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This is It: Latina/x Representation on *One Day at a Time*

by

Camille Ruiz Mangual

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
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Despite my passion for writing, I never envisioned myself writing a master's thesis. And yet, as *One Day at a Time's* opening theme says: this is it. I am very proud of my investment in this work, my commitment to completing it, and the effort that it took. I am just as grateful for the difficulties I faced while producing this thesis. When I entered graduate school, I did not expect to be writing and completing a thesis from home in the middle of a global pandemic and a time of increasing racial and political tensions. In doing so, I have learned so much about myself as a scholar, writer, and human being.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the tensions between contemporary Latina/x representations and problematic tropes in the sitcom, *One Day at a Time* (2017-2020) [*ODAAT*]. *ODAAT* centers of Elena, Penelope, and Lydia, three generations of a Latina/x family. Many entertainment reviewers and fans praised the series for its progressive and nuanced portrayals of Latina/x characters. However, I argue that while *ODAAT* depicts Latina/x characters that transcend some United States mainstream media tropes about Latinas/xs, the series also relies on conventional markers of Latina/x identity as tools with which to communicate progressive messages around identity. I expand upon scholarship in Latina/o media studies, feminist media studies, Black feminist media studies, and mental health representation in media. I take an intersectional approach to address how Latina/x identity intersects with issues of lesbian sexuality, straight elder sexual expression, pan-Latina/x cultural traditions such as the quinceañera, pan-Latina/x standards of beauty, and cultural stigma around mental health. I ask: How does *ODAAT* construct the identities of its central Latina/x characters? What tropes does the series rely on to build these characters and what tropes does the series resist?

INTRODUCTION:

LATINA/X/O REPRESENTATION

This thesis will focus on representations of Latina/x characters on the television series *One Day at a Time* (2017-2020) [hereafter *ODAAT*], excluding characters who identify as male. My project underscores the necessity of understanding tensions around constructions of Latina/x identity in media by exploring the depictions of coming out, expressions of straight sexuality by an elderly Latina, the negotiation of culture in terms of pan-Latina/x traditions (the quinceañera) and beliefs around beauty and mental health. I ask: How does *ODAAT* construct the identities of its central Latina/x characters? What tropes does the series rely on to build these characters? What tropes does the series resist? I focus on tensions that emerge between what is presented as Cuban (discussed more shortly, but a very generic version of “Cuban”) tradition, and more progressive “American” ways of thinking. I argue that while *ODAAT* depicts Latina/x characters that transcend some United States (U.S.) media tropes about Latinas/xs, the series also relies on common markers of Latina/x identity as tools with which to communicate progressive messages around identity. In other words, the series engages with tropes to create complex, nuanced Latina/x characters who do not fall neatly within one box. Doing so, *ODAAT* demonstrates that Latina/x identity cannot be easily defined.

Given that *ODAAT* is a recent series, I am the first to examine its Latina/x characters in this way. *ODAAT* is a great site through which to examine topics such as LGBTQ+ identity in a Latina/x family, the stigma around mental health in the Latina/x community, and typical Latina/x cultural celebrations because the series creates complex narratives around these issues. This

work brings together scholarship on stereotyped tropes, and representations of Latinas/xs (Báez, 20; Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 2018; Ramírez Berg, 2002; Román, 2000; Valdivia, 2016, 2020), LGBTQ+ representation on television (Dow, 2001; Fryett, 2016; Hobson, 2015; McInroy & Craig, 2017; Netzley, 2010; Raley & Lucas, 2006), and depictions of television characters with mental health issues (Carter & Rossi, 2019; Diefenbach 1997; Hoffner & Cohen, 2015; Smith-Frigerio, 2018). Ultimately, this work calls upon critical scholars to continue to examine the way U.S. mainstream media constructs Latina/x identity. Although many scholars explore the representations and constructions of contemporary Latina/x/o identity, (Deckard et al., 2020; Fernández-García, 2020; Mohamed & Farris, 2020; Ramos, 2020; Rivera-Rideau, 2019; Wallace, 2020), as the landscape continues to change, critical scholars must continue to analyze and understand these changes.

Mainstream media often engages in narrow depictions of Latinas/xs/os as aggressive and dishonest criminals, lazy and stupid, or hot-tempered, provocative harlots (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005; Román, 2000). As representation of the Latina/x/o community in the mainstream media in the U.S. increases, we are seeing different types of representations, not simply one-dimensional characters. Between 2016 and 2020, Former President Donald Trump demonized Latinas/xs/os on social media, in campaign speeches, and in political advertisements, labeling them criminals (Trump, 2013), gang members, rapists (Washington Post Staff, 2015), and invaders (Trump, 2018). In January of 2018, Trump referred to immigrants from countries such as El Salvador and Honduras as coming from “shithole countries” (Dawsey, 2018). Trump continuously pushed for “toughness” at the border to deter Latina/x/o immigrants from entering the U.S. (Miroff, Sacchetti, & Dawsey, 2019). Additionally, at a rally in the Florida panhandle, Trump used the word “invasion” seven times in less than a minute to describe undocumented

Latina/x/o immigrants crossing the border (Fernández Campbell, 2019; Zimmer, 2019). Trump's views crystalized ongoing issues around the Latina/x/o community in U.S. culture, making the issues particularly salient and stirring up a lot of sentiment. While Trump's discourse exacerbated enduring problematic racist ideas about Latina/x/o people, these tropes existed and permeated mainstream media before Trump entered office and continue to exist now that he has left office.

As anti-Latina/x/o sentiments and violence against Latinas/xs/os have increased significantly over the past year, there has been an increase in television representations of Latinas/xs/os. Recently, there have been more opportunities for representation in television series such as *Vida* (2018-2020), *Queen of the South* (2016-), *Selena: The Series* (2020-), *The Baker and the Beauty* (2020-2020), *Ashley Garcia: Genius in Love* (2020-2020), *On my Block* (2018-), *East Los High* (2013-2017), *The Club* (2019-), *Alternatino with Arturo Castro* (2019-), *Mr. Iglesias* (2019-), *Station 19* (2018-), *Los Espookys* (2019-), *Narcos* (2015-2019), *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2013-), *Elite* (2018-), *The House of Flowers* (2018-2020), *La Reina del Sur* (2011-2019), *Modern Family* (2009-2020), *Mayans M.C.* (2018-), *The Fosters* (2013-2018), *Good Trouble* (2019-), *Diary of a Future President* (2020-), *The Baby-Sitters Club* (2020-), *Superstore* (2015-), *Cable Girls* (2017-), *Party of Five* (2020-2020), *Charmed* (2018-), *Gentefied* (2020-), *Jane the Virgin* (2014-2019), and *Pose* (2018-), to name a few recent ones. However, it remains that only 4% of characters on television are Latina/x/o (del Río & Moran, 2019) and these depictions engage tropes such as featuring characters with broken English and fiery attitudes, even as the shows attempt to dismantle or upend these tropes. Stereotypical portrayals of Latina/x characters are well documented and persistent even as the number of Latina/x/o-themed programs across streaming networks, cable, and broadcast channels continue to move away from one-dimensional

characters. This project addresses typical roles for Latina/x characters to examine how *ODAAT* both engages with these roles and combats them. Doing so will allow me to emphasize the importance of these characters in a time when, Latinas/xs/os are still characterized as rapists, drug dealers, and criminals, or represented in clichéd ways. Popular culture also tends to relegate Latina/x characters to roles as criminals, law enforcement personnel, gardeners, and maids (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Negrón-Muntaner, 2014). Valdivia (2016) notes that media shows Latinas/xs/os as sidekicks, background characters, or caricatures despite the fact that the population of Latina/o/x people within the U.S. reached around 60 million (18%) of the U.S. population in 2019 (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2020; del Río & Moran, 2019). *ODAAT* engages many of these tropes even as it aims to dismantle them. For example, Lydia represents the spitfire character through her dancing, singing, and suggestive performances of heterosexuality even as she breaks from the usual depiction of elder Latina characters as conservatively sexual or asexual, almost virginal. I use scholarship examining representations of Latina/x people on television to examine how the series resists these roles in a unique way while still engaging them as a means of characterization. Although *ODAAT*'s characters offer “alternative” and progressive representations of Latinas/xs on television, they embody conventional representations of Latinas/xs.

Homogeneous Latina/x/o Representation

Existing scholarship in Latina/x feminist media studies examines representation of Latinas/xs in network television and film. While *ODAAT* ended its run on a network television channel, it first aired on Netflix and maintained some of the liberties in dialogue, representation, and messaging that come with that (for instance, explicitly addressing political, social, cultural messages through its Latina/x characters). Historically, women's bodies, and Latina/x bodies in

particular, have been used in media and public discourse as a means of displaying national struggles with identity and belonging (Valdivia, 2020). Contemporary depictions of Latinas/xs, however, reflect the social, historical, and political context in which they are represented. Latina/x bodies represent the growing Latina/x/o population as well as the anxieties spurred by the growth in the Latina/x/o community (Valdivia, 2004 quoted in Cepeda, 2016). That is, Latina/x bodies stand-in for the gendered and racialized anti-Latina/x/o sentiments and remain outsiders in dominant U.S. culture. Further, in U.S. mainstream media, Latina/x's racialized and gendered bodies operate as a combination of cultural influences performing both within the boundaries of accepted whiteness and yet maintaining their own cultural and racial perspective (Dubrofsky & Hardy, 2008; Molina-Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004).

While *ODAAT* identifies its characters as Cubans, this makes little difference in how they are presented. *ODAAT* distinguishes the Alvarez family as Cuban by explicitly having a character state their Cuban identity (for instance, “You’re Cuban”), incorporating subtle set pieces (such as Cuban-style coffee, Café Bustelo, in the pantry), or by detailing the experience of Cuban exiles in the U.S. (such as when Lydia talks about arriving to the U.S. via the Pedro Pan program). Most of the time, though, the series presents the characters as generically Latina/x. By this I mean that outside of the few moments and props that explicitly mark Cuban identity, the series represents the Alvarez family as Latina/x/o through pan-Latina/x/o cultural traditions, beliefs, and taboos. Many of the signals that the Alvarez family is Latina/x/o include common cultural traditions such as the quinceañera, typical cultural stigmas such as the discussion of sexuality and the dismissal of mental health issues, and props such as Goya products (typically purchased by Latina/x/o communities (Williams Bustos, 2020)), and crosses to illustrate the association of Latinas/xs/os with Catholicism. Besides the instances in which they address their

Cuban roots (mentioned above) there is nothing distinctly Cuban in the way *ODAAAT* portrays its Latina/x/o characters. U.S. mainstream media tends to homogenize Latina/x characters under a handful of signifiers such as bright clothing, rhythmic music, and light or olive-colored skin (Molina-Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004; Casillas, Ferrada, & Hinojos, 2018). *ODAAAT* portrays all three of its central Latina/x characters with one or more of these pan-Latina/x traits. For example, the series depicts Elena with light skin and Lydia in bright clothing and with light skin. Media often also homogenizes Latina/x characters on television with accents that attempt to serve as markers of authenticity (Casillas, Ferrada, & Hinojos, 2018). Most Latina/x characters in U.S. mainstream media have Spanish inflections that are stereotypically associated with Mexican Spanish and erase linguistic diversity (Hinojos, 2019) in a way that reinforces existing stereotypes about a lack of proficiency in English and introduces assumptions and questions about assimilation and lack of U.S. citizenship for Latina/x characters (Casillas, Ferrada, & Hinojos, 2018). This is another marker of Latina/x identity we can see on *ODAAAT*.

