format is just another example of efforts to gain the billennial audience. According to Castañeda, the emergence of these webnovelas is not just an

online version of telenovelas but are "acculturated" second-generation telenovelas that are distinctive from previous narratives (15). She states,

> The new form is produced with an online format in mind; they're bilingual with English subtitles; they have a U.S. Latina 'feel' to them; the main characters are also bilingual; and the plot lines address modern issues and go beyond the rags-to-riches story that are so prominent in traditional televised telenovelas. (Castañeda 15)

While being "Latino" and "American" seem like two distinct identities, billennials are given the passports to both. This is worth noting as in the following chapter we discuss the question of cultural 'authenticity' for the Latinidad community, as it is being reworked by Spanish language television networks.

*Antes Muerta Que Lichita* (I'd Rather Be Dead than Ordinary) – Univision's second transmedia telenovela aims at higher fan interactivity – more than one million fans engaged with Univision's first transmedia event in 2014. The popular telenovela is about Lichita (Maite Perroni), who is an employee at an ad agency where she has been for eight years, but feels unappreciated. Determined to change her situation, she seeks empowerment by transforming herself into a more cosmopolitan and confident persona--Alicia. Along the way she faces obstacles that test her moral fiber. We also see that her single mother is going on a similar path to self-discovery, seeking to become a successful entrepreneur. This new narrative in the telenovela genre about women finding their self-empowerment also uses innovative storytelling approaches, "like one character's empowerment blog and a novela-within-a-novela which fans can follow online." The actress Perroni has a strong social media fandom, with 3.1 million Twitter followers and 1.1 million fans on Instagram which attests to how the telenovela has been adapted to appeal

to older *and* younger viewers. Thus, casting an actress like Perroni for a multi-generational appeal contributes to *AMQL*'s narrative as 'authentic' as we define this in the following chapter.

Thus, this chapter layed out the importance of the Latinas/os in the U.S., as account for more than 17% of the U.S. population. As Dávila points out, there has been a growing realization that the Latina/o population is a shifting population and separate from the mainstream American television viewers. Even though programming is being produced domestically, the key to creating an authentic show is casting actors who are from Latin America, as the case is with casting Perroni. Another way that an authentic show can be produced is by using the Spanish language instead of English because Spanish resonates more with terms like "traditional." Furthermore, one sees Spanish-language TV networks'' naming of bilingual millennials are billennials who are defined by their routh, heavy use of emerging technologies, their biculturality and proficiency in two languages. Billennials are the children of Latinx immigrants who feel more at home with American culture, such as watching TV shows in English, and being digitally savvy. Technology becomes a way for self-expression and the strong connection to the *familia* (family) and friends. Notably, Latinas have become the carriers of tradition and use technology to serve as culture influencers. In the following chapter we will examine how the term Latinx is used by Latino/a millennials or billennials to deliberately queer their identity as it is being constructed for them by politicians, Census bureaucrats, and media corporations.

## Chapter 3: The Changing Authentic Latinx Identity

*It is not an either/or scenario. It's about "and"—in the digital world, U.S. billennials search terms using both languages, even at the same time...They strive for the best of both worlds, naturally. (Fernandez 2014)*

### Latinx as a Collective Assertion

A term more commonly used today by Latina/o billennials to identify themselves has been *Latinx*. Latinx is the gender-neutral alternative to Latino or Latina and is used by scholars, activists and journalists as part of the 'linguistic revolution' (Ramirez and Blay). Even though the Oxford English Dictionary incorporate "Latinx" as being a common world in the English language in 2015, Latina/o millennials (billennials) have been using the word since the turn of the millennium (Guidotti-Hernández 147). For some, Latinx helps "modernize the idea of a pan-Latin American experience--or *Latinidad*--one that reflects what it means to be of Latin American descent in today's world" (Padilla). Having appeared across credible media platforms like National Public Radio (NPR), the term aims to move beyond gender binaries, making room for people who are trans, queer, etc., and is therefore considered to be more inclusive of the intersecting identities of Latin American immigrants (Ramirez and Blay; Hinojosa). Many scholars and activists have supported the term because it challenges traditional gender, cultural and social binaries. As Nicole Guidotti-Hernández emphasizes, "In the negation of gender choice and the pan-ethnic signifier Latin, Latinx encompasses the unknown, the diverse, the queer as it defies Spanish language norms of gender in language and previous nationalist articulations of identity" (147).

Those who oppose the term suggest that using this gender-neutral noun is disrespectful to the Spanish language and "a blatant form of linguistic imperialism--the forcing of U.S. ideals

upon a language in a way that does not grammatically or orally correspond with it" (Guerrera & Orbera 2015). Other scholars like María R. Scharrón-del Río and Alan A. Aja argue that the Spanish language itself is a form of linguistic imperialism for Latin Americans:

> What is the most blatant form of linguistic imperialism for Latin Americans? Spanish. Are we not aware that upon the arrival of the conquistadores and subsequent acts of genocide, a few thousand indigenous languages existed in the Americas, and a few resilient hundred continue to be spoken today? Not to mention the attempted erasure of African languages via the violence of slavery and colonialism. (Scharrón-del Río & Aja)

Río and Aja mention the changing dynamics of Spanish and English proficiency among people who self-identify as Latinx or Latino/Hispanic in the United States and that not all of them were raised speaking Spanish. "The 'x,' in a lot of ways, is a way of rejecting the gendering of words to begin with, especially since Spanish is such a gendered language," explains queer, non-binary femme writer Jack Qu'emi Gutiérrez in an interview with PRI. "In Spanish, the masculinized version of words is considered gender neutral. But that obviously doesn't work for some of us because I don't think it's appropriate to assign masculinity as gender neutral when it isn't," she adds (Padilla). Older Latina/os like Qu'emi's mother are confused, as their lives have been organized around rigid hierarchical gender norms, but they are now faced with making efforts to embrace the gender and ethnic fluidity implied in the Latinx position (Horne). However, most believe that while using Latinx, is not the complete answer to the "ongoing quest to develop a cohesive postcolonial identity…Still, using 'Latinx' is a positive step towards recognizing all of *nuestro gente*—our people—and will hopefully challenge every Latin American to think about what it truly means to be part of this complex culture" (Clark, qtd. in Padilla). It is equally important to recognize that "Latinx" is a result of how languages change in order to reflect the

need of a particular historical moment and in some cases, this indicates the beginning of a linguistic revolution. For many of the first-generation immigrant Latinx population, the English language offered a relatively simple way of integrating into their new homeland of the U.S.

The younger billennials, by contrast, were born in the U.S. and use the identity category of "Latinx" to embrace a more progressive sense of self – one that accommodates the spectrum of LGBTQIA sexualities, while dismissing the oppressive masculine/feminine binary within the Spanish language. As queer scholar José Esteban Muñoz affirmed, we should "move beyond notions of ethnicity as fixed (something that people are) and instead understand it as performative (what people do), providing a reinvigorated and nuanced understanding of ethnicity" (70). Thus:

> Affectively and sonically acting improperly, defying gender, ethnic national, generational, and sexual norms in the field and in relationship to whiteness, the x in Latinx uses language to register and make meaning of these categories in their difference. The x in Latinx carries the affective overload for that which is not recognized fully, fully articulated, or that defies static ethnic national conceptions of being. (Guidotti-Hernández 148)

Regarded accordingly as a "queering of language," *Latina Magazine* writer Raquel Reichard wrote in 2015 that "The 'x' makes Latino, a masculine identifier, gender-neutral." It also takes us past Latin@—historically deployed to imply both masculine and feminine identities—to now become gender inclusive outside of that hegemonic heteronormative binary. Consequently, "For many, the x indicates living on a border, not a geographical nation-state border, but the thin line dividing between what historically have constituted gender expressions" (Guidotti-Hernández 149). This is important as we see Latinxs desire to defy traditional norms.

At the same time, “Latinx” also captures the “push-back against historic privileges for non-Black Latinos,” drawing attention to “the benefits of white privilege for Latinos [that] are rooted in colonial-centric notions of whiteness ideologically and politically.” Thus, the term “Afro-Latinx” recalls the violence of “racial exclusion” and also how “entrenched sexuality is essentialized and in need of re-appropriation in relationship to Blackness.” Therefore, to quote Jennifer Loubriel (2016), “Even though you can be marginalized because you are Latinx, that does not erase the systemic white privilege you have because of your race” (in Guidotti-Hernández 150). What the formulation of “Latinx” draws attention to is that,

> Inclusion, in particular, is a core value for millennials. The fact that Latinx signals inclusion for this generation is paramount because their self-concept is about tolerance, belonging, and making a difference. What is meaningful to millennials is their active capacity to be heard, be involved, and trying to make a difference. (Guidotti-Hernández 151).

Media consumption has become increasingly important in the formation of shared identities for populations like billennials. The “ethic of care for others” informs the emotional bond between Latinx millennials (billennials) and is mostly nurtured in the digital realm, based on “previous experiences of exclusion based on race, social class, skin color, or other presumptions made about them because they are Latinx.” Latinx as an identity position is not about assimilation, “but rather, a collective assertion of the very thing that has made them feel excluded. In caring for others, they [billennials] don’t want peers to experience the same exclusion they’ve known (Guidotti-Hernández 152). Artist-scholars like Ricardo Gamboa playfully use the creative space of Latinx to layer in political critique, language, and the remaking of the self where he inserts himself into the space of culturally familiar iconography, thus deliberately making the familiar

foreign. In a Facebook status update, for example, Gamboa's "tied bandana, woke face, and queer, brown sensibilities all mobilize affect to name proximity to Rosie the Riveter, historic feminist icon, but with difference at the core of the representation" (Guidotti-Hernández 154). This "hood, queer, Latinx" representation draws from an American working class feminist icon of empowerment and brings to it what Muñoz would argue is a "theatricaliz[ation of] a certain mode of 'feeling brown' in a world painted white, organized by cultural mandates to 'feel white'" (68).