Because *ODAAAT* marks its characters as Cuban, I examine here media portrayals of Cuban characters. Mainstream media usually portrays Cubans and Cuban migration to the U.S. through a perspective of exceptionalism and privilege (Molina-Guzmán, 2010; Pérez-Firmat, 2012). Typically, media depicts Cubans as “white, middle- to upper-class, educated, politically conservative, and unquestionably committed to U.S. capitalism and democracy” (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, p. 27). We see this depiction in some of the most known and popular representations of Cubans in media including Pepe, Joe, Carmen, and Juana Peña, Antonio, and Adela from PBS’s *¿Qué Pasa, USA?* (1977-1980), Angie Lopez and Dr. Victor Palmero from *George Lopez* (2005-2007), and Amy Santiago from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2013-). Portraying Cubans as white in U.S. media means that Cubans benefit from protection from ethnic and racial

discrimination in the media, a privilege that other Latinas/xs/os do not have. For instance, while Cubans are understood as white, representations of Spanish Caribbean people, Mexicans, and other Latin Americans are coded as poor, exotic, racially Black, uneducated, aberrantly sexually fertile, and undeserving of public sympathy or legal protection (Rodríguez, 1997; Molina-Guzmán, 2018). Mainstream media praises Cubans for their political strength in the U.S. Over the years contemporary media representations of Cubans have changed and now frame them as both “honorary white ethnics” when positioned as political exiles, or racial and ethnic outsiders when they have emigrated to the U.S. without formal documentation (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 2018).

The term “Latino” is more common among younger generations and enjoys more widespread acceptance as the politically correct term to refer to Latin American populations, whereas “Hispanic” is associated with the conquest and colonization of the Spanish (Dávila, 2012). Although “Latino” is the more accepted term, both the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used by the marketing and advertising industry as a way to commodify, sell, and market pan-ethnic images of populations with Latin American backgrounds in the U.S. (Dávila, 2012). In the mainstream media in the U.S., both terms are used to construct profitable and engaging depictions of Latina/x people that will appeal to audiences with different backgrounds. Additionally, both terms suggest a pan-ethnic notion of Latina/x identity. In other words, while the terms are useful in encompassing broad heterogeneous populations, both “Hispanic” and variations of “Latino” (addressed shortly) erase differences among individuals from different countries and locations, and with different experiences (Dávila, 2012; Guidotti-Hernández, 2017). Having said this, I use these terms throughout the thesis, though it is not my intention to reify these homogeneous and pan-ethnic categories. Rather, I use the terms as a means of

bringing attention to the generic depiction of Cuban-American characters on *ODAAT* mentioned above. By using the terms, I can self-consciously highlight the series' use of pan-ethnic tropes and depictions in constructing the identities of its central Latina/x characters. Using these terms, I highlight that these terms represent generalized ideas about Latina/x/ people that conflate everyone from a variety of countries into a generalized homogenized stereotype.

Over time, references to Latin American populations evolved from “Hispanic” and “Latino” to “Latino/a” to “Latin@” as a means of being more inclusive of binary genders. In other words, the “O” signals a masculine ending, the “A” signals a feminine ending, and the “@” combines the two. More recently, the term “Latinx” has gained traction as a label for those who identify outside of the gender binary. The earliest uses of the “x” comes from Nahuatl-inspired writing of the words Chicano and Chicana as Xicano and Xicana and to critique colonial legacies of U.S. imperialism and the Spanish Empire (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017). The term “Latinx” has been in use since the late 2000s although it was only entered into the Oxford English Dictionary in 2015 (Guidotti-Hernández, 2017). Some scholars feel using the term “Latinx” as a means of representing cisgender heterosexual people eclipses recognition of those identities that exist beyond gender and sexual norms, such as gender nonconforming and nonbinary people (Rodríguez, 2017). Additionally, others express that the “x” is symbolic of linguistic imperialism, alienating non-English speakers (de Onís, 2017). Still others express concern that the use of the “x” will create a division among U.S.-born Latinos and Latin American immigrants (de Onís, 2017; Madonado, 2020). I am aware of the transformations in vocabulary, of the still-changing nature of this terminology, and committed to engaging the tensions. I use the term “Latinx” self-consciously, as a way of explicitly engaging the tensions. I use “Latina/x/o” as a means of referring to men, women, and those outside of the gender and sexual

binaries. I use this term when referring to an overall community. Throughout the thesis, I also employ the term “Latina/x” to include only those who identify as women as well as those who identify outside of the gender or sexual binary. In this thesis, “Latina” refers to those who identify as heterosexual women. I use “Latina” when discussing Penelope Alvarez and Lydia Riera, as this is the term the series uses to identify them. Throughout the thesis I also use “Latinx” to describe those who identify within the LGBTQ+ community. Some scholars advocate for the use of “Latinx” as a term that undermines the inherently gendered nature of Spanish and other Romance languages and signals gender neutrality (Rodríguez, 2017; Maldonado, 2020; de Onís, 2017). In the series, Elena refers to herself as a “proud Latinx” (Calderón Kellett et al., 2018) so, to stay true to the way the series presents her identification, I use “Latinx” to reference her. The word “Latinx” allows me to engage the challenge posed by the LGBTQ+ community to the colonial imposition of gender binaries and normative gender expression. Using the term “Latinx” allows me to recognize the complexities in how Elena’s character is presented. Here, my purpose is to highlight how a character falls outside of the binary delineated by the terms “Latina” or “Latino.” Using “Latinx” for the analysis of Elena allows me to embrace her differences when it comes to sexuality and gender expression. I believe simply referring to Elena as “Latina” would erase her sexual identification as a lesbian and her gender expression. Further, as mentioned above, *ODAAT*’s depiction of Latina/x identity is generic rather than specific. Thus, when referring to traditions, beliefs, or depictions that are applicable across the Latina/x/o community (meaning, non-specific) I use the phrase “pan-Latina/x.”

Site of Analysis and Methodology

In 2017, Netflix rebooted Norman Lear's 1975-1986 sitcom of the same name, *ODAAT*. The reboot foregrounds three generations of a Cuban-American family, a twist on the original series' focus on two generations of a white family. I selected *ODAAT* as my text and site of analysis for a few reasons. First, the series is recent and was very popular with its viewers. It is one of the few series that was canceled twice and revived thanks in large part to the outcry and social media campaigns from fans demanding its revival. Other recent series that have experienced this type of revival include *Timeless* (2016-2018), *Southland* (2009-2013), *Futurama* (1999-2013), *The Killing* (2011-2014), *Family Guy* (1999-), *Community* (2009-2015), *Cougar Town* (2009-2015), *Damages* (2007-2012), *The Mindy Project* (2012-2017), *Nashville* (2012-2018), and *Scrubs* (2001-2010). Among these shows, *ODAAT* is the only Latina/x-centered show to be canceled and revived twice. Second, I chose *ODAAT* as my media site because it constructs nuanced and complex Latina/x characters by transcending some mainstream media tropes about Latina/x people while relying on others. I question how *ODAAT* illustrates the identities of its central Latina/x characters, and what tropes the series relies on and resists to build these characters. Through this project I find that the series critiques the notion that coming out is the best option by showing a range of reactions from outright rejection to uncertain acceptance of Elena's sexuality. The series also depicts the expression of lesbian sexuality as awkward and funny in contrast to expressions of heterosexuality as suave. I suggest that *ODAAT* positions cultural beliefs about beauty and mental health, and traditions such as the quinceañera as outdated and negative. *ODAAT* suggests that the "American" way is better and encourages viewers to modify or forgo culture.

The *ODAAT* reboot has been praised as one of the few television series to feature well-rounded Latina/x characters as main characters (Deggans, 2017). Upon its release on Netflix, the series received a 98% critic score from *Rotten Tomatoes*, the top online aggregator of movie and television show reviews, meaning that most viewers felt positively about the show. *ODAAT* has gained audience support by addressing controversial topics (Framke, 2017; Bradley, 2018; Allyn, 2019) such as LGBTQ+ issues, microaggressions, mental health in the Latina/x/o community, and racism among others. Despite the glowing reviews, within the first week of season one's release on Netflix, the series had approximately 382,000 views according to data provided to Business Insider by analytics company Jumpshot (Clark, 2019). Compared to other shows on Netflix, such as *Jessica Jones* with 3 million views within its first week, or *Friends from College* with just under 1 million views in the first week (Clark, 2019), *ODAAT* did not have a large audience. After three seasons, Netflix canceled the series due to low viewership. This outraged fans, sparking a social media campaign around the hashtag #SaveODAAT (Allyn, 2019). In June 2019, entertainment media brand Pop TV picked the series up for a fourth season. The fourth season of the series premiered on March 24, 2020 with a total of 607,000 viewers across a simulcast of ViacomCBS channels Pop TV, TV Land, and Logo (Porter, 2020; Thorne, 2020), which showed substantial gains in viewership for the series compared to its audience on Netflix. *ODAAT* released 6 episodes of their fourth season on Pop TV. However, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic put an abrupt halt on production of *ODAAT*'s fourth season. The series released one final episode, an animated special about politics, that received mixed reviews with some calling it unexpected and delightful (Johnson, 2020), while others felt it was "something out of a bygone era" (Leeds, 2020, para. 3). Following this final episode, Pop TV dropped the series in November 2020. CBS re-aired *ODAAT*'s fourth season in September 2020 as a final attempt to

save *ODAAT*. Even though *ODAAT* was the only Latina/x/o series on broadcast at the time, the reviews and viewership for the re-aired fourth season were modest at best. The series announced its official and final cancellation on December 8, 2020.

ODAAT was a situation comedy (sitcom), with episodes lasting roughly 25-35 minutes. The sitcom is a 20- to 30-minute television program often recorded in a studio in front of a live audience (Carvalho et al., 2021). Carvalho et al. (2021) outline two different types of sitcoms: domestic and traditional. For this project, I will focus on domestic sitcoms like *ODAAT*. Domestic sitcoms typically take place in the home or the workplace. Unlike traditional sitcoms that rarely explore the characters' ideas and conflicts, domestic sitcoms such as *ODAAT* subvert the genre as they emphasize social commentary and character development. Both traditional and domestic sitcoms navigate taboo, contemporary issues, and social critique using a simple "situation, complication, confusion, resolution" structure (Carvalho et al., 2021; Newcomb, 1974; Walsh, Fürsh, & Jefferson, 2008). In many cases, the typical structure leads to memorable characters meaning that when viewers tune in to the following episode, they will see the same characters undergoing new situations with the same episode format. Through this arrangement, the only thing that changes are the issues the characters face. Organizing the episodes in this way rarely allows for any in-depth exploration of the situations the characters experience because by the end of the episode, the characters must come to some sort of solution (Carvalho et al., 2021; Newcomb, 1974). The end of the episode signals the end of the episode's problems with a scene clarifying the solution or a verbal explanation from one of the characters.

ODAAT engages the first three elements of the conventional sitcom format (situation, complication, confusion) and is set (mostly) in the home. Employing part of the traditional sitcom format allows for the series to create relatable characters through which to address

political, social, and contemporary issues. In other words, maintaining the same characters throughout the series builds familiarity and gives *ODAAT* greater flexibility with its social, contemporary, and political commentary. *ODAAT* subverts the genre by transforming the last element of the framework, the “resolution.” Rather than allowing everything to go back to normal at the end of the episode and opting for simple endings, the series weaves into the characters’ stories contentious issues around the LGBTQ+ community, racism and microaggressions, mental health, and immigration, for example. These issues become central parts of the narratives about the three generations of Latinas/xs living in the Alvarez household that the series carries throughout each season. By this I mean that the series does not resolve every issue at the end of the episode. Rather, the series carries issues between episodes and seasons. For instance, midway through *ODAAT*’s first season, Elena, the “headstrong daughter whose hobbies include reading, studying, and railing against the nefarious influence of the patriarchy in all its insidious forms” (Framke, 2017, para. 9), comes out to her Latina/x/o family as a lesbian. Instead of resolving this conversation and reveal in one episode, *ODAAT* carries this discussion through the rest of the season and into its second season. Doing so ensures that the series is constantly addressing issues of homophobia, coming out, acceptance, and the way coming out impacts family dynamics in the Latina/x/o community.

The fact that a series that centers characters within a marginalized community, the Latina/x community, is available for consumption by widespread audiences and has received so much praise seems significant. Besides Elena (mentioned above), *ODAAT*’s other central Latinas include Penelope, the single mother, nurse, and veteran, and Lydia, Penelope’s confident and melodramatic mother. In an article for *Vox*, culture writer, Caroline Framke (2017) refers to the series as fantastic and a joy to watch as it navigates complex topics with grace and care. *Vanity*

Fair's Laura Bradley (2018) also complimented the series' ability to depict humorous Latina/x/o-specific culture in a way that anyone of any culture can understand. Another *Vanity Fair* contributing writer, Joshua Rivera (2020), admires the series' warmth, empathy, and dedication to telling stories of familial survival using comedy to engage viewers.