As a political term and a political stance, the term "Latinx" for billennials, is rooted in its "capacity…to carry the excessive affective overload and political responsibility for all Latinos," and is "the most appealing and striking reason for why such a move is decisively post-nationalist in a world that is highly protectionist and nationalist." More importantly, for billennials, "their rejection of boomer created nationalism" is *not* ahistorical; "rather, they want to understand these histories as broadly, as blackly, as queerly, as transly, and as openly as possible" (Guidotti-Hernández 157). Latinxs are culturally-based leaders that use a *We* orientation approach. From a historical context, Latinxs are hybrids, mainly the Spanish and Indigenous people of this hemisphere but can have mixed ancestry from other countries. Latinxs are connected by culture and by bringing people together, reinforcing a strong sense of culture and community, and articulating a vision that inspires people, that creates a connected and collective community action.

**Latinidad and Hyphenated Identities**

In order to understand the nuances of billennial identity, it is equally important to consider the concept of "Latinidad." Spanish-language media corporations, advertising and marketing firms have invested a great deal of money to establish a clear distinction between

"Latinidad" and "Latinx" audiences (Davila 2001; Levine). Even as the 1980s were declared to be the "Decade of the Hispanic" (Sommers 32), the growing realization of the ethnic differences underlying the term "Hispanic" led some scholars like Felix Padilla (1985) to coin the panethnic term "Latinismo," or "action and identification as Latinos and Hispanics" (Sommers 32-33). The United States is one of the world's largest Spanish-speaking countries, and Felix Padilla emphasizes how important language was in the 1970s as a unifying factor in bringing different Spanish-speaking immigrant cultures together in their new homeland (Sommers 36). Laurie Kay Sommers also adds that during the '70s, this common linguistic factor led to the "unifying influence of the Spanish electronic and print media" that linked "together numerous markets in the manner of a media chain, building up a million-dollar international Spanish-speaking audience transcending borders and nationalities." Through powerful networks such as SIN (Spanish International Network) television and cable companies, and the print media, "cultural ties with Latin America and the Spanish language" were continually reinforced, thus retaining the tension between nationalism and pan-ethnicity (Sommers 37).

More recently, noted scholar Arlene Davila's (2001) analysis also examines the trends in U.S. Hispanic marketing as corporations have switched to using a newer pan-ethnic identity term, "Latinidad," to sell to Latina/o consumers. Davila (2012) conceives of "Latinidad" as "a noun that identifies a subject position (the state of being Latina/o) in a given discursive space" and as a concept functioning as an identity category (3). One of the criteria for being identified as an U.S. Latinidad, she adds, is the use of the Spanish language (4). Language, as we saw in the previous section, has also been a basis for the more defiant self-empowering "Latinx" label in the U.S. Scholar Isabel Molina Guzmán (2006) also notes that there has been a commodification of

"Latinidad", specifically in the 2002 film *Frida*. Guzmán explains Latinidad in terms of a distinct semiotic language:

> As a system of media signification, Latinidad is a performative and performed dynamic set of popular signs associated with Latinas/os and Latina/o identity. Common signifiers of Latinidad are language, linguistic accents, religious symbols...Latinidad may be used by members of Latina/o communities to self-identify, and by the general market media to denote Latina/o identity and culture. (235)

"Latinidad" here is reduced to a set of recognizable visual signs and linguistic aspects that American audiences typically associate with immigrant Spanish-speaking populations. More complicatedly, Latinxs themselves self-identify with these stereotypical identity markers, so that these signs have become classified as 'authentic' characteristics of a pan-ethnic Latinx and Hispanic identity. Furthermore, Guzmán maintains that such socially recognizable visual signifiers associated with 'Latinidad' identity get reiterated to produce a sense of authenticity within media texts. (235).

Scholars Jeffrey Nealon and Susan S. Giroux (2012) argue that identities are culturally constructed through difference and that a 'successful' negotiation of identity involves its recognition by other people (43). In their words:

> No one asked any of us to vote on what it means to be white, black, Latino/a, or Asian in the place where we live; you know that you are from a particular group—and come to understand what that identity means in America—by the way people recognize you and react to you (or by the ways in which they don't recognize you or react to you). (Nealon & Giroux 40)

Essentially, identities are dependent on the way that others perceive you. It is a process, they argue, of recognition in terms of differences—whether one is straight, gay, etc. so that identities are always being negotiated (Nealon & Giroux 51). Nealon and Giroux also consider the ambivalence contained in hyphenated multicultural identities, observing that:

> "X-American" identities (African-American, Asian-American, Italian-American, and so forth) signals a decline in the common identity of "American-ness." For others, the proliferation of identities under the common rubric of "American" signals a positive change, the sense of expanding the possibilities to be both a member of the American "melting pot" and yet still affirming some pieces of another (ethnic, racial, religious, etc.) identity at the same time. (56)

The authors acknowledge that using the "X-American" identity label emphasizes that the idea of being American is tied to multiple ethnic immigrant roots. If anything, being American and ethnic, which inevitably means non-European, means that the bearer of that identity has to constantly make a political choice about which side of the hyphen they owe their primary allegiance to.

Furthermore, in many cases, as we have seen during the anti-minority backlash during the 2016 Presidential elections, this "choice" has resulted in a split within the Latin American community as they have increasingly felt the need to affirm their American-ness as an indication of patriotism. Journalist Andrea Noel notes that:

> Although they may have turned out in record numbers on Election Day, a whopping 29 percent of Latinos cast their ballots for Donald Trump, according to CNN exit polls, ... This is more than the 27 percent of Latinos who voted for Republican candidate Mitt Romney in 2012. So, almost one out of every three Hispanic voters decided, despite

> Trump's rhetoric about Mexico, Mexicans, and Mexican-Americans, that they want him to lead the United States as it grapples with a future full of decisions about how it will treat migrants, refugees, and the estimated 11 million undocumented people who have lived alongside them in communities across the country. (Noel)

And, she adds, NBC exit polls showed that 68 percent of Latinos were against building a wall along the Mexican border, a figure that was in sharp contrast to the 86 percent of African Americans who responded similarly. Likewise, responding to whether unauthorized immigrants should be able to apply to stay on legally in the country, "82 percent of blacks said yes, whereas only 78 percent of Hispanic voters agreed" (Noel). As Noel points out, the growing split between Latinos shows that they are not a "unified bloc" as politicians have long imagined them to be, and that "their votes will continue to be as diverse as the opinions of the nation at large." Not surprisingly, she suggests, analysts have not considered, "on the one hand, a religious, conservative streak among Hispanics, and on the other hand, the idea that many Mexican-Americans and Latinos would call themselves average Americans, rather than identify with the communities that politicians, pundits, and members of the media cast them into" (Noel). In the words of one Latino voter:

> "Look, lady, I'm an American, and vote for my country's interest," he said with a smile. "I don't go around calling people like you a white voter or a woman voter, and I wouldn't assume that you would vote for Clinton because she looks like you, so why's everyone asking the same of people who look like me?" (qtd. in Noel)

Even as scholars and media professionals are wrapping their minds around the complexity of defining Hispanic-American/Latino identity, we are becoming aware of the fact that to many Americans, those who come from Spanish-speaking countries are still "foreigners." We

witnessed this most recently in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico (Dovere) and in the number of YouTube videos that have captured racist attacks against people speaking Spanish in public spaces in the United States. In a 2015 Press encounter, Univision's Jorge Ramos[3] was ejected from the room when trying to ask a question about the Mexican wall and immigration, with then Presidential candidate Trump telling him that he could "Go back to Univision." Later, allowed back to the Press gathering, Ramos

> …asked his questions about the wall, birthright citizenship, and mass deportation. How was Trump actually going to do these things? Did he plan to use the Army to round up eleven million people? "We're going to do it in a very humane fashion," Trump said. "I have a bigger heart than you do." The two men talked over each other, with Ramos still asking for specifics. Trump now seemed to know who Ramos was. "You and I will talk," he said. "We're going to be talking a lot over the years." He meant, it seemed, when he was President. "Do you know how many Hispanics work for me?" Trump asked. "They love me." (Qtd. in Finnegan)

Encounters such as these attest to the importance of having journalists and reporters who will ask tough questions on behalf of under-represented groups, particularly in the current political climate. More recently, when Univision's KMEX-TV Channel 34 was pulled off carriers on the West coast because of failed negotiations over carriage fees paid by cable operator Charter Communications, it created panic among 2.4 million Latinidad viewer-households nationwide.[4]

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[3] In June 2015, Ramos sent a handwritten letter to Donald Trump, who had just launched his Presidential campaign, asking for an interview, but with no success. Univision had severed its business association with Trump, including its broadcasting of the "Miss U.S.A." and "Miss Universe" beauty pageants, after Trump blatantly stated that Mexico was sending "rapists" to the United States. Trump posted Ramos's letter on Instagram, boasting that Univision was "begging" him for interviews. In the following weeks, Trump kept up a rhetoric of racist remarks about Mexicans and immigration, arguably stirring up anti-immigration rage to new heights.

[4] 2.5 million Latino homes nationwide found themselves unable to access popular broadcast networks as Univision and UniMas, as well the cable channels Galavision, El Rey and the sports outlet Univision Deportes (James and Bermudez).