This thesis uses close critical textual analysis to analyze *ODAAT*. For the purpose of this thesis, the text and site of analysis is *ODAAT*. This means that as I conduct the textual analysis, I do not look outside of the text (at production, actors, showrunners, etc.). I look only at what is in the series, such as at characters, dialogue, lighting, body language, narrative, characterization, and so forth. After reviewing the series, I selected a total of 24 scenes from 15 episodes throughout all four seasons to conduct my analysis. I selected these scenes because they were the ones that depicted the themes I noticed as central parts of the characters' narratives. While the selected scenes are not the only scenes that address the themes I have identified, the scenes I selected demonstrate turning points in the characters' stories and/or center key themes rather than simply mentioning these themes. In other words, while other scenes may have mentioned the themes I touch on, they do not depict significant changes in the characters' narratives. To select the episodes, scenes, and themes that I analyze and discuss, I watched all four seasons (46 episodes) of *ODAAT* multiple times. First, I watched each episode and took note of what stood out as the central narrative or takeaway in the episode as well as which issue(s) the episodes addressed. Doing this allowed me to determine that throughout all four seasons the series regularly addressed key issues such as mental health, LGBTQ+ identity, cultural beliefs and tropes, and sexual expression. I then returned to the series a second time. In this second viewing, I revisited the episodes that centered the recurring themes I had identified the first time around. As I watched the episodes a second time, I noted the scenes that dedicated the most space to

illustrating each issue as integral parts of the characters' narratives. This was intentional as I wanted to return to these scenes for another review. I noted pivotal scenes, for example, that depicted Elena's sexuality such as the scene in which she comes out to her father as this is an impactful scene for their relationship. I then watched the selected episodes and scenes a third time. In the third viewing I paid particular attention to aspects of the production such as dialogue, lighting, body language, camera angles, framing, and laugh tracks. For instance, noticing the laugh tracks gave me insight into which scenes and exchanges the series wanted the viewers to laugh at. One example of this (discussed in more depth later) is the use of the laugh track when Lydia, the grandmother, expresses her straight sexuality. In these scenes, *ODAAT* gives comedic voice to the expression of sexuality by an elderly woman. Observing body language and camera framing afforded me the ability to comprehend, for example, if the series depicted characters as uncomfortable, sexualized, awkward, and so on. The observations deepened my analysis by allowing me to understand how the series invited viewers to feel about each scene and the characters within that scene.

Textual analysis is a methodology used to “understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live” (McKee, 2011, p.1). Using textual analysis allows scholars to understand the particular situated workings of a specific context. For this project, the context I look at is *ODAAT*, as a way to talk about larger cultural issues relevant to this particular moment in the U.S. Textual analysis enables me to access “ideologies encoded in a particular media text and the historical, cultural, and political context from which the product has emerged” (Báez, 2018, p.5). This is crucial to understanding both how the series characterizes the three central Latinas/xs and what this means in the historical, cultural, and political context of the time. This methodology

seeks to understand “the ways in which these forms of representation take place, the assumptions behind them and the kinds of sense-making about the world that they reveal” (McKee, 2011, p.17). Textual analysis investigates how media texts create meaning when distributed and circulated within popular culture (del Río & Moran, 2019; Fürsich, 2009; McKee, 2011). An understanding of how texts create meaning is at the center of my project, with a focus on how meanings about Latina/x identity emerge on *ODAAT*.

My critical approach assumes that power relations are always present in social contexts, though not always explicitly acknowledged. Critical methods seek to identify, expose, and critique power relations that lead to the subordination of nondominant groups (McDonald, 2017). Furthermore, critical methods call upon scholars to be transparent about how they conduct research and how their decisions impact the production of knowledge (Framer & Chevrette, 2017). This approach is at the center of my project as I consider how the series reflects critical issues and how these issues relate to questions of power.

Critical Interventions

Importantly, intersectionality as a framework allows me to access the kind of oscillation I pinpoint throughout this thesis between contemporary, progressive representations of Latina/x people and conventional ones. Intersectionality’s commitment to examining difference and sameness enables me to recognize patterns between the series’ nuanced, multidimensional depictions of Latina/x characters and the traditional tropes the series engages (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013).

While intersectionality is not explicitly a theory of identity (Collins, 2020) in this project, I use intersectionality to examine how identity categories overlap rather than interpreting aspects of identity as parallel and unrelated pieces of the whole. To conduct my analyses, I engage core

ideas about representational intersectionality that addresses cultural constructions of women of color in popular culture (Crenshaw, 1991; Agosto & Roland, 2018). By this I mean, I heed Crenshaw's (1991) call to pay particular attention to the ways in which images of women of color are produced by prevalent narratives about race and gender, and to recognize how contemporary critiques of sexist and racist representation still marginalize women of color. An intersectional perspective is crucial for this project because the depictions of each Latina/x character cannot be adequately analyzed or interpreted without accounting for the ways in which their multiple identities appear onscreen. For instance, I use this perspective to consider the way the series depicts a Latina who is elderly and sexually expressive. Examining these three aspects (Latina identity, old age, straight sexual expression) together, I come to understand some of the oscillation between progressive representation and the spitfire stereotype engaged on the series. By this I mean, interpreting the character as a Latina allows me to analyze the way the series reproduces mainstream media stereotypes of Latinas. However, by factoring in age, I note how the series is defiant of both stereotypical U.S. mainstream media depictions of sexual Latinas who are usually young and elderly women who are usually depicted as asexual. Using intersectionality grants me access to the nuances of characters' representations.

Throughout this thesis, I also engage ideas in feminist media studies that examine how media constructs racialized and gendered identity. Television studies within feminist media studies have often examined how women are portrayed in media, especially on television (Dow, 2001; Dow & Condit, 2005; Molina-Guzmán & Cacho, 2013). Dow (2001) notes that in the 1970s, women in sitcoms were often heterosexual, white, unmarried, middle class, and exploring their independence following a divorce. Dow's analysis of the original *One Day at a Time* (1975-1984) and how it addressed culturally relevant messages through its central women characters,

Ann, Julie, and Barbara, informs my analysis of the reboot. I extend Dow's (2001) scholarship beyond an examination of feminism in the original version of the series to explore how Latina/x identity intersects with sexuality and sexual expression, traditions such as the quinceañera, beauty standards, and mental health in the series reboot.

Scholarship in Latina/o media studies informs my research, allowing me to discuss historical and contemporary representations of Latina/x characters. This scholarship permits me to examine how *ODAAT*'s characters fit with or resist stereotypical roles for Latina/x characters in U.S. mainstream media. Existing scholarship in Latina/o media studies addresses U.S. media's ideal Latina body and the ways in which media shapes Latina/x identity onscreen (Báez, 2018; Casillas, Ferrada, & Hinojos, 2018; Fernández-García, 2019; Fernández L'Hoeste, 2017; Hurtado, 2017; Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 2018; Molina-Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004; Negrón-Muntaner, 2017; Valdivia, 1998, 2000, 2014, 2020). I extend scholarship about the representation of Latina/x bodies in U.S. mainstream media to analyze how a contemporary sitcom both engages with and resists tropes about Latina/x people. Scholarship on contemporary media representations of Latina/x people allows me to discuss the depiction of Latinx lesbian sexuality, elder Latina sexual expressions, and the outdatedness of Latina/x/o cultural traditions and beliefs. Molina-Guzmán's (2018) book in this area examines ethnic, racial, and linguistic representations of Latina/x/o people on sitcoms to argue that despite increased inclusion of Latinas/xs/os onscreen, sitcoms do not contest homophobia, racism, and sexism. I build on her ideas about how race, ethnicity, and gender impact the landscape of contemporary Latina/x/o representation on sitcoms to examine how, as a Latina/x-centered sitcom, *ODAAT* depicts traditionally gendered and racialized markers of Latina/x identity (for instance: the quinceañera, beauty standards, expression of straight sexuality). I examine racialized markers of Latina/x

identity to call attention to the homogenizing and pan-Latina/x features the series engages such as visual indications of Latina/x identity, traditions, beliefs, and accents. At the same time, this scholarship allows me to discuss how the series resists homogenizing its characters and creates complex Latina/x representation.

Latina/o media analyses of Latina/x people's intersecting identities on television (Beltrán, 2009; Leon-Boys & Valdivia, 2020; Mora, 2018; Valdivia, 2011) and film (Báez, 2007; Beltrán, 2009; Ramírez Berg, 2002) also inform how I conceptualize intersectional Latina/x identity throughout this thesis. Leon-Boys & Valdivia (2020), for instance, explore Disney's production of the Diaz family's specific and ambiguous Latina/x/o identity on the television series *Stuck in the Middle* (2016-2018). They note that while *Stuck in the Middle* engages subtle signifiers of Latina/x/o identity (for instance, hyperfertility, two quinceañera celebrations, characters with brown hair and light olive skin, and the occasional use of Spanish words), the series depicts the Diaz family as ambiguously Latina/x/o. I extend Leon-Boys and Valdivia's (2020) ideas outside of the Disney live-action television universe as a means of understanding how *ODAAT* depicts generic Latina/x identity onscreen. This is important because *ODAAT*'s identification of the characters as Cuban makes little difference in how they are presented (as addressed above). Using these ideas enables me to understand how *ODAAT* employs the intersection of pan-Latina/x cultural values, traditions, and representations with more progressive and nuanced character traits. Further, I engage and extend scholarship about representations of Latinas in U.S. mainstream media such as the spitfire (Molina-Guzmán, 2012, 2014; Ramírez Berg, 2002; Valdivia, 2016), to understand how *ODAAT* modifies this representation to include an elderly Latina character. I use scholarship about Latina/x roles on television to examine how the series resists these roles in a unique way while still relying on them for the plot. Even as *ODAAT*'s

characters offer an “alternative” and progressive representation of Latinas/xs on television, they embody problematic roles.

Existing scholarship on mental health and the media¹ examines whether media representations of mental health are “positive” or “negative” (Pirkis et al., 2006; Sieff, 2003; Wahl, 1992). Further, this area primarily addresses depictions of bipolar disorder (Smith-Frigerio, 2018; Wondemaghen, 2019), obsessive compulsive disorder (Hoffner & Cohen, 2015), and madness (Herson, 2016; Rose, 1998). I use this scholarship to understand conventional mainstream media depictions of people with mental health issues. I extend this scholarship to suggest that *ODAAT* positions Latina/x cultural values as outdated, negative barriers to treating mental health. One of the areas where mental health is discussed in terms of women of color is in Black feminist media studies. Scholarship in this area looks at the image of the strong Black woman and how she handles mental health challenges. The strong Black woman trope mostly centers Black women (excluding Afro-Latinas) (Beauboeuf-Lafontan, 2007, 2009; Carter & Rossi, 2019; Wallace, 1978; Walker-Barnes, 2014; Wyatt, 2008). I extend scholarship about the strong Black woman to engage with similar ideas in Latin American gender studies, around *marianismo*, an idealized feminine gender role characterized by self-silencing, caretaking, and selflessness (Sanchez, Vandewater, & Hamilton, 2019). While conversations around the contemporary media representations of the strong Black woman have begun to address mental health (Junior, 2019; Kopotsha, 2019; Walker-Barnes, 2014), conversations around contemporary *marianista* characters have not yet addressed this topic. It is important for my project to bring together these two ideas of representations of women of color who must self-

¹ There does not seem to be one defined body of scholarship on this, but I have found this work uses the following different terms: media representations of mental health concerns, media portrayal of mental illness, or media and mental illness stigma.

silence and show strength. I put these areas of scholarship in conversation as a means of extending discussions in Latina/o media studies to the realm of mental health. I use scholarship in Black feminist media studies and Latina/o media studies to critique the way *ODAAAT* positions Latina/x cultural stigma around mental health as negative and outdated. By engaging these areas of study, I add to media studies research about women in media with mental health issues (Chouinard, 2009; Quintero Johnson & Miller, 2016; Wondemaghen, 2019) and more specifically, scholarship on characters of color with mental health issues (Smith-Frigerio, 2018).