One viewer from California lamented that “This is a crucial news source so many of us depend on/..Taking it away is like telling community, ‘You don’t matter. You’re not worthy of receiving information’” (James and Bermudez). Father Richard Estrada of Church of the Epiphany in Lincoln Heights, was disturbed:

> The blackout’s timing couldn’t be worse, he said, given the current political climate, which has many Latinos on edge.
>
> “People are afraid and nervous of what [President] Trump will do next,” Estrada said. “A lack of access to news and information will only make things worse. It makes you wonder, ‘What’s next? What will they take away next?’ ” (James and Bermudez)

While the perception that the President is behind this black-out is unfounded, what this concern shows is how worried Latinidad immigrants to the U.S. are about political issues (such as the recent mass deportations of undocumented migrants, and the threat to DACA) and how vital the Spanish-language networks are for information and discussions about issues that concern the community and from their perspective.

Univision may not be a well-known household name among non-Spanish speakers, but in 2013 and 2014, “for what are known as the July prime-time sweeps, its audience was larger than that of each of the four main English-language networks. Its original programming is sold throughout the Spanish-speaking world. (The U.S. now has more Spanish speakers than Spain does.)” (Finnegan). This alone gives us a sense of the vast power Univision wields in reaching out, through its programming, to Hispanic-American and Latinx audiences worldwide. Its appeal also reflects the recent nuanced focus on diversity within the Latinx community:

> On the news side, the network is far more cosmopolitan than its English-language counterparts, starting with its employees. Patsy Loris, the senior news director, is

> Chilean; Sabrina Zambrano-Orr, the executive producer of "Al Punto," is Venezuelan; Teresa Rodriguez is Cuban; Isaac Lee, the president for news and digital, is Colombian; and so on. The coverage of international news, especially in Latin America, is decidedly more thorough and energetic than what the English-language broadcast networks provide. (Finnegan)

Hyphenated identities imply a dual identity capturing the complexities of intersectionality much like "Latinx" has. Scholar Frances Giampapa feels that the act of claiming identities and claiming the spaces of identity is a political act where can move from the margins and to the center, where one achieves inclusion (193). We can therefore see how the letter "x" in "Latinx" has been an important self-empowering move for billennials (Latinx millennials).

For millennials, as a 2013 Boston Consulting Group research survey showed, 'authenticity' is also particularly important. Another survey showed that 85 percent of Millennials want companies to be more 'authentic', as they want to have an "engaging, authentic" relationship with brands (Gronlund). The President of The Pathfinder Group, a business consulting firm, reports that:

> Authenticity is often described as the quality of being genuine and real, true to its origin. Among Hispanic Millennials, this means true to their culture and so it is even more important. They are very proud of their culture and heritage. According to Pew Research, only 33 percent of second generation Latinos identify as American first; the rest still refer to themselves as Hispanic or Latino first. In short, Hispanic Millennials are Hispanic by choice. (Gronlund)

For Hispanic Millennials, this in turn means communicating in a manner that reflects a full understanding and sensitivity to their culture and heritage. This explains why most viewers in

that community find Jorge Ramos and Univision particularly trustworthy, since it is the one television network that has consistently tackled hard issues such as immigration, without backing off. In the eyes of Hispanic-American and Latinx viewers alike, Univision is 'authentic' in delivering news and entertainment that recognizes Latino diversity, and also captures the global complexity of being diasporic as both Hispanics and Latinos move from their countries into the U.S., and face the challenge of deciding whether to integrate or assimilate.

**Cultural Authenticity**

In his well-known essay "Identity, Authenticity, Survival," philosopher K. Anthony Appiah challenges the idea that an authentic identity must oppose the traditional norms that seem to threaten its progression. He suggests that "it is in the dialogue with other people's understandings of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity" (154). And, he adds, "[w]e make up selves from a toolkit of options made available by our culture and society. We do make choices, but we do not determine the options among which we choose" (155). This is a reminder of how influential the media is in shaping people's sense of their cultural authenticity as well. Literary scholar Michael Nieto Garcia cautions though that racial/ethnic authenticity create a hegemonic discourse, using an "essentialist discourse" and "trading biological claims for (mostly) cultural ones" (132).

For instance, media scholar Yeidy Rivero and Latino/a Studies researcher Marisel Moreno remind us, that Puerto Rican identity is centered in the idea of "la gran familia puertorriqueña" (the great Puerto Rican family). Rivero feels that, since the 1930s, ongoing attempts to express Puerto Ricanness have "functioned as a symbolic shield against the United States" (15). Moreno explains that *la gran familia puertorriqueña* "continues to inform notions of Puerto Rican identity both in and outside the island and that the diaspora community has

invoked this myth as a strategy to reclaim its kinship ties to the greater Puerto Rican family" (3). This, in turn, permits the construction for a "cultural nationalism" that, as historian Christopher Schmidt-Nowara indicates, allows Puerto Ricans to "define a sphere of authentic culture and history [that is] protected from what they considered external [colonizing] influences," namely, Spanish and American forces (14).

The concept of Latinidad similarly attempts to construct a discourse of 'authentic' Latinx identity. But to understand how Latinx authenticity is constructed, we must first try to make sense of the complexity of cultural authenticity. This concept has been explored considerably in relation to multicultural children's literature and its importance in being accurate. Education scholars Weimin Mo and Wenju Shen define cultural authenticity as "not just accuracy or the avoidance of stereotypes, but involves cultural values, facts, and attitudes that members of the culture as a whole consider worthy of acceptance and belief" (198). Mo and Shen emphasize that in order to be considered authentic, the members who identify in the particular culture consider certain values and facts to be true. Additionally, researcher in children's literature Junko Yokota suggests that a text's cultural authenticity can be evaluated by several characteristics such as the "richness of cultural details, authentic dialogue and relationships, in-depth treatment of cultural issues, and the inclusion of minority groups for a purpose" (159). A media text, much like *Antes Muerta Que Lichita*, can be evaluated by Latinxs as culturally authentic by the structuring of the dialogue and the relationships of characters within the telenovela. No surprise then that Marilyn Halter, writing in her book *Shopping for Identity*, tells readers that when it comes to marketers and culture producers re-constructing culture through commercial avenues, they usually find themselves caught between two extremes: "authentic cultural purity" and "cultural expression that has been so commercialized that it has been robbed of any distinctive meaning" (17).

For Latinos/as in the United States, representations of ethnic and cultural authenticity "are also mediated by way of an amorphous yet stereotypical Latinidad (Aparicio 2003; Davila 2008)" reconstruction of a pan-Latino identity (Lugo-Lugo 107). As Frances Aparicio emphasizes, "the multiple subjectivities and identities that Latinos embody" give rise to complex processes of interlatino transculturations. These interlatino transculturations, she continues, can produce "competing authenticities," and in certain cases, lead to "numerous forms of negotiations…cultural divergences, and power hierarchies" as well (92). Molina Guzmán and Angharad Valdivia develop this insight, discussing how "Latina/o identity, as a hybrid form within U.S. culture, remaps dominant hierarchies of identity and challenges popular notions of place and nation" (214). Furthermore, while Latinas/os "occupy a racialized space in between the dominant U.S. binary of Black or White identities," equally significant is the fact that no Latina celebrity in the U.S. "can lay a claim to an authentically pure ethnic identity, rather they may claim or reject a multiplicity of ethnic identities" (Molina Guzmán and Valdivia 214). In fact, because these celebrities have to appeal to both Latinas/os in the U.S. and those who are diasporic, they are idolized as "transnational figures…they exist within the representational conflict between the hybrid and the authentic that many diasporic cultures occupy" (218).[5] If cultural identity in the commercial context is therefore, always a performative negotiation, then Marilyn Halter's observation holds weight that, "When individuals purchase something considered representative of a culture, whether buying a piece of their own heritage or branching out to expose themselves to another's, they expect a certain level of legitimacy" (Halter 19). In

[5] The complexity of this is captured by Carmen M. Lugo-Lugo through the example of the celebrity Jennifer Lopez or J-Lo as she is called. Even though she claims to be 100 percent "authentically" Puerto Rican because of her parentage, as a second-generation immigrant, she may also choose to label herself as Puerto Rican "because she may not see herself as Black, or White, or as a member of any other discreet racialized group in U.S. society" (109).

other words, to borrow from Valdivia's analysis of Jennifer Lopez's body as a site of such identity-making, Latinidad has been transformed into "a marketable commodity" (Valdivia 67).

Arlene Dávila (2001) therefore cautions readers that "marketing discourse is not without political and economic repercussions" (235), and that the marketing industry "stands at the forefront of contemporary Latino cultural politics." Furthermore, "the discourses of authenticity [are] engendered by [the marketing] industry to defend the existence and profitability of [Latinos] as an authentic and thus commercially viable market" (4). This has led to postcolonial scholar and filmmaker Frances Negrón-Muntaner to conclude that "Latino…refers less to a cultural identity than to a specifically American national currency for economic and political deal making, a technology to demand and deliver emotions, votes, markets, and resources on the same level--and hopefully at an even steeper price--as other racialized minorities" (172). Equally, as Linda Martín Alcoff tells us, the diversity of Latinidad poses the challenge of defining what is culturally "authentic" for this group:

> Racialized identities in the North have long connoted homogeneity and easily visible identifying features, but this does not apply to Latinos in the United States, nor even to any one national subset, such as Cuban Americans or Puerto Ricans. We have no homogeneous culture, we come in every conceivable color, and identities such as mestizo signify the very absence of boundaries. (229)

It makes sense too that the source of any commercial messaging regarding Latinidad identity plays an important role in establishing the credibility of the representations. The selling of Telemundo, to NBC, for example, raised questions about the lack of familiarity of Telemundo's new president within the Latinidad community and therefore cast doubts on the network's legitimacy and authenticity (Davila 2000: 76).