Ultimately, I engage scholarship about LGBTQ+ representation on television (Dow, 2001; Fryett, 2016; Raley & Lucas, 2006; Netzley, 2010; Hobson, 2015; Molina-Guzmán, 2013). Fryett (2016) outlines one of the predominant scripts for LGBTQ+ characters as the “coming out” story in which the character comes out to their heterosexual counterparts. Further, Dow (2001) notes that coming out stories tend to contribute to the notion that LGBTQ+ sexuality is important to address particularly because of its impact on the characters’ personal relationships with heterosexuals. I apply these ideas about the coming out story to my analysis and understanding of how *ODAAAT* depicts a Latinx lesbian character. I find that by using the “coming out” story, *ODAAAT* makes sexuality a major plot point and uses sexuality to create drama between heterosexual characters and the lesbian character. Further, scholarship about the typical coming out story for LGBTQ+ characters enables me to understand how the series makes sense of and uses Elena’s coming out to both embrace and resist typical LGBTQ+ narratives. In addition, I extend scholarship about representations of LGBTQ+ youth (Marshall, 2010; Macintosh & Bryson, 2008, McInroy & Craig, 2017) to analyze a young Latina girl who is depicted as headstrong, confident, and supportive rather than vulnerable.

Chapter Overview

To set a foundation for the argument that *ODAAT* portrays Latina/x characters that both transcend and rely on some U.S. mainstream media tropes about Latinas/xs, I began this chapter with a discussion of what Latina/x media representation looked like and how it looks now. I outlined the terminology I will use within this project, that is, the way I conceptualize the terms Latina/x, Latina, Latinx, Latina/x/o, and pan-Latina/x as ways of referring to different populations and traits. This chapter also unpacked the tropes such as relegation to hot-tempered, light-skinned characterizations that have existed and continue to exist in U.S. mainstream media depictions of Latinas/xs. I note how we continue to see conventional portrayals even as greater opportunities for Latina/x/o representation arise. By examining conventional and contemporary depictions of Latina/x people, I opened up a discussion about *ODAAT*. I detailed the series' popularity and suggested that the series both engages with and transcends Latina/x stereotypes and tropes as it constructs the characters' identities. I also outlined my use of textual analysis throughout this thesis. Finally, I detailed my critical interventions into the fields of feminist media studies, Latina/o media studies, mental health and media studies, LGBTQ+ studies, and Black feminist studies. The overall intent of this thesis is to unpack the tensions between progressive Latina/x depiction and harmful tropes on *ODAAT*.

Chapter One: Intergenerational displays of sexuality. In Chapter One, I examine how *ODAAT* depicts both Elena and Lydia's sexualities. I suggest that while the audience is cued to laugh at both women's expressions of their sexualities, it is not for the same reasons. In this chapter, I argue that *ODAAT* depicts Elena's expressions of her lesbian identity as odd and something to be made fun of. By presenting Elena's sexuality in this way, the series lodges a critique of the assumption of heterosexuality in U.S. mainstream media representations of

Latinas/xs. I then examine how *ODAAT* depicts elderly Latina Lydia as an uncommon reinvention of the Latina spitfire stereotype. Here, I suggest that although the series invites the audience to laugh at Lydia's displays of straight sexuality, the laughter functions as a way to make the audience aware of their own discomfort with elderly sexuality. The laughter allows the series to draw attention to the fact that elderly women who are sexual are often made fun of, but Lydia is supposed to be taken seriously. Ultimately, I examine how *ODAAT* depicts Elena's coming out story to position positive, accepting responses of Elena's sexuality as the "correct" response and villainize characters who disapprove. By depicting both acceptance and disapproval, the series demonstrates that the ways in which a family handles coming out impacts their dynamics and closeness. I suggest that by demonstrating varied responses to Elena's sexuality, the series critiques the idea that coming out is "always best." To conduct my analysis, I examine 12 scenes from nine episodes. I pay particular attention to the characters' dialogue, and body language, as well as the camera framing.

Chapter Two: Cultural expectations and beliefs as barriers. In Chapter Two, I argue that *ODAAT* demonstrates how characters must modify culture to fit their needs through an analysis of the quinceañera (a pan-Latina/x celebration), pan-Latina/x beauty standards, and religion-based stigma around mental health. Although quinceañeras and beauty standards are drastically different from mental health, I note a common theme in the way the series depicts the characters navigating these issues. In other words, the series positions culture as the catalyst for the characters experiences. For instance, I begin this chapter with an analysis of how Elena navigates tensions between her feminism and the quinceañera cultural tradition. Here, I discuss how Elena reframes the quinceañera celebration to align with her feminist values as well as how she alters the traditional dress to into a suit to align with what she is comfortable with. I argue

that the series' depiction of her as a character who does not reject either sides of her identity (feminist and Latinx girl) is a unique and important depiction of a Latinx character. Next, I suggest that the series critiques pan-Latinx beauty ideals. I do this by analyzing scenes in which Elena is made fun of for attempting to embrace these standards. Here, I argue that *ODAAT* depicts limits of cultural beauty standards as an obstacle to happiness and comfort. In the last section of this chapter, I turn to media tropes around pan-Latina/x/o cultural stigma toward mental health that deem therapy and medication ineffective and unnecessary treatments. I argue that by presenting the issues in this way, the series depicts Latina/x cultural beliefs as negative and outdated, suggesting that the "American" way is the best way. This suggests that viewers should forgo cultural beliefs that advocate for strength as a means of overcoming mental health issues. Instead, the series encourages viewers to seek "Americanized" versions of treatment such as therapy and medication. Throughout this chapter, I suggest that Latinas/xs must be able to tweak their cultural beliefs and expectations as a means of self-preservation. To conduct my analysis, I examine 12 scenes from six episodes. I pay particular attention to the characters' dialogue, and body language, lighting, and the camera framing.

Chapter Three: Conclusion. *ODAAT* centers many facets and intersections of Latina/x identity through its central characters. The series' depictions of issues around sexuality and culture open an inquiry into the possibilities of Latina/x representation in U.S. television that extend beyond the engagement of tropes and into multidimensional and well-rounded characters. I conclude this project with an evaluation of the crucial contributions *ODAAT* made and the changing landscape of representation following its cancelation. I ask: what is the future of Latina/x representation?

CHAPTER ONE:

INTERGENERATIONAL DISPLAYS OF SEXUALITY

In this chapter, I argue that *ODAAT* depicts Elena's expressions of her lesbian identity as odd and something to be made fun of. In doing so, the series' presentation of Elena critiques the assumption of heterosexuality in Latina/x/o communities in mainstream media. In addition, I suggest that although the series characterizes Lydia, Elena's heterosexual grandmother, as a comical reinvention of the hypersexual Latina spitfire stereotype, Lydia's expressions of sexuality are not humorous in the same way as Elena's expressions. In other words, I suggest that while the audience is cued to laugh at both Elena and Lydia's expressions of their sexualities, it is not for the same reasons. Further, I examine how *ODAAT* depicts Elena's coming out story. I argue that the response to coming out impacts family dynamics. The series positions positive, accepting responses of Elena's sexuality as the "correct" response and villainizes characters who disapprove of Elena because of her sexuality. To conduct my analysis, I examine 12 scenes from nine episodes. I pay particular attention to the characters' dialogue, body language, and the camera angles.

Odd Latinx Lesbian Identity

Throughout the series, *ODAAT* depicts expressions of lesbian sexuality as odd or funny in contrast to heterosexuality. There is only one lesbian central character, Elena. Throughout the series, Elena uses "gay," "queer," and "lesbian" to refer to her own sexuality, while most other characters tend to use "gay" when addressing her sexuality. The words "gay" and "queer" are frequently employed as umbrella terms for people who are not heterosexual and/or not cisgender

(PinkNews Staff, 2017; Walters, 1996; Barker & Scheele, 2016; Henderson-Espinoza, 2015). “Queer” is often also utilized as an umbrella term to stand in for differences in gender, class, body, and nationality (Eguchi & Calafell, 2020; Henderson-Espinoza, 2015). While the terms “gay” and “queer” are useful in discussing sexuality, I use “lesbian” to note Elena’s preference for women. “Lesbian” refers to women who are predominantly attracted to other women (PinkNews Staff, 2017; GLAAD, n.d.). Further, *ODAAT* characterizes Elena as the most politicized character. Elena’s politics and lesbianism intersect productively in that she is often involved in and vocal about issues of equity, social justice, sexism, and so on, with particular focus on LGBTQ+ issues. While *ODAAT* centers Elena’s expressions of her lesbian identity as awkward and clumsy, it portrays other characters’ expressions of heterosexuality as normal, suave, even at times amusing. In 2017, GLAAD conducted a content analysis of original scripted series premiering or expected to premiere a new season in primetime between June 1, 2017 and May 31, 2018. This analysis reports the presence of LGBTQ+ characters for the 2017-2018 season. According to GLAAD (2017), in the 2017-2018 season, when *ODAAT* aired, only 25 out of 70 LGBTQ+ characters present on series that aired on Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime, identified as lesbians. Additionally, only 7 out of 70 LGBTQ+ characters were Latinx (Townsend et al., 2017). LGBTQ+ people have been presented on television shows since the early days of television, but in limited ways, such as depictions as drag queens or villains, with lesbians in particular depicted as predatory and neurotic (Dow, 2001; Fryett, 2016). The 1970s marked the beginning of an increase in visibility for LGBTQ+ characters in the media (Gross, 1994). Since then, television has become more inclusive of LGBTQ+ characters, yet many of these characters are still supporting characters. Popular series that aired within the last five years and feature LGBTQ+ characters somewhere in the cast include *DC’s Legends of Tomorrow*

(2016-), *Charmed* (2018-), *Pandora* (2019-), *Black Lightning* (2018-), *Connecting* (2020), *Good Girls* (2018-), *9-1-1: Lone Star* (2020-), *Coroner* (2019-), *B Positive* (2020-), *For Life* (2020-), *This is Us* (2016-), *All American* (2018-), *Love, Victor* (2020-), *Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist* (2020-), *Burden of Truth* (2018-), *The Conners* (2018-), *Riverdale* (2017-), *Roswell, New Mexico* (2019-), *What We Do in the Shadows* (2019-), *Better Things* (2016-), *Mayans M.C.* (2018-), *Snowfall* (2017-), *Everything's Gonna Be Okay* (2020-), *Motherland: Fort Salem* (2020-), *The Bold Type* (2017), *The L Word: Generation Q* (2019-), *Killing Eve* (2018-), *Euphoria* (2019-), *Gentleman Jack* (2019-), *I May Destroy You* (2020-), and more. Portrayals of LGBTQ+ characters airing now continue to engage with stereotypical narratives of LGBTQ+ people in U.S. mainstream media. By centering a lesbian Latinx character and making her coming out story visible, *ODAAT* gives us a presentation of a main character who resists tropes about Latina/xs as heterosexual and of LGBTQ+ individuals as predominantly male and white. At the same time, the series engages with one of the most common storylines (the coming out story) for an LGBTQ+ character.

The way *ODAAT* presents Elena's identity as a lesbian lodges a critique of the assumption of heterosexuality in Latina/x/o communities. *ODAAT* does this by revealing Elena's lesbianism through the obliviousness, close-mindedness, and expectations of other characters that she will engage in heteronormative practices later in life. For instance, the series presents Elena's family as completely oblivious and misunderstanding when Elena's dialogue begins to suggest that she may not identify as heterosexual. After undergoing a makeover, Elena arrives home bare faced, looking disgusted and saying, "Um, I took the makeup off after first period because people were staring at me and all these boys were talking to me which is the last thing I want" (Mann et al., 2017a). At this point, the series has not revealed to the viewers that Elena is

a lesbian. By framing her reaction to the boys' attention with disgust, the series hints at Elena's lesbian identity. The scene encourages viewers to laugh at Elena's aversion to boys and their attention. However, *ODAAAT* sets this scene up as a commentary on the ignorance of other characters about Elena's preference for women when Lydia, Elena's grandmother, looks at Elena with a very confused expression and slowly responds, "I don't understand any words you are saying to me" (Mann et al., 2017a). Here, the series suggests that Lydia is oblivious to Elena's preference for women. Lydia expects Elena to be heterosexual, so she cannot understand Elena's desire to avoid boys' attention. Because the series has not yet revealed Elena's lesbian identity, this scene functions as commentary on the expectation that Latinx characters are heterosexual (González-López, 2010; Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 2018). Lydia does not question whether Elena's comment means that she is not interested in boys. Rather, Lydia just says that she cannot understand why Elena would not want male attention. This introduction to the obliviousness, close-mindedness, and expectations of heteronormativity introduces a pattern in how *ODAAAT* approaches the subject of Elena's sexuality until she comes out. Throughout the series, other characters do not consider the possibility that Elena may be interested in women. Instead, other characters assume Elena is heterosexual while Elena privately questions her sexuality. In mainstream representations of Latina/x/o communities, heterosexuality is the privileged means of expressing sexuality. This means that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are considered the norm and ingrained in perceptions of love and romance (Alcalde, 2014; González-López, 2010; Castañeda, 2018). As a result, heterosexuality is the presupposed form of sexuality.

ODAAAT further engages with the assumption of heterosexuality by portraying other characters' ignorance about Elena's lesbianism. The series emphasizes other characters' obliviousness to Elena's sexuality later on, when Penelope, Elena's mother, finds out that Elena

was watching pornography featuring two women and one man. Here, once again, the series critiques the close-mindedness of other characters about Elena's sexuality given that there is no consideration of the possibility that Elena could be a lesbian. Instead, Penelope nervously wonders if Elena is sexually active. As she asks Elena, Penelope fidgets with her hands, her eyebrows knit closely together. She stands a distance away from Elena who is sitting on her bed. When Elena says that she is not sexually active, Penelope lets out a breath, throwing herself on the bed to hug Elena tightly. As she holds Elena, Penelope yells, "Oh thank God! You're way too young! And guys are really bad at it in the beginning anyway, not that I want you to be with an older guy" (Mann et al., 2017b). Once again, the series uses this scene to lodge a critique of expected heteronormativity in mainstream representations of Latina/x communities. Despite the two women in the pornographic video Elena was watching, Penelope's response expresses an assumption that it was the man that Elena was interested in. Further, Penelope's response supposes that although Elena is not sexually active right then, when she is, it will be with a man. However, as Penelope says this, Elena struggles to get out of her mother's grip and looks horrified, her eyes and mouth gaping. Elena's troubled expression and body language as she attempts to end the conversation hints to viewers that she is not interested in the discussion of ever being with a man. Despite Elena's expression and body language, the series depicts Penelope as completely unaware of Elena's interest in women. Much like Lydia in the scene mentioned above, the series does not depict Penelope ever questioning Elena's sexuality. Instead, both characters are oblivious to Elena's interests.

The series emphasizes Penelope's ignorance about Elena's sexuality when Elena reveals to Penelope that she does not have romantic feelings toward the boy she was dating. Penelope immediately tells Elena not to worry because one day she will find a romantic partner in a man.

Here, again, Penelope's response demonstrates an expectation of heterosexuality and a close-mindedness toward the possibility that Elena could be a lesbian. The series further critiques the expectation to be straight when Elena counters, hesitantly saying, "What if that's not what I want" (Mann et al., 2017b). Viewers are invited to make light of the situation particularly by laughing at Penelope, who is still completely oblivious to Elena's sexuality and what she is trying to reveal, as Penelope rolls her eyes and says, "Oh, I know. Marriage is a patriarchal tool used to enslave women. All men are adult babies. I know." (Mann et al., 2017b). However, Penelope's misunderstanding further perpetuates the assumption that Elena's interests are heterosexual. Elena turns to her mother and confesses, "when I think about love, I see myself, someday, loving a woman" (Mann et al., 2017b). In response, Penelope looks at Elena. Penelope's facial expression is pained, lips trembling, and her eyes welling up with tears as she says, "Oh... When did you..." (Mann et al., 2017b). Through Penelope's response and shocked expression, the series emphasizes just how unaware Penelope was of Elena's sexuality. Further, the conversation demonstrates just how tightly Penelope clung to the assumption that Elena was heterosexual despite signals telling her otherwise. Here, the series lodges a critique of the assumed heterosexuality in mainstream media depictions of Latina/x/o families by using Elena's interactions with both Lydia and Penelope to demonstrate the uncomfortable tension these expectations can produce.

Although the series is progressive in its depiction of Elena's sexuality and exploration, it will show how the construction of her flirtatious scenes as comical reinforces the stereotypical coding of Latinx LGBTQ+ characters on television as "familiar, funny, and slightly wrong," (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, p. 143). Compared to other characters on the series' expressions of straight sexuality, Elena's exploration of lesbianism becomes something of an awkward, funny

spectacle for viewers to poke fun at. *ODAAT* problematically defines Elena by her sexuality. Unlike the depiction of other characters' sexualities, Elena's lesbianism is her distinguishing trait rather than just one aspect of her identity. The series suggests that her lesbian sexuality marks her as different from her heterosexual family members. For example, in "To Zir, With Love," Elena meets Syd, her future non-binary partner (Wolfe & Lewis, 2018). Syd approaches Elena and attempts to flirt with her by mentioning that Dani, Elena's first crush, is lucky to have a girlfriend. Elena, heartbroken over the news that Dani already has a girlfriend, is inattentive to Syd's advances. Given Elena's indifference, Syd thinks Elena is not a lesbian and not interested, so they decide to stop flirting with her. As Syd turns to walk away, Elena finally catches onto Syd's interest and yells, "No, no! Gay! Me, gay!" as a laugh track plays (Wolfe & Lewis, 2018). In sitcoms such as *ODAAT*, laugh tracks cue "audiences into who and what [is] laughed at and whether it [is] socially appropriate to laugh" (Molina-Guzmán, 2018, p.14). The audience is cued to laugh at Elena's desperate and graceless attempt to ensure Syd is aware of her sexuality and interest. The series uses Elena's enthusiastic response to other her and highlight how she is awkward in a way that heterosexual characters on the series are not, as I address later. By layering Elena's outburst with a laugh track, the scene signals to viewers that it is funny to clumsily explore first loves and crushes, but that it is especially funny when Elena does this. This humor is particular to Elena because by encouraging viewers to laugh at her expressions of sexuality, the series others her in a way that it does not do with heterosexual characters. In doing so, the series draws attention to her sexuality and puts an emphasis on her lesbianism. Syd responds to Elena's outburst, "Oh. Uh, me gay, too" followed by the sound of another laugh track (Wolfe & Lewis, 2018). Given the grammatical parallel between Syd's response and Elena's initial outburst, viewers are once again invited to laugh at Elena and Syd's

unsophisticated interaction. The specifics of the humor and the marking as awkward create implications around lesbian sexuality as unconventional, not smooth, and other. Further, in television, LGBTQ+ identity was and continues to be used as a way to add an element of drama or deviance to a character (Dow, 2001; Waggoner, 2018). I suggest that the laughter at Elena's awkwardly presented sexuality marks her as a deviant character and centers her story on this aspect of her identity rather than on her as a fully rounded character with other facets. For instance, through this scene, the series draws attention to and defines Elena by her sexuality by pairing Elena with Syd solely because they both identify as "gay." Up until this point, Elena and Syd's interactions have been limited mostly to group settings in which neither character speaks directly to the other. And yet, immediately following this interaction, Elena and Syd are assumed to be dating. I suggest that the series makes Elena's sexuality her primary characteristic such that she is a lesbian first and a Latinx girl with other traits second. The humor used throughout the scene ridicules Elena's sexuality by highlighting the uncool way she acts as she conveys her interest in Syd. While, as I will address later, the series also invites us to laugh at Lydia's expressions of heterosexuality, the humor is different. Here, the series encourages us to ridicule Elena and to see her as an outsider. This interaction in particular is important for distinguishing the presentation of Elena's sexuality from how the series presents the sexuality of her straight family members. In the scene discussed above, Lydia and Elena's brother, Alex, observe Elena's interaction with Syd and characterize her expressions of sexuality as "de madre," or uncool and not good (Wolfe & Lewis, 2018). Here, the scene engages in a typical depiction of LGBTQ+ characters, centering Elena's distinct experience flirting as a lesbian and marks her as different from her heterosexual family members (González-López, 2010; Arreola, 2010; Anzaldúa, 2012). The series marks Elena's sexuality as clumsy, using the family's comments to distinguish

lesbianism from heterosexuality. The scene codes her lesbianism as funny and exaggerated as demonstrated by the laugh tracks.

Although the series invites viewers to laugh at both Elena's expressions of interest and those of her heterosexual grandmother, the laughter is used differently and means different things. The series presents Elena in a fairly asexual way. By this I mean that it is as if the space of the series does not have a place for her as a sexual, romantic lesbian. Though there are mentions of dates with Elena's partner, Syd, the series does not show these dates onscreen. Instead, much of the time that Elena and Syd spend together is with Elena's family around. In these instances, the series depicts Syd and Elena more like friends than like two people in a relationship. Furthermore, with Elena, femininity, sexual nature, and attractiveness are not inherent traits. For instance, when Elena is afraid to express interest in her first crush, Dani, Lydia tells Elena that she should be bold and vulnerable with her feelings. Elena notes that while it is easy for straight people to flirt openly, flirting is difficult for her as a lesbian. She fears fulfilling the trope of the lesbian who asks a straight girl out and faces rejection. While she is doubtful that anyone will ever have feelings for her, Elena heeds Lydia's advice. A laugh track plays as Elena sheepishly notes that her way of flirting is just "staring awkwardly [at Dani] and smelling her hair as she walks by" (Wolfe & Lewis, 2018). In response, Lydia cringes. The laugh tracks layered over Elena's description of how she expresses her sexuality encourage the audience to laugh at her ineptitude. As a result, laughing at Elena's ineptitude frames her sexuality as something to poke fun at, something that is embarrassing. Here, again, the series centers Elena's sexuality as a defining characteristic. The description of Elena's means of flirting and Lydia's response mark her as different from heterosexual characters. The laughter functions with the representation of awkwardness to mark Elena's lesbianism as secretive and even a bit

embarrassing. The laughter marks her as odd, her behavior unexpected. On the other hand, the laugh tracks layered over Lydia's expressions cue viewers in to laugh at her dramatics.

Much like the scenes where the series shows Elena flirting and expressing her sexuality, the scenes where Lydia flirts with men are layered with laugh tracks, but the audience is directed to laugh for a different reason. With Lydia, there is never a question that she is a feminine, attractive, and sexual being. In fact, the series makes Lydia's attractiveness, femininity, and sexuality integral parts of her characterization, but they are not the central elements of her character. In contrast to Elena's lesbian identity, *ODAAT* represents Lydia in stereotypical fashion for a straight Latina as a feisty and lustful spitfire who flirts with men she is not actually interested in (Ramírez Berg, 2002). U.S. mainstream media constructs the Latina spitfire as a linguistically challenged, loud, comical, dancing beauty who often performs excessiveness and sexualized dancing which depicts her as racially different and foreign (Valdivia, 2020). This is significant because the Latina spitfire is usually very sexual and flirtatious. Portraying Lydia in this way, the series draws a clear contrast between Lydia's inherent sexuality, attractiveness, and flirtatiousness and Elena's lack thereof. The series invites viewers to see Lydia embodying the spitfire role, for example, by taking them back in time to the moment Lydia met her now-deceased husband, Berto. In this scene, viewers see an attractive younger Lydia in a red dress, elaborately coiffed hair, gold heels, red painted nails, and red lips. Within seconds of meeting him, Lydia flirts with Berto, telling him that she is all his. Berto flirts back, saying that Lydia is the most beautiful woman in the world. This scene introduces viewers to Lydia as already attractive, sexual, and feminine in her youth. Another example of Lydia's unabashed sexuality appears the first time Lydia meets Penelope's boyfriend, Max. Max is a tall, muscular, handsome man and although he is younger than Lydia, she does not hesitate to flirt with him. As Penelope

tries to usher Max out of the apartment and away from her mother, Lydia smirks when she grabs and squeezes his bicep, telling him to stay for dinner as a laugh track plays over her comment. Here, the series invites the audience to laugh at Lydia's assured sexuality. While it is expected that Lydia will be sexual given her characterization, the series still depicts her expressions of sexuality as funny, silly, and playful. Furthermore, Lydia's sexuality has a place and a space within the series that is not afforded to Elena's lesbianism. In other words, as in the moments addressed above (and some detailed later), *ODAAAT* shows Lydia's flirtatious, sexual, and romantic moments onscreen. The series invites us to see Lydia openly flirting and going on dates with men. Even though the series depicts Lydia's sexuality as comical, it gives her expressions of heterosexuality a space onscreen. In Lydia's case, the viewers are cued to laugh because of the exaggerated and self-aggrandizing way she expresses her sexuality. The series invites viewers to find humor in the drama and the over-the-top show she puts on when she flirts. For example, throughout the series, Lydia flirts with Dr. Berkowitz, her "exclusive, nonsexual, platonic companion" (Calderón Kellet et al., 2020) by laughing loudly and throwing her head back to reveal what she calls her perfect neck as she smiles charmingly and makes eyes at him. The series directs the audience to laugh at Lydia's expression of sexuality because it is theatrical, exaggerated, and blunt. Lydia is assured in her sexuality even if it is funny, but Elena is not.