Finally, it is equally important to mention traditions as part of cultural authenticity. Scholar Anthony Giddens (2003) argues that:

> In traditional societies, the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations. Tradition is a means of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of past, present and future, these in turn being structures by recurrent social practices. (37)

In traditional societies, individuals prefer to use rituals and practices from the past as a guide for how they should live in the present. Today, in the Latinidad community, traditional practices are being challenged and reworked to accommodate Latinxs. Giddens argues that tradition is not static but reinvented by each generation. With this in mind, what was considered to be an authentic Latino/a identity decades ago, is being reinvented. And this reinvention takes on interesting dimensions thanks to the marketing of television through online convergence culture.

## Convergence Culture

"Convergence culture" is a term used by new media theorist Henry Jenkins to describe an era of transition when old and new media collide and where one sees increasing overlaps between the roles of media producers and consumers (3). Old media, like radio or newspapers, are not being transformed by new technologies (14). Jenkins describes media convergence as a phenomenon that involves "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted" (2). This, in turn, encourages collaborations between fans and producers of a TV show and has resulted in new ways in which how consumers process news and entertainment. Jenkins outlines the connection between three main concepts that he outlines: media convergence, participatory

culture, and collective intelligence. Media convergence, he states, is the intersection of all media where one cannot see where one media begins and the other ends. It impacts the way we consume media, so that we can listen to music while browsing through social media, or sending emails. Participatory culture involves consumers actively interacting with the media, reworking and sharing media content, instead of passively consuming media culture. Here, consumers aren't sitting back and watching but rather participating in the making of the media. Regardless, corporations still have more power than consumers (Jenkins 3). Collective intelligence means that every member of the "community" knows something and are able to combine their knowledge together to produce great outcomes. By "community," Jenkins means that consumers are held together by mutual production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge (27). Jenkins states:

> None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills. Collective intelligence can be seen as an alternative source of media power. We are learning how to use that power through our day-to-day interactions within convergence culture. (4)

Collective intelligence is an important form of community since it involves sharing knowledge about interests between consumers. It is a result of the participatory culture. These communities form in forums, Facebook groups, even YouTube comments. People often talk about their common experiences and therefore, reinforce social norms and builds a common ground for other consumers.

A 2013 study in a *New York Times* article found that 34 percent of millennials watch no broadcast television (New York Times 2013). Since Latinx millennials constitute a large

percentage of this group, it is understandable how Univision attracted this audience by creating a product that can also be the by-product of the collision between new and old media.

*AMQL*, therefore, is another product of convergence culture. To understand how this telenovela has been instrumental in crafting what is considered as "authentic" and a billennial identity, in the following chapter, we will analyze the media content of *AMQL*. It is also important to note the numerous occasions that the telenovela included product placement, especially since the scene of the action within the telenovela is usually in the main protagonist Alicia's place of work, which is an advertising company. Additionally, to fully understand the audience experience, it is important to look at the fan pages and forums that have been dedicated to the transmedia telenovela. Audiences, after all, responded to the telenovela by contesting or negotiating the narratives of identity in the telenovela.

## Chapter 4: *AMQL* and Spanish Billennial Media

*"Lichita is a hardworking young woman who has been struggling to advance professionally in an advertising agency. After working there for eight years, she feels underappreciated and invisible. When the handsome Roberto arrives at the agency, he steals her heart and her ideas, using the for his own advancement at an important business presentation. This finally prompts Lichita to make changes and she decides to no longer be a victim at work. Instead, she will transform herself into the powerful Alicia."*

-Antes Muerta Que Lichita (2015-2016)

### The Backbone of *AMQL*

Whether its a dramatic story of love or a romantic comedy, millions of Latinxs watch telenovelas nightly on TV and/or on their devices not just for the plot twists, but for the sense of community telenovelas inspire. As I have discussed in previous chapters, telenovelas often have multi-generational appeal, especially for women, the cornerstone of the Latinx family who keep language and traditions alive. But what has Univision done to please *abuela* (grandmother), *papa* (dad) and billennials? Produced by Televisa and aired through Univision, *Antes Muerta Que Lichita* (AMQL) follows the story of Alicia who becomes the empowered advertising executive in Icónika. In Mexico, it ran from August 24, 2015 through February 21, 2016; in the U.S., it ran September 22, 2015 through March 7, 2016. *AMQL* also won for Best Lead Actress (Maite Perroni) and Best Multi-Platform telenovela, an award started the previous year, in the 2016 Premios TVyNovelas[6].

[6] The Premios TVyNovelas are awards that are annually by *Televisa* and the magazine *TVyNovelas* to honor the best Mexican television productions, including telenovelas. Since 1983, the award ceremony is held in the Forum Mundo Imperial in Acapulco. The ceremony is broadcasted through Canal de las Estrellas in Mexico and Latin America, and Univision in the United States.

Screenwriter and one of the writers of *AMQL* Pedro Armando Rodríguez is known for adapting another well-known telenovela *Rebelde* (2004-2006) from the Argentinian original (*Rebelde Way*) for Mexican audiences and was nominated in the 2016 Premios TVyNovelas for *AMQL* in the category of Best Screenplay or Adaption. The Executive Producer was Rosy Ocampo, who is currently the Corporate Vice President of Content for Televisa. Ocampo is a highly respected producer and is known for being the Executive Producer of *La Fea Más Bella* (The Ugliest most Beautiful; 2006-2007) in Mexico. With over 20 highly successful telenovelas under her belt, Ocampo's productions have been broadcasted in over 70 countries (Milenio). In the United States alone, her telenovelas have contributed to Univision's golden era as the leader of the U.S. Latino market. Ocampo's productions have been widely recognized for innovating the telenovela by using transmedia strategies that take viewers beyond the TV screen with storytelling that spans digital and social platforms (Milenio).

Every year since 2008, Globo and the Ibero-American Observatory of Television Fiction (Obitel) publish reports on 12 countries' previous year's programming, and in 2016, the report focused on the reinvention of TV fiction genres and formats. The year *AMQL* premiered was important because in Mexico, older analog television broadcasting was finally replaced by digital television. According to the report, TV networks Televisa and TV Azteca communicated with their audiences through the telenovelas about the analog phase out: "In their plots, characters spoke of the importance of buying digital TV sets or signal decoders so as not to miss their favorite telenovelas or shows" (Orozco 282). Specifically, *AMQL* was one of the most outstanding examples because it created a series of podcasts on this topic on its website (Orozco 282). One important finding from this report that year was that Mexico was the second largest market in the world for Netflix, thus attesting to the growing popularity of cross-border

telenovelas (284). In 2015, *AMQL*, a comedic telenovela, was the third most watched program that year during prime time (7pm-10pm) hours, with the top viewers being aged 40 years and over, and had a total of 131 episodes, approximately 45-65 minutes each (292-293).

**AMQL's Webnovela & Its Premise**




"Capitulo 72" Alicia (Maite Perroni) at Icónika USA.

AMQL's narrative, like other telenovelas that year, is focused around love and family but stands out for including social themes of digital literacy and social responsibility (Orozco 294). The first episode of the telenovela sets up the main female protagonist Alicia's life as assistant to the Director of Creativity at Icónika, the best advertising agency in Ibero-America, as narrated by its CEO, Augusto de Toledo y Modragón. Alicia, nicknamed "Lichita," "Asistonta" (dumb assistant) and "Lichicienta" (her name reformatted to refer to Cinderella), is a laughing stock because of her appearance and style choices. Despite having a passion for public relations, her intelligence and talent are not recognized by her co-workers even though she has worked at the agency as a temp for eight years. Alicia breaks the fourth wall to directly talk to audiences about her thoughts in surprising moments during the telenovela. For sixty-one episodes, audiences see Lichita struggle to become visible in her workplace. By episode sixty-two, a little more into the last half of the show, the new Alicia arrives at Icónika's curb during the Press interview being

held with Luciana, the show's antagonist, who happens to be Augusto's daughter. This new Alicia not only looks physically different, but is empowered. During the first episode, audiences get to see the ways in which Alicia, or Lichita as she's nicknamed before her transformation, is treated: she's invisible and when she's visible, she's laughed at. The plot is a classical one similar to *La Fea Más Bella*: an "ugly" woman can only be acknowledged by others when she is transformed into someone "beautiful." Even though Alicia transformed herself physically, by the end of the telenovela, she voluntarily changes back again to the old Alicia with less makeup, except she is still empowered. Despite efforts to show powerful female protagonists, *AMQL* follows the traditional narrative as previous telenovelas with its' Cinderella-type narrative so that Alicia ends up marrying Roberto, her male counterpart.

Throughout the telenovela, it is easier for writers and producers to incorporate product placements in between scenes because most of the narrative takes place in the advertising agency Alicia works at. During every episode, the hashtag #AMQLichita pops up at the bottom to encourage the viewers to interact online while watching the telenovela. Even though it was a romantic comedy, interestingly, *AMQL* also dealt with themes of cyberbullying, which I will discuss later in this chapter, and homophobia. In Episode 72, viewers learn that the President of the ad agency Icónika is already planning on expanding the company to the U.S., naming it Icónika USA, and he sends Alicia to help the new agency set up. The transition to Icónika USA is obvious because the logo has an American flag. During the episode, Alicia learns that she's not just helping a team on a campaign but that there are only two employees, Yuris and Jorna, and that she's going to manage the branch. Her team involves Latinxs, who have accents, and in one scene, they share their thoughts on advertising:

Jorna: So you're interested in advertising with a social sense?

Alicia: Totally. My university thesis is about that. I think we shouldn't only be selling products. We should send positive messages for society.