After Elena comes out, the series problematically characterizes her by her sexual orientation. Unlike with the other characters, Elena's sexuality is not just one dimension of her character alongside other traits. Rather, as mentioned above, Elena's sexuality becomes her defining trait. The series draws attention to it at every turn, so she cannot be simply Elena, but she is primarily a lesbian and then also a Latinx girl. For instance, in "Penny Pinching" (Signer & Fryman, 2020) the series introduces viewers to Nora, a girl who is dating Elena's younger

brother, Alex. At a dinner with the family, Lydia asks Nora how she and Alex met. Nora says she complimented Alex's sneakers, he nodded at her, and they have been together ever since. Elena looks incredulous and responds, "God, it's so easy being straight" (Signer & Fryman, 2020) as a laugh track plays over her comment. The dialogue and delivery highlight a comedic interaction between Elena, Alex, and Nora, yet the joke focuses on Elena's difficulty expressing her sexuality and the challenges of being non-heteronormative. Elena's remark reminds viewers of her first time attempting to flirt with Syd and the challenge they had in even articulating their interest in each other while Nora and Alex did so with a simple compliment and nod. The series asks the audience to recall Syd and Elena's awkward conversation and body language, noticing how this diverges from what the conversation reveals about Nora and Alex. Thus, the series uses Elena's response to highlight her sexual orientation. Her comment emphasizes that it is not just that Alex and Nora had an easier time showing their attraction to each other but that this is so because they are straight. By continuously centering Elena's sexuality, the series disrupts the default assumption of heteronormativity in mainstream media representations of Latina/x/o communities. Here, the scene centers Elena's lesbianism to address the distinct experiences of Latinx characters who are not heterosexual (González-López, 2010; Arreola, 2010; Anzaldúa, 2012). From this scene, the series once again reminds the audience that compared to the heterosexual characters that surround her, Elena has a harder time expressing her sexuality and that this is something that is okay to laugh at.

Latina Spitfire in her Golden Years

ODAAT uses Lydia, an elder Latina to reinvent the sexual spitfire trope, giving sexual agency to a Latina character in her seventies. However, her character hardly pushes the limits of elder sexuality in mainstream media. Typically, the Latina spitfire is a young woman (Báez,

2008), whereas older Latinas such as those over the age of fifty, are presented as conservatively sexual or asexual and domineering mothers or grandmothers (Báez, 2018; Molina-Guzmán, 2018). However, through Lydia, *ODAAT* reimagines the trope to characterize a Latina in her mid-seventies as shockingly sexual. Detailed by Ramírez Berg (2002), the spitfire trope characterizes Latinas as short-tempered and loud. U.S. mainstream media marks the spitfire character as a comical, linguistically challenged, hypersexual, and curvaceous dancing beauty, foregrounding traits that explicitly “other” Latina characters when juxtaposed with “white, heteronormative, middle class, and standard English-speaking” characters (Valdivia, 2020, p. 27). Though we see Lydia perform suggestively and flirt with men, that is the extent of her sexual expression. Thus, although the series depicts Lydia’s sexual agency as a Latina spitfire, her character does not expand the boundaries of elder sexuality in mainstream media.

ODAAT portrays Lydia’s sexual nature as an inherent yet surprising part of her personality. Through this depiction, the series reconceptualizes the Latina spitfire trope to focus on an elder Latina who is, among other things, playfully sexual. In the quinceañera episode (discussed in the following chapter), the family suggests Lydia will “dance inappropriately” with one of Elena’s guy friends (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). Then, the camera centers Lydia who confidently says, “You can count on it” as she shimmies her shoulders, throws her head back dramatically, and runs a finger down her neck (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). Immediately, *ODAAT* invites viewers to recognize a sexual side to Lydia through her suggestive movements and confident response, even if it is presented as inappropriate for the company she will be in. Allowing viewers to see Lydia’s suggestive response speaks to the typical traits of a Latina spitfire character who is sexual and desirable to others (Ramírez Berg, 2002). Characterizing Lydia in this way, the series brings to the forefront the sexuality of an elderly Latina. Rather than

visually depicting Lydia as the typical image of a hypersexual Latina spitfire in low-cut or tight-fitting clothing, bold makeup, with a curvaceous body, and overdone hair (Báez, 2018; Molina-Guzmán, 2010), Lydia wears a loose-fitting blue top and khakis, clothes that align with what one might expect from a grandmother (Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 2018). While her bold blue hoops and teal statement necklace align perfectly with the image of the Latina spitfire in loud and excessive jewelry, they serve as subtle cues to Lydia's sexual personality. By visually depicting Lydia as a typical grandmother but inserting sexual elements and cues into her personality, the series suggests that Lydia's sexual and sensual desires are part of her identity. The series reinforces this notion when the family suggests that she will flirt with the boys at her granddaughter's quinceañera, and she does not deny it. Instead, she wholeheartedly affirms their assumptions by performing suggestive physical movements. By inviting viewers to see Lydia in this suggestive light, the series sets the tone for Lydia's continued sexual expression throughout the series. However, unlike the invitation to make fun of Elena because her expressions of her sexuality are awkward, we are not invited to laugh at Lydia because she is straight and expressing interest in men or boys. Instead, the series invites viewers to laugh at Lydia because she is so unashamed about her sexuality. Additionally, as mentioned above, that a Latina in her mid-seventies is so outwardly sexually suggestive is uncommon in U.S. mainstream media. In Lydia's case, the laughter functions to bring attention to her surprising behavior although her sexuality is only a part of her characterization and that makes it funny. By this I mean, on top of being sexual, the series depicts Lydia as the heart of the Alvarez family, a devout Catholic, and a woman who loves beauty, dance, and yoga. The laughter coupled with these other traits presents Lydia in a lighthearted way that is different from how the laughter functions with Elena.

ODAAT uses Lydia's identity as a sexual older Latina to reinvent the Latina spitfire trope, given that spitfires are usually young women. Elderly Latinas tend to have less romantic activity and are presented as less attractive than younger Latina characters (Bazzini et al., 1997; Báez, 2007). U.S. mainstream media does not depict elderly Latinas as sexually attractive or with the agency to be sexual. Instead, depictions of sexual agency and attractiveness center younger Latina characters and elder Latina characters are depicted as virginal, asexual. *ODAAT* reinvents the Latina spitfire trope by introducing Lydia to Dr. Berkowitz, the man who becomes her companion. Lydia meets Dr. Berkowitz in episode five, "Strays," when Penelope hosts a birthday party for him in their apartment. Although Lydia has just met Dr. Berkowitz and has no intention of being with him in any romantic or sexual capacity, she seduces him in front of all the guests and her family by performing a slow rendition of "Happy Birthday," rolling her body and making eyes at him. As she places a birthday cake in front of him, she straddles a chair, pushes her butt out to one side and runs a hand up her body as she maintains intense eye contact with him. Through this performance, the series depicts Lydia in alignment with the stereotypically sexual and seductive Latina spitfire character and gives her agency to express her desire through her body rolls, her seductive singing, and the way she maintains eye contact with Dr. Berkowitz. As she performs for Dr. Berkowitz, Lydia remains serious and focused. Her expression clues viewers in that Dr. Berkowitz should interpret her expression of desire as serious rather than as a joke. It is important to recognize the critical implications of how the series represents Lydia's sexual nature. Typically, when mainstream media depicts sexual elder women, their expressions are not taken seriously and intended to be a joke (Gatling et al., 2017). Although *ODAAT* engages laugh tracks throughout Lydia's expressions of her sexual nature, we are supposed to take her seriously. In other words, though the series encourages viewers to find her sexual nature

amusing, Lydia's depiction suggests that to her, her sexual nature is serious. However, the invitation for viewers to laugh at Lydia's hypersexual portrayal works in contrast with Lydia's attitude toward her own sexual nature. The series encourages viewers to understand that Lydia's attempt to seduce Dr. Berkowitz is not a joke or comical to her. For example, as she executes the body rolls, slow singing, and intense eye contact, she is serious and focused on Dr. Berkowitz. Throughout her entire performance, Lydia remains unsmiling until the end when she gives Dr. Berkowitz an accomplished smile. Even as other characters chuckle at her performance or watch her with confused expressions, Lydia remains committed to seducing Dr. Berkowitz. As a result, viewers are invited to sympathize with Lydia's expressions of sexuality, eventually viewing them as genuine. Thus, the series transfers the focus of sexual attention to a grandmother, purposely defying the stereotype and brings viewers' awareness to the sexuality of an elderly woman. This depiction draws attention to the fact that older women who are sexual are often made fun of or made the butt of jokes, but Lydia is not. Instead, the comedy lies in reminding us of our own discomfort and making the viewers uncomfortable about the notion of a sexual elder Latina. The series encourages its audience to view Lydia's sexual nature by directing viewers' full attention to her performance. The camera centers her for the entirety of the song, framing her as a "hot Latina" spitfire through her explicitly seductive actions. Through her eye contact, seductive singing, the way she runs a hand up her body and so on, the series encourages viewers to recognize that Lydia is acting in a way that she considers hot and sexy. In doing so, the series suggests that elderly women can and should have the ability to display sexual and romantic desires. Although even here, at the height of Lydia's sexual expression with her body rolling and straddling the chair, *ODAAT*'s depiction of Lydia as a sexual elder does not push the boundaries of sexual elderly representation. By this I mean, though we see Lydia's whole performance, that

is the extent of the way the series depicts her sexuality. As *ODAAT* reconstructs the image of the Latina spitfire through Lydia, the series invites its audience to engage with the unexpectedness of this characterization through the placement of the laugh tracks and the other characters' expressions. Here, the laugh track functions as a way to bring attention to the unique representation and behavior of a sexual elderly Latina. To further emphasize the unconventional nature of a woman in her seventies as the Latina spitfire, laugh tracks play during the points of Lydia's performance in which she is the most overtly sexual such as when she straddles the chair or when she begins the slow singing. In this case, placing the laugh track at the most unabashedly sexual points of Lydia's performance invites viewers to acknowledge their discomfort with seeing a sexually suggestive elder onscreen. In this scene the laugh tracks are paired with shots showing her family and friends' bewildered and confused expressions toward Lydia's sexual actions. Using these elements, the series acknowledges that this image of a sexual elder Latina is atypical even for those characters around Lydia who know her to have a sexual personality. This is significant because the series intentionally characterizes Lydia as an attractive, sexual being. For the other characters to watch her romantic and sexual performance in amazement indicates that although sexuality and attractiveness are part of Lydia's personality, the straightforward displays of desire are still likely shocking to the viewers and to the other characters around her. By allowing viewers to see the other characters' confusion and surprise at Lydia's blunt sexuality, the series acknowledges the unexpectedness of a sexual Latina elder.

While *ODAAT* reimagines the Latina spitfire by positioning Lydia, an elder Latina, in this role, the series also relies on stereotypical traits of the spitfire, such as pairing with white men, to define Lydia's embodiment of the role. As mentioned above, Lydia flirts with Dr. Berkowitz. However, she does not form a romantic relationship with him due to her commitment to her

deceased husband, Berto. Though she is not romantically involved with him, Dr. Berkowitz, Lydia's companion (not her boyfriend) is a white man with whom Lydia conducts date-like events. Although Lydia denies her desire to be with Dr. Berkowitz, the series progressively shows how Lydia wants his companionship even as she denies her interest in him. In "Exclusive," Lydia discovers that Dr. Berkowitz plans to attend an opera performance with another woman. Though she claims she does not care, she devises a plan to make him jealous, dressing in a black dress with a bejeweled neckline, and long black gloves, and inviting her landlord, a younger man, to attend the show with her. Throughout the performance, Lydia tosses her head back, laughing loudly, tells her landlord to put his arm around her, and bends over in front of her landlord, encouraging him to look at her butt in attempts to attract Dr. Berkowitz's attention. When that does not work, she threatens Dr. Berkowitz's date directly, ruining her makeup and saying, "Stay away from my... friend" as she saunters away (Wolfe & Fryman, 2018). Through the defensiveness about her relationship with Dr. Berkowitz, the series presents Lydia embracing the role of the heterosexual and hypersexual Latina attracted to and paired with a white man. Although she does not claim Dr. Berkowitz as a partner, the series once again allows viewers to see how Lydia resists the asexual or virginal depiction that mainstream media usually assigns to older Latina characters. The presentation of Lydia threatening the woman Dr. Berkowitz is on a date with, the series shows her as passionate and desirous of a relationship, which is unique even as it reifies notions of Latinas in media in relationships with white men.

Coming Out

ODAAT demonstrates how the ways in which coming out is handled affects family relationships and closeness in mainstream U.S. media. I suggest that the series critiques the "out is always best" mindset that dominates U.S. mainstream discourse around the LGBTQ+ rights

movement (Ballou, 2015) by portraying varied responses to Elena's sexuality. The notion that "out is always best" suggests that coming out or revealing one's sexuality is always the best option (Ballou, 2015). However, the concept that coming out is always best fails to account for the possibilities of oppression, discrimination, rejection, and violence that individuals may face after coming out (Ballou, 2015). The series presents viewers with varied responses to Elena coming out as a lesbian, ranging from hesitant acceptance to total rejection. *ODAAT* depicts acceptance as the ideal or "right" response and demonizes those who reject Elena for her sexuality.

The series begins its critique of the understanding that coming out is "always best" by depicting Elena's sexuality as something that Penelope cannot immediately accept. *ODAAT* centers Elena's sexuality as a spectacle in multiple "coming out" scenes and discussions about her sexuality throughout the series. In television, one of the predominant scripts for LGBTQ+ characters includes the "coming out" story in which the character comes out to their heterosexual counterparts (Fryett, 2016). Existing scholarship notes that coming out stories tend to contribute to the notion that LGBTQ+ sexuality is important to address particularly because of its impact on the characters' personal relationships with their heterosexual counterparts (Dow, 2001). For example, initially Penelope, Elena's mother, struggles to accept what it means to have a daughter who identifies as a lesbian. Penelope expresses discomfort with and little knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues, but the series shows how she takes her lack of knowledge into her own hands and begins to learn how best to support Elena. Penelope asks her friends for advice on how to hide her discomfort and aggressively overcompensates, hugging Elena as she enthusiastically mentions she read up on a "lesbian lifestyle and pop culture website" and makes references to Lady Gaga, a stereotypical icon in the LGBTQ+ community. The positive reaction from

Penelope breaks with the mainstream media representation of older generations of Latinas/xs/os as homophobic (González-López, 2010). In other words, the expected reaction from Penelope would be to reject Elena. This is because mainstream media depicts Latina/x culture as aligned with Catholic values and practices, patriarchal institutions, and heteronormative beliefs that reject LGBTQ+ people (Alcalde, 2014; González-López, 2010). However, Penelope's response complicates "the coming-out narrative beyond the homophobic/tolerance binary" (del Río & Moran, 2019, p. 17). Penelope's response functions as a critique of the notion that coming out is always better because she cannot immediately accept or understand Elena, but she does not reject Elena either. The series constructs Penelope as uncomfortable with Elena's sexuality and yet endearing in her efforts to educate herself and overcome her discomfort. The audience is encouraged to learn along with Penelope as she gathers more information about how best to support Elena. This kind of positive reaction is privileged throughout the series and shown as the ideal response to Elena's sexuality. Given Penelope's complex response to Elena's sexuality, the series frames Elena's sexuality as something that will simply take some adjusting to and invites viewers to respond similarly to Penelope by guiding them alongside Penelope's journey with her complex emotions toward having a lesbian daughter. *ODAAT* furthers the idea that acceptance is the "correct" response to Elena's sexuality later on, when Elena comes out to her grandmother, Lydia. Lydia's response, like Penelope's, complicates the accepting/homophobic binary and the idea that coming out is the best course of action. Although Lydia tells Elena that she accepts her, Lydia expresses to Penelope in secret that she, too, is struggling to accept Elena's sexuality. Lydia has difficulty accepting Elena's sexuality because she is a Catholic and the Catholic church has historically had a problematic relationship with the LGBTQ+ community. Around the time this episode aired, Pope Francis had made headlines for saying, "Who am I to judge?" when

asked about LGBTQ+ advocacy in the Vatican (BBC News, 2013; McElwee, 2016). Thus, it is Pope Francis who guides Lydia's acceptance. Lydia begins her monologue, saying that being gay goes against God, however she comes to the conclusion that "...when it comes to the gays, the Pope did say, 'Who am I to judge?' and the Pope represents God. So, what? Am I going to go against the Pope and God? Who the hell do I think I am?" (Jones et al., 2017) and with that she accepts Elena's sexuality.

ODAAT further critiques the notion that coming "out is best" when depicting the ways Victor, Elena's father, rejects her after she comes out to him. In contrast to Penelope and Lydia's acceptance of Elena's sexuality, the only character who has an adverse reaction is her estranged father, Victor. The series characterizes Victor's rejection as the wrong response and immediately villainizes Victor, defining him as a stereotype of the homophobic Latino parent (González-López, 2010). The series portrays Victor championing heteronormative and patriarchal expectations of Elena but invites viewers to be critical of him and of these expectations. Elena comes out to Victor during a practice session of their father-daughter dance for Elena's quinceañera. When Elena comes out to him, Victor responds much like the other characters who make jokes about Elena's sexuality. Victor raises his eyebrows, looks away, and chuckles bitterly. Looking back at Elena, he narrows his eyes and lets out two forced laughs. He then raises his eyebrows, with a sarcastic expression on his face and scoffs at Elena's announcement saying, "Yeah, and you're pregnant, too, right? Let's do all the shockers" while a laugh track plays (Calderón Kellet et al., 2017c). Throughout this scene, Victor continues to dance with Elena, but his sarcastic dialogue and facial expressions, tell viewers that Victor has not taken Elena's announcement seriously. Rather, understood together, the laugh track along with his dialogue and facial expressions signal that he thinks Elena is joking or trying to pull a prank on

him. Here, the laugh tracks are not inviting viewers to laugh or perceive the scene as funny. Instead, the laugh tracks function to signal Victor's misunderstanding and denial that Elena could really be a lesbian. Unlike Elena's mother and grandmother who accept Elena's sexuality, once Elena clarifies that she is not joking and that she really is a lesbian, Victor looks disgusted and physically distances himself from Elena as he asks her, why she is "doing this," calling her "confused" because she is only 15 and does not know what she is talking about (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017c). The discomfort in the scene is palpable. As they talk, Victor and Elena stand a distance away from each other, rupturing the closeness they shared only moments before when they were dancing together in preparation for the father-daughter dance. Victor's voice is raised, his hands are on his hips, and his facial expression is one of disgust and contempt. He no longer makes eye contact with Elena, indicating his disapproval of her sexuality. Victor is presented as unsympathetic and homophobic. Victor's rejection aligns with the typically homophobic portrayal of highly religious Latina/x/o communities in mainstream media (González-López, 2010). However, the series does not represent rejection as an acceptable answer to Elena's sexuality. It is significant that the series does this because this strays from the typical presentation of Latina/x/o cultural beliefs. The series invites viewers to feel negatively toward Victor as the camera centers Elena with tears welling in her eyes. *ODAAT* encourages viewers to feel sympathy for Elena and to understand her disappointment that, following acceptance from her mother and grandmother, she has been let down by her father's reaction.

ODAAT demonstrates Victor's rejection of and anger toward Elena as a critique that coming out is best. The series portrays Victor as angry, disgusted, and unchanging in his homophobic beliefs. As the scene above comes to a climax, Penelope enters the room to speak with Victor. Victor frowns as he chastises Penelope for supporting Elena. He places his hands on

his hip, his voice stern and his eyebrows raised as he talks to Penelope. Penelope aggressively tells Victor that he is going to have to find a way to be okay with Elena's sexuality, but he counters saying, "No, I don't have to be okay with anything" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017c). As he storms out of the room, Victor says to Penelope, "She's [Elena is] mixed up... Oh, so we're all just supposed to pretend like this is cool? Because it's not. All right? It's not" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017c). In another scene Victor angrily says to Penelope, "This isn't who she is... It's not. It's a phase. It's what kids do. It's, like, cool now to be gay" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017c). The series continues to construct Victor's response as dismissive and belittling of Elena's sexual identity. Here, viewers are encouraged to see the potential rejection and violence one may face when coming out. This suggests that coming out is in fact not always best and that the way Victor handles coming out (rejection) ruptures the dynamic of the family. The series' engagement with varied reactions to Elena's sexuality suggests that while coming out may produce some positive or neutral responses, it can also be the source of pain and rejection.

The series suggests that the way in which coming out is handled impacts family relationships. *ODAAT* invites viewers to see the acceptance that Elena receives from Penelope and Lydia as conducive to strengthening the bond between the family whereas Victor's rejection severs the closeness. At the end of the episode mentioned above, unable to cope with Elena's sexuality and with how proud she is to be out, Victor leaves Elena's quinceañera prior to the father-daughter dance, without saying goodbye. Elena stands on the dancefloor alone, visibly hurt by her father's rejection as tears well in her eyes. The camera then centers Lydia and Penelope, both crying as they watch Elena process her father's rejection in front of everyone. Here, again, the series highlights the potential for pain and rejection that results after coming out. Additionally, the scene demonstrates that Victor's negative response hurt not only Elena but

Lydia and Penelope too. The scene emphasizes Victor's characterization as the villain who caused his daughter pain and embarrassment in front of everyone and who hurt the family emotionally. Once again, the series invites viewers to be accepting to Elena's sexuality along with Penelope and Lydia. Penelope is privileged as the parent with the "right" response as she wipes her tears and joins Elena on the dancefloor, taking the spot originally intended for Victor. Other members of the Alvarez family follow Penelope's lead, joining Elena on the dancefloor and after a moment of swaying, Elena says, "I'm okay, you guys" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017c). Elena's comment reinforces the notion that by accepting her sexuality and supporting her, these members of the Alvarez family have strengthened their bond with Elena whereas Victor, who is nowhere to be found, has destroyed their bond.

Closing Thoughts on Sexuality

It is an important time to study the representation of Latinx lesbian sexuality and older Latinas' expressions of heterosexuality. Townsend et al. (2021) found that the number of Latinx LGBTQ+ characters dropped significantly this year due to the cancellation of the majority LGBTQ+ Latina/x/o series. Furthermore, we have seen more recent discussions of older women's sexuality, with a focus on how ageism is part of how older women are represented as asexual, virginal, their sexuality made taboo (Delgado, 2020). Throughout this chapter, I suggest that *ODAAT* depicts Elena's lesbian identity as odd and as her defining characteristic. On the other hand, I argue that the series does not depict Lydia's straight sexuality as odd, but rather as a small part of her character. Doing so, the series reimagines the Latina spitfire trope but does not push the boundaries of elderly sexuality in mainstream media. Finally, the series shows both hesitant acceptance and rejection of Elena's sexuality to critique the idea that coming out is best.