Yuris: That's great because we've worked on a couple of that kind of things. Do you remember the ad about migrant children?

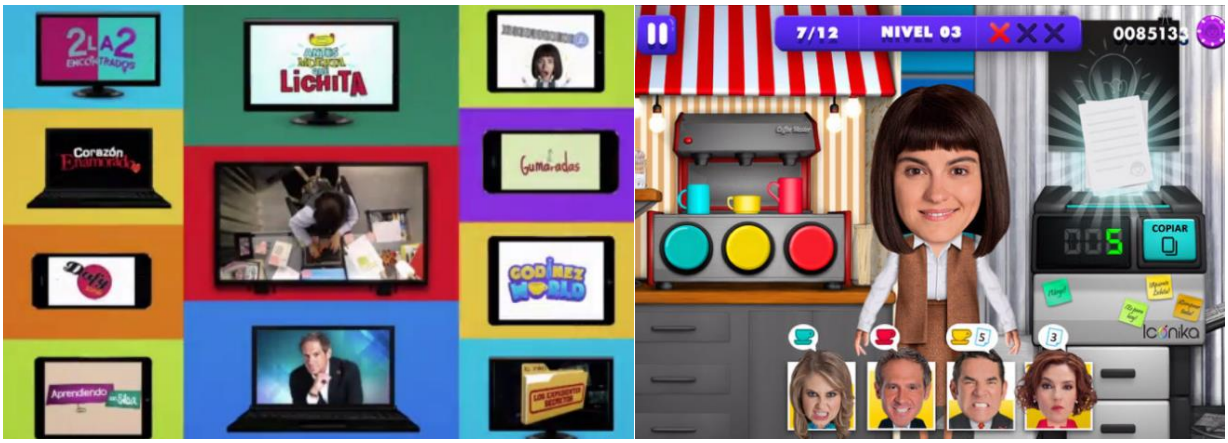
Jorna: Yes, we also did one on same sex couple marriages.

Alicia goes on to explain that she's interested making campaigns about social messages, such as discussing the gender inequality between men and women in the workplace. When asked about the current campaign she's working on, Alicia states that she's taking this opportunity to not just to promote a brand, but to give the social message to bicultural dreamers that they are the future of the Hispanic community in the U.S. This is important because writers are now using telenovelas like *AMQL* to attract the billennial or Latina/o millennial audience. By Episode 83, the actors of *Corazón Enamorado* make an appearance on the actual telenovela to shoot a commercial for an advertising campaign Alicia is leading.

Alicia's younger sister, Magos, is seen during the course of the telenovela watching *Corazón Enamorado, AMQL*'s embedded webnovela. During every episode, audiences are able to see short segments of *Corazón* and every Monday, the entire episode (about 5-7 minutos long) was published on AMQL's official site. As I mentioned in previous chapters, webnovelas were created to attract young Latinx audiences and *Corazón* is particularly a parody of the traditional aspects of the telenovela genre. By making respectful fun of the traditional framework and mythologies embedded in the typical telenovela, *Corazón* becomes an effective tool that is used by the TV network to attract a younger billennial audience that wants to see its attitudes and experiences reflected in cultural media products. Communication researcher Carlos A. Scolari argues that webnovelas have developed because of the phenomena of post-broadcasting and the

diffusion of the second screens. Second screens refer to the migration of television programming and/or related content, off traditional television sets to mobile devices such as cellphones and laptops, so that consumers hop between screens (and the printed page) and multitask while watching their favorite shows (Nielsen). Scolari builds off the work of Juan Piñón, stating that the decrease in consumption of traditional broadcasting content among the younger generation, and the diffusion of mobile devices among Latinos in the U.S. are leading to the development of new strategies for increasing *on demand* content and the production of short webnovelas adapted to the rhythms and forms of consumption of this new generation (Scolari). Scolari's research tells us that the future telenovela "must learn to move between the tensions generated by two vectors of force: the historical continuity of a genre in an environment marked by technological and generational discontinuities." *AMQL* has tried so far to achieve this.

**Media Content**




Media content for *Antes Muerta Que Lichita*, Capitulo (Episode) 72

In Mexico, content for *AMQL* was similar to that released in the U.S. but not identical. Because the telenovela was broadcasted through Univision, its content was branded with the Univision name whereas in Mexico, the content was branded as Televisa. The official website by Televisa includes several links to watch previous episodes (the website no longer shows full

episodes), photo galleries, media content and general information about *AMQL*. The media content section of *AMQL*'s official website is divided as follows, according to the Obitel 2016 report:

1) Blog Lichita: an online blog written by Alicia herself as she maintains one within the narrative of the telenovela; also a place where fans have the opportunity to share their experiences
2) Secret files: consists of scenes not aired on television
3) Gumaradas: a character who uses coarse language and appears on the Televisa forum to interact with actors with whom he jokes
4) Learning with Elsa: Alicia's mother who, along with her granddaughter, teaches senior citizens how to use the internet and digital tablets.
5) 2LA2: two characters who speak about several topics
6) Ximena's space: a platform where the Alicia's niece invites children to play the official game of the telenovela, Godinez World, which according to producer Ocampo, had 600,000 downloads in the first three months and surpassed 9 million game sessions
7) Dafyzone: "tips to overcome teenage problems and not die trying"
8) Characters test: surveys to ask audiences what they like during an episode

*AMQL* employed multiple storytelling techniques to expand the world of "Lichita" in way that is relevant to every member of the family: the novela-within-a-novela for millennials, the advice blog for teens, and the technology tutorial series for *abuelos* (grandparents). Audiences can also participate in interactive polls and not only to talk about twists in the plot through online forums, but actually influence the narrative direction through interactive polls using the app. According

to the Obitel report, the most promoted type of fan reach-out to keep their active participation was through Facebook that consisted of interactions such as inviting the audience to "like" images and use hashtags such as #Final*AMQL* or #SuperWoman, preview videos and photos of the stars, and "to join the talk" in which people shared their opinion about the contents of the telenovela or the future of the plot (Orozco 298). "Dafyzone" is a blog kept by Dafne during the course of the telenovela. Dafne is the sixteen-year-old daughter of the president of Icónika and dresses in goth-style clothing. Because her parents care about appearances, Dafne uses her fashion rebellion against her parents for sending her away to boarding schools because she is overweight. Repeatedly, characters say that working at Icónika and marketing in general means working in a world of appearances. Dafne keeps a blog, like Alicia, as a space to express her feelings but deals with cyber bullying for being overweight. The blog has become part of *AMQL*'s transmedia content and establishes a place where young audiences know how to deal with bullying. Everytime Dafne or Alicia are typing in their blogs, pop ups appear to let the audience know that the content will be posted online. In the U.S., Univision contributed to the transmedia efforts by releasing UniNovelas, an app to view the telenovelas being shown on TV at the time along with exclusive content such as character-produced blogs, additional clips, etc.

**Critics in the U.S. and Mexico**

Although *AMQL* was not the most successful telenovela during its run, critics from both the U.S. and Mexico praised it for its narrative and transmedia elements. Reviews have been mixed so that from the critics' point-of-view, the telenovela has either been judged on the merit of how it stands within its own genre, or how it is a game-changer in educating viewers about social issues. One critic, for example, stated that the telenovela's social messages and characters were hard to take seriously because they had been caricatured (Staff). But *AMQL* is certainly not

the first telenovela to develop over-the-top characters. One pseudo-journalist from the Mexico-based digital publication Ximinia states that *AMQL* is the worst of Mexican television, and is the same or worse than Televisa's *La Fea Más Bella* ("The Prettiest Ugly Girl"), essentially following the same narrative framework with similar characters, dialogues and finale (Pilato). Writer Alvaro Cueva raises the same question that *AMQL* is a copy of *La Fea Más Bella* but argues that it is the most intelligent, positive, revolutionary telenovela of all time, arguing:

> We have a story that puts on the table the double moral of families and Mexican companies that questions the pruderies and religious fanaticism, which reflects on the impossibility that thousands of ex-offenders have to rejoin the workforce.
>
> And who has recognized this? Who has congratulated Rosy Ocampo and her magnificent production team for having the pants to mess with this, and with much more, while still offering a melodrama for all audiences? Who! As if everything I just said was not enough, nobody, in the whole history of Mexican television, has produced more and better transmedia content than *Antes Muerta Que Lichita*. (Cueva)

Actress Maite Perroni who plays "Lichita" in *AMQL* answers the critics best by pointing out the show's main message:

> [Lichita] is exposed to criticism and comments from everyone. As time goes on she has the necessity of seeking vengeance and rise up to demonstrate that she is just as capable as everybody else, but she will go to the extreme. An extreme that is not positive, that will make her forget about her values, principles and her family. In the end she will realize things can be that way because she is converting in the person she didn't want to be. (Tinoco)

For a telenovela that seeks to educate viewers on the perils of cyber-bullying and of trying to please everyone by being who you are not, *AQML* has taken the bold step of following its own message. Recognizing that its 'authenticity' in viewers' eyes, particularly for Latinx billennials, depends upon advocating diversity positive messages and an openness to exploring the issues that the children of immigrants may be confronting in the Latinidad diaspora. The telenovela has used an old media form to start an intergenerational conversation within the culture about the fears and anxieties that both old and young viewers face–technology and a fast-changing world with different values, in the case of older viewers, and issues like body image, parent-child connections, and cyber-bullying for younger audiences.

**Media Industry and the Impact of Catering to New Audiences:**

What has been significant for the Spanish television networks has been the impact that *AQML*'s transmedia efforts and reworking of traditional telenovela themes has had on the genre at large. More recently, in 2016, NBCUniversal's Telemundo and BuzzFeed announced their collaboration in producing a 10-part *millennial* soap opera "Much Ado About Nada." The unfolding of the storyline for the "English-language show will be informed by BuzzFeed data about what resonates with a younger, mobile-oriented and multicultural audience, and producers are leaving the door open to change the narrative mid-series based on viewer reaction." The decision to try a youth-oriented telenovela in English, and to pay attention to trends among the billennial viewers shows an appreciation for the growing number of eyeballs that are in this category. Peter Blacker, executive VP of digital media and emerging business for NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises, claims that there have been plenty of telenovela *parodies*" [italics mine], but "nobody has earnestly set out to take this classic genre and create a full-on telenovela for millennials" (Spangler). Set in California over the course of one weekend, the telenovela

promised the usual twists and turns, but enters the world of politics. The plot revolves around Alexa, who owns a social-media firm and is hosting a political fundraiser for her client, who's running for the California governor's office. BuzzFeed and Telemundo came up with the series after research showed that there is growing interest among Hispanics and younger audiences in both politics and social media, according to Blacker. Its launch was therefore planned around the November 2016 U.S. Presidential elections, "in the middle of one of the most politically charged years of all time" (Spangler). One of the proposed characters was a young U.S. military veteran who returns to L.A. after serving in the Middle East, given the popularity among Hispanic audiences for military vets, Blacker said. BuzzFeed and Telemundo planned to do a talent search to find a real-life returning Hispanic vet for the role.

In terms of technological innovation, each *ten-minute episode* appeared weekly across Telemundo and BuzzFeed *digital platforms*. Telemundo also aired segments of the series on its "Un Nuevo Día" morning show and the cabler and BuzzFeed advertised the show in a broad social-media campaign in Spanish and English. Most importantly, because five of the ten episodes were crafted "based on BuzzFeed insights on audience reaction," this digital telenovela was literally, "a living, breathing thing" (Spangler).

At the same time, a *Wall Street Journal* article published in September 2016 reports that, the rapid change "in young Hispanics' television tastes is testing Univision Communications Inc.'s 24-year marriage to its longtime programming supplier, Mexican TV giant Grupo Televisa SAB, a relationship that helped fuel the rise of Hispanic media in the U.S." The ratings at Univision have seen a sharp drop[7] despite experiments like *AQML* (2015-2016) because of allegations that Televisa's content, which consists mainly of telenovelas imported from outside

[7] Univision network's average prime-time audience has fallen from 3.7 million viewers five years ago to two million this season, including a week of DVR playback. Its average prime-time viewership this season has dropped 25% from last year (Ramachandran and Campo-Flores).

the U.S., seems out-of-date and lacks the "American flair to appeal to younger and U.S.-born Hispanics, said people familiar with the matter" (Ramachandran and Campo-Flores). While things reached a head with Univision considering severing its ties with Televisa, a new FCC deal has allowed the U.S. to "become 'a primary place for distribution of content, not a secondary place' for Mexican media giant Grupo Televisa," according to Univision CEO Randy Falco. As part of the deal with Televisa, the FCC allowed it "to increase its equity stake in Univision to 49% from 25% — the current ceiling for overseas ownership of a TV station owner. There was one caveat: Televisa can control only as much as 40% of the shareholder votes" (Lieberman). What this draws attention to is the increasing attention of how important the younger billennial market is to television companies that want to attract more advertising dollars. "We think the television station business is a good one — it's very, very important to us for retransmission," Falco says (Lieberman). But just as important here is the recognition that the U.S.-based Univision will also control content for Televisa, as Univision's Isaac Lee has been made Chief Content Officer of both Univision and Televisa, under the terms of this new agreement (Lieberman). Thus, we now have an American flavor to Latinidad programming being streamed to billennials in the U.S. but also Latinx youth across the diaspora.

This also raises questions about cultural authenticity. The U.S. has long been accused of "cultural imperialism," a term coined by Herbert Schiller that proposes that, "that US-controlled corporations dominate the global communications industries" because they have more economic and political resources than corporations in other countries. One of the fears raised by the "cultural imperialism" argument was that the dominance of American media content would ideologically transform other cultural ways of thinking into following the American value-system (Barker). However, complex media flows and the different interpretations and remaking

of media content as it crosses borders, means that there are arguably more opportunities for foreign companies, such as Televisa, to participate in manufacturing media narratives that will be consumed across cultures. Of course, as we have seen, media ownership and true participation are a different matter. Univision's Isaac Lee has been made Chief Content Officer of *both* Univision and Televisa, but this guarantees a stronger voice for Lee's parent media company Univision. As evidenced before, Univision's concern for ratings and its desire for a more American flavored programming lineup means that Latinidads and billennials will be consuming the American lifestyle with its accompanying ideologies as being the more relevant and desirable identity to aspire to.

**Transmedia storytelling and the Corporatization of Viewers:**

Hellekson and Busse, in their book, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, suggest that the export of new forms of television programming from the U.S. to the rest of the world, based on a media convergence model, has not only changed storytelling models, but also attracted a more active audience base that is younger and more familiar with technology. Henry Jenkins has pointed out that transmedia storytelling is the expansion of the storytelling across multi-media platforms so that "each franchise is self-sufficient to allow its individual consumption" (3). Multi-platform storytelling applies particularly to narrative content that is translated in a planned and orchestrated manner across many different media formats such as television, film, webisodes, mobile phone applications and mobisodes, games, books, graphic novels, and music albums (Jenkins, 2006). And, as transmedia professionals Buckner and Rutledge, co-founders of the consulting firm "A Think Lab" identify, there are three incentives for why producers should be using transmedia storytelling to increase the impact of their stories, namely: persuasion, audience connection, and financial impact. When we look at audiences,

"transmedia strategies create many points of entry that reach and link multiple demographics and target different user needs to effectively expand the customer base." Each media component – whether it's a song, a comic strip, a video game, mobile app, or a blog – "functions as a standalone story experience – complete and satisfying" for the viewer (Buckner and Rutledge).

While Jenkins argues in *Convergence Culture* (2006) that "convergence culture" empowers fans and produces new dynamics between producers and consumers through "participatory fan culture," other media scholars still worry about the corporatization of fan energy and participation in transmedia projects. Jennifer Gillan, for example, draws attention to how television production companies are deliberately constructing TV shows as a multi-platform network of media products partly by cashing in on fan labor through existing fan-centered websites. Gillan makes the case that by designing content for multiple media platforms, broadcast networks aim to capture two target audiences simultaneously: the more traditional broader audience of the traditional television platform, but also the niche audience of the online and interactive content – those who play video games related to the TV series, for instance. Hence the TV industry has started adopting a new model of a combination "narrowcast-broadcast" TV programming, and advertisers are participating in this via branded entertainment deals (2). This new transmedia model aims at creating loyal and active fans who will become "brand advocates," and develop fan networks, repost content and links to their social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.) for free.

Related to this, Mark Andrejevic and other researchers are studying how the rise of interactive media exploits the creative and collaborative community energy of the Internet for corporate gain and train prosumers to accept greater surveillance (through practices like customized online advertising) and buy into neoliberal citizenship (Andrejevic, 2003, 2007a,

2007b; Ouelette &Hay, 2008). Along the same lines, Eileen Meehan (2005) shows how corporate synergy, involving cross-promotion of media products within media conglomerates for maximum profit, becomes accepted as a standard market practice for dominating media markets. She is particularly concerned about how the corporate profit motive and not audience interest becomes the main consideration, as audiences are commodified and sold to advertisers and organized by demographics. Meehan also adds that, "the saturation of multiple markets with branded products means less air time, cable time, shelf space, and the like for non-branded products" (111). The increasing turn to transmedia storytelling in other words, creates a media culture that extends corporate branding practices into the more complex area of identity-making and cultural authenticity.

**The Construction of Mediated Latina/o Identity:**

What does all this mean when it comes down to the construction of Latina/o identity, particularly concerning billennials? A recent Pew research study reveals that: "Hispanics are the youngest major racial or ethnic group in the United States. About one-third, or 17.9 million, of the nation's Hispanic population is younger than 18, and about a quarter, or 14.6 million, of all Hispanics are Millennials (ages 18 to 33 in 2014)." Taken together, the research shows that, "Nearly six-in-ten Hispanics in the U.S. are millennials or younger." A key difference between generations is that "Millennials are currently much less likely to be immigrants and are more likely to speak English proficiently." According to the same report, 76% of Hispanic millennials speak only English at home or speak it "very well," and 88% of Hispanics between the ages of 5 to 17 years, are fluent English language speakers. More interestingly, while 95% of Hispanics report that it is important for future generations to preserve the cultural tradition of speaking Spanish, 71% of them say that speaking the language is not a defining feature in order to be

considered Hispanic (Patten). This is of importance because as the new Univision-Televisa deal moves towards programming for Latinidad audiences, but with an American flair, much of its programming will be for the U.S. based Latino/a viewer base. In addition, the decision to move to creating telenovelas in English is both to capture the billennials as well as a larger mainstream American audience that is hungry for novel ethnic content that does not need to be translated. One could argue therefore, that Schiller's fears about "cultural imperialism" are not totally irrelevant.

In 2016, an episode of the CNN Original Series "United Shades of America," showed W. Kamau Bell interviewing residents of two Los Angeles communities where the majority of the residents are of Mexican descent--East L.A. and Boyle Heights. He asked one of them about the labels used to identify the community as an ethnic group:

> "Chicano and Chicana is the term that came from the people, the term that came from the streets, that came from the struggle of people saying 'Brown is Beautiful,'" explains Hector Flores, a musician with the band Las Cafeteras.
>
> "Latino" is another complicated term, Flores tells Bell: "People use it as an umbrella term." For Flores, "Hispanic" is "a Census word" used "to put everybody in categories." (Vega)

While a Pew study in 2012 on Hispanic identity indicated that half of those surveyed chose to "use their country of origin to describe their identity (Puerto Rican or Mexican for example) instead of Hispanic or Latino. Half of the respondents said they had no preference between Latino or Hispanic." In addition, although the growing popularity of "Latino" is used to cover the whole Spanish-speaking community, "those surveyed considered their culture unique and not part of a pan-Latino or Hispanic-American identity. (Generally, "Hispanic" is used to define

those who have roots in Spanish-speaking countries, excluding Brazil, while "Latino" includes those from Latin American countries, including Portuguese-speaking Brazil.)." Even now, the American government and many media companies use the terms synonymously. For example, Bell uses the term Latino in the television show "United Shades of America," while the Pew Research Foundation uses the word "Hispanic" in its research reports. The Census Bureau typically asks two questions when collecting data on Hispanics. The first is an ethnicity question to check if the respondent is "Hispanic, Latino or Spanish" and for respondents to specify their national origin (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban etc.). Next, they ask respondents to identify their race (white, black etc.). The bureau is test-piloting these questions for the 2020 Census to try and more accurately capture Latino identity. Finally, "Latinx" as discussed in Chapter 3, is increasingly the gender-neutral term of choice for younger members of the Latino/a community (Vega).

Sociologist Nilda Flores-González, author of *Citizens but Not Americans: Race and Belonging among Latino Millennials*, discusses her research into attitudes toward national identity among young Latinos/as, including young Puerto Ricans. Her findings show that Latino millennials *identify more with African Americans* because of their "shared marginal status," as also with Middle Easterners, and especially those with Arab and Muslim roots (6). Latino millennials find themselves towards the bottom of the race hierarchy and therefore facing discrimination and a sense of disempowerment, like other minority groups. As they struggle to try and fit into the social fabric of American life, despite having been born in the U.S. and socialized according to the norms of American culture, these young people don't feel comfortable calling themselves American. Flores-González suggests that this is because they do not see themselves "having the racial or cultural traits required to be seen as full-fledged

members of the American imagined community" (8-9). Through the process of "race making" she argues, there is an othering that the Latinidad community faces that makes them feel, as Castles and Davidson would argue, as "*citizens who do not belong*" [italics mine] (11-12), and therefore, Latinx millennials see themselves "*as citizens but not as Americans*" (9).

In her book, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New America*, sociologist G. Cristina Mora describes how, during the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of "Hispanic panethnicity" was established, as politicians, Census Bureau officials, activists, and media corporations collaborated in creating this idea. One could tune in to the Spanish television networks in the 1980s and see activists and census officials, on the news programs, discussing this concept. One Univision executive recalled a telethon where Census officials, media celebrities, and activists discussed the 1980 Census form with "a big circle around the new 'Hispanic' [census] question," inviting viewers to call in and identify themselves as such (5). This bringing together of all the different Hispanic and Latino groups under one label allowed various parties to overlook their cultural and ethnic differences and attempt instead, to redefine them as one minority group (6). Mora explained the commercial benefits of this for media companies and advertisers, in an interview with *Berkeley News*:

> Until that time, Spanish-language media executives had been creating separate television stations and programming for Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Suddenly they were able to start using some of this broad Census data and go to advertisers like McDonald's and Coca Cola and say, 'Look, we're a national Hispanic community and our consumer needs are different so invest in us and we will get you Hispanic consumer dollars.' With that strategy, they were able to connect stations across the country, and

> over time, create a Spanish-language McDonald's commercial that could broadcast to a national audience. (Qtd. in Anwar)

Another strategy she describes was how the Spanish language media was strategically used to develop this "Hispanic" identity. She talks about a popular Miami-based *El Show de Cristina*, that was described as the Spanish-language equivalent of Oprah. The show ran for twenty-one years and was only canceled in 2010:

> On the set, Cristina might have a Colombian family, a Mexican family and a Puerto Rican family talking about the difficulties of raising second- generation immigrant children or passing on the Spanish language and traditions. *This created an image that we were together, that we share the same problems, that we are a community* [italics mine]. (Qtd. in Anwar)

However, as the immigrants from central and South America and the Caribbean increased in numbers, and Latinos became a dominant part of tis 'minority group,' the labels became more politicized:

> Hispanic generally refers to the way that Latin Americans are united through their connection to Spain and their links to Spanish culture and tradition. Spaniards would be included in this formulation, but Brazilians would not. Latino, on the other hand, is usually used to refer to the way that Latin Americans are connected to one another via their common history of colonization. Spaniards, then, would not be part of this formulation, while Brazilians might. Yet for the most part, these labels and categories are ambiguous and lots of organizations and institutions invest in keeping these terms as ambiguous and as broad as possible. (Qtd. in Anwar)

And, Mora adds, while the media prefers the term "Latino" as do people in cities along the coasts, there is still a tendency to use "Hispanic" in rural regions of the U.S. (Anwar). In addition to Mora, other scholars have also made the point that the media has produced a homogenous, airbrushed, and 'white washed' Latino identity without paying attention to differences in the cultural histories or cultural specificities of groups within this category. By downplaying national origins they are thus able to construct this one pan-ethnic category of Hispanic or Latino (Dávila 2008; Rodriguez 1997).

We can see how profitable this is for media producers and advertisers when we reflect on the transmedia partnership with Toyota for Televisa's telenovelas in 2013. David Beck, Senior Vice President, Social Media, for Univision Communications Inc. at that time, explained how this included Toyota vehicles in one of Televisa's most highly-anticipated new telenovelas. It brought together TV, digital, and social media content to create an immersive multi-platform experience for consumer-viewers and offered unique exclusive content and interactive content:

> When viewers download or update Univision's UVideos digital video app, which is now available on over 240 million connected devices, their favorite characters from Univision's primetime novela, *Lo Que La Vida Me Robó,* will send messages as if they were your friends. All the user has to do is look for the message icon in the upper right corner of the UVideos app, click there and choose the character they would like to follow. The communications from the characters will range from text and voice messages from the characters to exclusive photos, videos and polls. Univision worked closely with Televisa producers and writers to create content from the inception of the script adaptation. (Edelsburg)

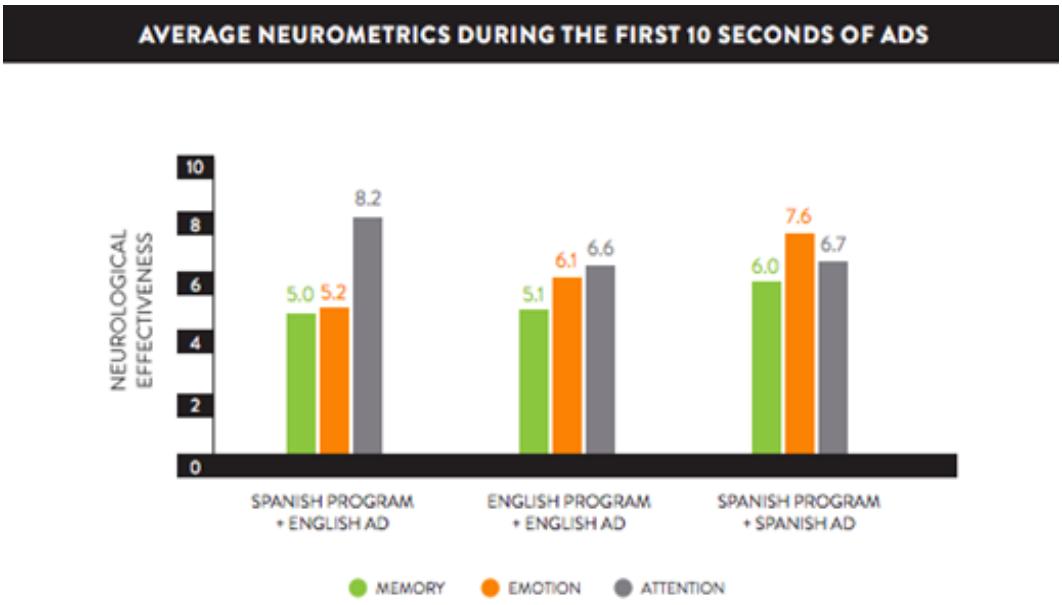
Toyota is not only able to "own the experience," but also connects with consumers "via second screen and social media; the ability to continuously engage with consumers via sponsored segments on Univision's popular morning show *Despierta América* (Wake Up America); sponsored editorial content at www.novelasyseries.com; and continuous social chatter on Facebook and Twitter" (Edelsburg).

It is cross-platform experiments like this that lead to concerns among young Latinx viewers that by being constructed as 'billennials' or a particular market segment, the focus has shifted from political and cultural aspects of identity-making to commodity makers. And, furthermore, these commodity brands are not those from Latino countries, but are manufactured or assembled here in the U.S. and therefore encourage assimilation into mainstream America through 'buying' into the ideologies that advertisers attach to these brands. In other words, the media socialization encourages identification with the brand culture rather than with one's culture-of-origin.

Univision also paired up with Nielsen and Starcom Mediavest Group's Multicultural division to study the importance of language in contributing to the perceived cultural 'authenticity' of media content by billennials. The study asked three main questions that once again confirm how the concern for advertising dollars is driving the question of authenticity for media producers. These questions were:

- Does the emerging population of bilingual Millennials respond differently to messaging when it is in Spanish than when it is in English?
- What are the best ways to reach and connect with the Hispanic bilingual Millennial?
- How does the language of television programming influence how the advertisement is received by the consumer? ("The Bilingual Brain" 2)

The study found that, “When Spanglish ads followed English programming, bilingual Hispanic Millennials were highly emotionally engaged at the beginning of the ad. However, when viewers were primed with Spanish programming, Spanglish ads were less engaging and therefore seemed less relevant.”




*Source: “The Bilingual Brain” 7*

At the same time, other factors did play a role because “ads with English messaging and concurrent Spanish voiceover suffered” (“The Bilingual Brain” 8). In other words, if the audio script does not match what’s being shown visually (see table below), there is a disconnect between the two, that compromises the effectiveness of the ad. For example, familiar characters should stay true to their language of origin. Characters that typically speak English “will seem out of place speaking Spanish. This unfamiliar situation results in confusion and decreased memorability” (“The Bilingual Brain” 10).




*Source: "The Bilingual Brain" 9*

Another Univision report on "The Demographic Revolution" addresses the growing Latinidad population in the U.S., especially of younger generations, and how it will impact the market in the future. The Yankelovich Monitor, which is part of The Futures Company, did a study in 2016, and reported back that:

> …we are moving away from the monolithic WASP cultural block that defined the USA in the past to a new paradigm in which ethnic groups and new waves of immigrants are blending, interacting and coexisting with the WASP cultural block to form a New America. "This evolution is not new, America's identity has always been in flux," they say as they point out that diversity goes way beyond skin color and will increasingly be defined by cultural, religious as well as racial sensibilities. These are important markers for marketers to understand and leverage. (Chiqui)

Therefore, the new transmedia experiments with telenovelas, as well as English language programming on Spanish networks, are indicators of this researched and strategic approach by U.S.-based media companies to redefine what Latinidad /Latinx means by fragmenting the community, not by national origins, but by generational appeals. Second, such programming homogenizes different Latinidad groups, deliberately encouraging an identification through consumerism and brands rather than through a sense of cultural 'authenticity.' And by doing so, it encourages the assimilation rather than integration of Latinidad immigrants into mainstream American culture, so that multiculturalism here is being redefined by a type of "media imperialism." Oliver Boyd-Barrett writes that "media imperialism" typically takes one of three forms:

> Firstly, processes of imperialism are in various senses executed, promoted, transformed or undermined and resisted by and through media. *Secondly, the media themselves, the meanings they produce and distribute and the political-economic processes that sustain them are sculpted by and through ongoing processes of empire building and maintenance, and they carry the residues of empires that once were* [italics mine]. Thirdly, there are media behaviors that in and of themselves and without reference to

> broader or more encompassing frameworks may be considered imperialistic. These may be international (as in the unequal news exchange relationships imposed by western international news agencies on national agencies throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) or national (as in the case of powerful entertainment and news media that exercise inordinate commercial and political influence in given national markets – the influence of Rupert Murdoch in the United Kingdom comes to mind). (Boyd-Barrett 1)

We can see these elements in the reworking of programming on Spanish networks in the U.S. Even as Henry Jenkins, among other scholars, celebrates the community aspect of fan-based participatory communities that are possible through media convergence, this chapter has attempted to show how the political economy of media industries and their intersection with State and Census agendas can produce a commodified authenticity that is reassuring in terms of fitting white mainstream stereotypes while satisfying the desire of ethnic audiences to see themselves represented on screen,[8] as well as have media content that caters to their interests.

Beatriz Acevedo founded a production company in 1995, called HIP Entertainment Group, and for more than 20 years, she has turned out more than 1,000 hours of television programming in English, Spanish and Portuguese for networks like the Travel Channel, PBS and MTV. Her work across genres, ranging from documentaries to game shows to music specials, has earned her three Emmy Awards. Acevedo is determined to find a way to empower Latino creators, and change how Latinos are represented in the media. So, in 2012 she started a digital

[8] The popular Netflix show *Orange is the New Black*, for example, though it represents Latina gang members in a prison, has been praised for showing Latinidad diversity. It has also critiqued for not getting cultural distinctions between the different Latina ethnicities accurately, and moreover, for using lighter-skinned Latina actresses and therefore making Afro-Latinas invisible yet again.

media company called *mitú*, to make content for and by Latinos, especially for U.S.-born millennials:

> Over the course of five years, the company's programming has grown to reach nearly 100 million people in the U.S. each month. Every month, the work she and her team produce generates 400 million content views and over 120 million video views. The company has partnerships with platforms like Spotify, YouTube Red and Paramount TV, and brand partners such as Honda, Toyota, Pizza Hut and State Farm. In the U.S., the company has 111 employees, of which 51 percent are female. Her team has produced seven original series this year with plans to double that figure in 2018. (Zipkin)

She discusses the "broken bridge" between corporate Hollywood and the creative talent in Latinidad communities. Hollywood networks and studio heads would inform her that they couldn't find Latinidad talent to create shows for those audiences, while the creative folks in the Latinidad community complained that no one in Hollywood would return their calls. Added to this was the challenge that "if a writer that had a really authentic story to tell, they'd be like, 'We don't know if this will be commercial enough, or it's going to turn off our core audience'" (qtd. in Zipkin). Her dream, she admits, is that: "…*mitú* becomes the voice for this generation. I… We've found an incredibly loyal audience who always say, 'Oh, finally, a brand that gets me, where have you been all my life?' We're striking a chord" (qtd. in Zipkin).

While Acevedo is not pushing for a cultural essentialism where only Latinidad producers and creators of media can get cultural authenticity right, she is concerned that multiculturalism within the media industry is often looked at as "a good deed or charity," rather than good business sense. By accommodating diverse voices from different cultures and showing multiculturalism in a positive light, media companies can not only attract more consumers but in

this difficult climate, they can also help readers and viewers engage digitally with different worlds and overcome their fear of foreignness. For younger U.S. born millennials, whether they are Latinidad or not, this exploration of diversity is a significant way in which they differentiate themselves from older and more conservative generations. This is the hope for keeping cultural diversity alive on media networks that find it easier to reduce cultures to types. As millennials become an increasingly vital target audience for media companies and advertisers, perhaps their consumer desires can shape a demand for alternative media sources like *mitú* and in turn, influence the way programming is redefined to be better culturally informed and accommodating.

## Conclusion

"Hispanic" media depended and still does on transnational Latin American media conglomerates to bring programming to the U.S. Telenovelas, especially, have bonded women across generations and is consumed by younger generations so that they feel closer to their heritage. Marketers call them billennials but the young, Latina/o millennials call themselves Latinx. *AMQL* became a test drive for Univision to think about creating programming for the Latinx family, especially to attract the billennials, who represent one-fifth of the millennial population. Jenkins' convergence culture enables us to understand how millions of fans are eager towards a media product, in a way that Univision is trying to create fan communities for its shows. When there is audience participation in telenovela's narrative, fans are producing content and becoming more involved in the media shown to them. Using the term Latinx is not about assimilation but about integration because younger generations use this as a self-empowering, more authentic term than the billennial one Univision coined. Throughout Chapter 3, I examine the question of what is 'authentic' and who gets to decide what 'authentic' Latinidad is. We see here a battle between how terms are being used while most media and the U.S. census still uses Hispanic. Mexican-Americans in the past have claimed terms created out of political context like Chicano/a during the 1960s and even the recent term Latinx. Corporate-created terms like Hispanic or Latino millennial are the most commonly used because it became easier to lump everyone in one category, advertise on similarities like the Spanish language, and ignore the cultural differences. What Spanish-language networks desire to do now is to tap into younger Latinidad populations that are born and raised in the U.S. who have less connections with homeland to give them more Americanized content.

The Spanish television landscape seems to be shifting as Telemundo dethrones Univision as the top Spanish language network in the US, with both of them garnering increasing segments of the US—not just the Latina/o—audience. Even Jorge Ramos, who continues to be a news anchor for Noticiero Univision (Univision's news program), has acknowledged the need for him to communicate with an English-speaking audience, stating, "I have to reinvent myself to reach that market...these are kids who meet me and never say, "I watch your newscast'. They say, my mom and dad watch you or 'my grandparents watch you'" (Qtd. in Chavez (2015): 261). Univision continues to maintain its position as the Latina/o TV leader but Telemundo's Narco-novelas have become a constantly viewed product that has enabled the network to be a top Latina/o TV network. The old genre of telenovelas colliding with webnovelas symbolizes the change to attract younger audiences. We see a change from the watching on a TV to the experience of watching on phones, tablets and online. Marketers are going from calling them Latinas/os to billennials.

As a Latinx, I see TV shows like *Elena of Avalor* and films like *Coco* (2017) and feel glad to see media giants like Disney create shows advised by Latinxs. I come from a *We* or people-centered culture; a culture that is woven together by common history, heritage, traditions, language and values. By watching how *Coco*'s narrative is centered on family, we are reminded to treat people like *familia* and stay connected across generations so that we keep moving together or *juntos*. It is compelling to see Disney and Spanish-language TV networks use traditions and family to remind younger generations that is important to stay together. Because more than 20 percent of millennials are Latinx and were raised in traditional *We* cultures, they value connectivity through the generation shift that is occurring. That's how words like "Latinx" began, to be inclusive of our Latin American roots and emotional bond between all us.

*AMQL* was a product of efforts to attract billennials back to programming like telenovelas and keep the *familia* together. As a Latinx millennial, I hope to use my voice to contribute to marketing efforts to attract my generation to programming to that speaks to what matters most to us. It is my hope that Latinxs play a greater role in the media in the following years. It will be interesting to continue examining the shift to market to an audience like billennials. After all, we have already proven just how *juntos*, we can be more progressive and that will undoubtedly change American culture in the next few decades.

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