CHAPTER TWO:

CULTURAL BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS AS A BARRIER

In this chapter, I argue that *ODAAT* demonstrates how characters must modify culture and adopt an “American” way to fit their needs through an analysis of the pan-Latina/x quinceañera celebration, beauty standards, and religion-based stigma around mental health. Although the quinceañera and beauty standards are drastically different from mental health, the common thread throughout is the influence of culture. In other words, the series illuminates tensions between culture and personal ideals, preferences, and needs. I begin this chapter with an analysis of Elena’s quinceañera celebration, demonstrating her discomfort with the cultural tradition and how she alters both her perception of the tradition and her approach to celebrating it to better fit her values. Here, I highlight how Elena maintains her commitment to her identity as a Latinx girl even as she negotiates tensions between culture and her feminism. Next, I suggest that although the series critiques pan-Latina/x beauty ideals, they do so through Elena who naturally and unwittingly already embodies conventional standards of Latinx beauty. I do this by analyzing scenes in which Elena is made fun of for attempting to embrace beauty standards. In the last section of this chapter, I turn to media tropes around pan-Latina/x cultural stigma toward mental health that deem therapy and medication ineffective and unnecessary treatments. Here, I emphasize Penelope’s tensions between culture and mental health needs. I argue that the series presents Latina cultural beliefs around mental health as negative and outdated. By presenting the issues in this way, the series encourages viewers to forgo cultural beliefs and seek

“Americanized”² versions of treatment because these are best way to meet her needs. Throughout this this chapter, I suggest that Latinas/xs must be able to tweak their cultural beliefs and expectations as a means of self-preservation. To conduct my analysis, I examine 12 scenes from six episodes. I pay particular attention to dialogue, lighting, body language, and camera angles.

Quinceañeras and Gendered Expectations

ODAAT positions Elena’s feminism in tension with the pan-Latinx celebration of the quinceañera to depict the limits of steadfastly abiding by cultural traditions. In the first episode of the series, *ODAAT* introduces Elena to the audience as she argues with Lydia and Penelope about whether she will have a quinceañera or not. By introducing Elena in the context of the quinceañera, the series engages with a common method of signaling pan-Latinx cultural identity within mainstream U.S. popular culture (Leon-Boys & Valdivia, 2020; González, 2019) and establishes the gendered performance expected of her. In other words, here, the series engages a generic and often-used signal of Latinx culture, the quinceañera. Doing so, the implied expectation of Elena is that she celebrate the rite of passage happily by embracing the typical dress and celebration style as I will show below.

Introducing Elena as resistant to the quinceañera hints at the show’s characterization of her as a feminist and sets her values in opposition with respecting and blindly following her culture. In Latina/x/o cultures, both within the U.S. and in Latin America, a girl’s fifteenth birthday, called a quinceañera, is regarded as a major rite of passage to celebrate a girl’s journey

² I use the terms “Americanization” and “Americanized” to describe the adoption of conventional mainstream values in the U.S. This term also stands in for the idea of assimilation (Rumbaut, 2015) when it comes to Latinas and Latinx enacting these things in a US context. Chun et al. (2013) conceptualize assimilation as a process whereby individuals develop new cultural identities and erase ties to their culture of origin. By noting that the characters engage “Americanized” responses to issues of mental health, I mean that the series depicts these responses as typical, expected and valued in the United States (Huebner, 1906). By presenting its characters navigating mental health situations using therapy and medication, *ODAAT* depicts an idealized version of “American” and an assimilationist construction of what it means to be and act like an American when dealing with mental health.

from childhood into maturity (Romo, Mireles-Rios, & Lopez-Tello, 2014). Within Latina/x/o culture, the convention is for Latinx girls like Elena to be excited to transition to womanhood, to dress up, and come together with her family to celebrate this element of her Latinx culture (Ruz Hernandez, 2008). Traditionally, Latina/x/o parents and grandparents, in this case, Penelope and Lydia, are the ones who hold on to cultural traditions such as the quinceañera celebration (Ruz Hernandez, 2008). On the other hand, the children or grandchildren, such as Elena, abandon tradition to assimilate to American culture and develop American identities (Ruz Hernandez, 2008). In the first episode, Elena, a budding activist and feminist, views quinceañeras as misogynistic and argues that she does not want “to be paraded around in front of the men of the village like a piece of property to be traded for two cows and a goat” to which her grandmother responds, “You are throwing away your Cuban heritage” (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). Although here, the series signals a specifically Cuban identity, the quinceañera is celebrated widely across the U.S. and Latin America, not just by Cubans. By showing her resistance, the series positions Elena as a third-generation child and grandchild who views traditions from the familial homeland as outdated and archaic and finds herself distanced from her cultural roots (Hawkins, Posadas, Manale, & Bean, 2020). Viewers see that Elena’s feminist mentality clashes with the more traditional beliefs of her mother and grandmother about the gendered expectations in Latina/x culture to celebrate quinceañeras. Through Elena’s resistance, the series demonstrates that the clash between Elena’s feminism and her mother and grandmother’s ties to the tradition happens particularly because Elena is living in the U.S. and entrenched in a culture, where the quinceañera as a rite of passage is not well understood (Ruz Hernandez, 2008). Here, the series presents the tension between Elena’s feminism and the gendered expectations of her culture. Now, it is typical in mainstream media for a girl to reject the entire quinceañera celebration or

some element of it. This happens, for instance, in shows such as *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007-2012), *The Fosters* (2013-2018), *Austin & Ally* (2011-2016), and *Taina* (2001-2002). However, in these shows the girl simply rejects the tradition because she does not want to make her quinceañera celebration a big deal or because she does not like the way she will have to celebrate. *ODAAAT*'s depiction of Elena's resistance expands upon this trope of being expected to celebrate the quinceañera but rejecting it. *ODAAAT* does so by portraying a Latinx character who does not want to celebrate specifically because of the tension she feels between her feminist politics and her cultural traditions.

For Elena, the standard quinceañera celebration cannot exist in conjunction with her feminism and vice versa. As Elena, Penelope, and Lydia argue about whether Elena will have the quinceañera or not, Elena glares at her mother and grandmother with her hands on her hips and nostrils flared, pounds her fist on the counter, and raises her voice as she speaks. Eventually, she stalks off with a resolute, "I'm not doing it" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). At this point, the series depicts Elena siding with her feminist beliefs, seemingly choosing to abandon her culture because she views the quinceañera as misogynistic. However, as she negotiates her feminism and her cultural traditions, Elena does not actually reject either part of her identity which is significant for the representation of a Latinx character like her. *ODAAAT* creates a unique situation that suggests that for Elena, celebrating the quinceañera in the traditional way is not the best option. Instead, given her feminism, she will alter the quinceañera tradition in a way that allows her to maintain both her beliefs and her culture. Penelope and Lydia attempt to win Elena over by showing her photos from Penelope's quinceañera, holding a formal debate with her, and finally, when nothing convinces Elena to change her mind, deciding that Elena will have the quinceañera whether she agrees with it or not. During their debate, Penelope exclaims to Elena,

“Oh, God, just accept it. You’re Cuban, you’re 15, you’re gonna have a big party, with a poofy dress and a bad photo. It’s what we do” (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a), solidifying her unwavering commitment to the cultural tradition and her lack of desire to see Elena’s perspective. In this moment, Penelope’s dialogue reminds the audience of the family’s Cuban identity, although, again, Latina/x/o communities across Latin America and the U.S. celebrate this tradition (Mercadal, 2020). As Penelope decides that Elena will have the quinceañera celebration whether she wants to or not, Elena furrows her brows and raises her voice, saying the tradition is stupid, and she does not want to celebrate. The family looks shocked and hurt as Elena storms out of the room saying she hates Penelope and that they are not listening to her. The audience is invited to recognize Elena’s rage in her facial expressions and body language. Additionally, *ODAAT* urges the viewers to notice how, even after attempting to talk out her perspective with her mother, Penelope and Lydia refuse to acknowledge Elena’s disconnection from the cultural tradition. The series encourages viewers to respond with sympathy to Elena even as she becomes angry because we know that the celebration creates tension between her identity as a Latinx girl and her feminist beliefs, thus putting her in a difficult position. The series presents Penelope and Lydia holding on to the tradition too tightly to consider Elena’s point of view. The argument between Penelope, Lydia, and Elena about the quinceañera reveals that this is not the only cultural tradition Elena has resisted. Here, again, the series emphasizes the tension between Elena’s beliefs and her culture, particularly in terms of religion. During the debate, Elena mentions that she wrecked her First Communion because, as a vegetarian, she would not eat the body of Christ and as a child she would not sit on Santa’s lap because Lydia would not admit that Christmas is a pagan ritual. Though the series does not show these two instances of Elena’s resistance to the cultural traditions held by her family, by mentioning them

the series further highlights the way Elena's beliefs distance from her family's traditions. By making viewers aware of this information, the series demonstrates the continued tension between Elena's beliefs and her culture. This is significant because at this point, it seems that Elena has constantly sided with her feminist ideals and abandoned all notions of following her culture. She has done so with the First Communion, Christmas, and now with the quinceañera. This resistive trait demonstrates an unusually subversive attitude toward tradition for a mainstream Latinx character. On television, Latinx characters like Elena are typically associated with powerlessness and constructed as maintaining tradition even in new cultural contexts as a way of being loyal to their family (Molina-Guzmán, 2018; Taft, 2014). However, Elena breaks from that trope by standing her ground throughout the episode. With an angry red face and her shoulders slumping, Elena stands up to Penelope and firmly states her opposition to the quinceañera: "...when I tell you that I don't want to be a part of something that I think is a misogynistic cultural ritual, you tell me to shut up, do it anyway" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). Here, once again, the series invites viewers to note the tension between Elena's feminism and her Latinx culture as well as to note how unusually subversive her character is. At this point, the series' depictions of Elena show her siding with her feminist beliefs. However, the series teases out this tension later in the episode when Penelope finally tells Elena that the main reason she wanted Elena to celebrate a quinceañera was because she wanted friends and family to show up and say, "Look at the amazing single mom pulling it all together by herself" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). At this point, Elena looks at Penelope, with a contemplative expression on her face. She looks away for a second, frowns, and shakes her head. Elena then enthusiastically jumps up saying, "No, I'll do it. All I wanted was a good reason why, and you just gave me one... We're gonna show them what single mothers can pull off" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). Here the series transforms the

meaning of the quinceañera tradition from a cultural ritual meant to indicate a Latinx girl's transition to womanhood and preparation for marriage to an event meant to show how hardworking Penelope is, an event more aligned with Elena's feminist ideals. In other words, through this conversation, the series reveals to viewers that Elena is able to negotiate the tension between feminism and culture by viewing the quinceañera as a way to show family and friends that Penelope is an empowered, capable woman raising two kids on her own. This depiction of Elena as a Latinx character is significant because she does not give up either feminism or her culture. She manages to negotiate the tension between belief and culture by adopting what the series constructs as a more "Americanized" and assimilationist way of perceiving the tradition. Elena modifies her understanding of the purpose for her quinceañera and, as I will soon show, the traditional attire girls wear to celebrate the tradition.

Although Elena eventually comes around to the idea of having a quinceañera, the series presents her as subversive in her rejection of recommended quinceañera attire. When Lydia makes her a quinceañera dress, Elena insists she is not comfortable wearing dresses, and shares that she recently decided she is comfortable in suits and ties (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017c). Elena is willing to compromise, though, if she can wear Doc Martens underneath her quinceañera dress instead of the traditional heels (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017c). Here, again, we see Elena's personal beliefs and preferences positioned in opposition to her culture's expectations. For Latinas/xs, the expected attire for a quinceañera includes a light-colored crinoline or bell-hoop dress either made by a relative or purchased, jewelry, a tiara, and slippers that will be changed into heels to symbolize the transition from girlhood to womanhood (Mercadal, 2020; Ruz Hernandez, 2008). Furthermore, Latina/x girls are expected to embody outward beauty and a specific Latina/x look that consists of excessive jewelry, bold makeup,

bright clothing (Báez, 2018; Molina-Guzmán, 2010), and elaborate hairstyles (Plummer, 2007) when they celebrate their quinceañeras. Elena's rejection of the dress is not atypical for a Latina/x character (Leon-Boys & Valdivia, 2020). However, what is unique about Elena's rejection of the dress is that the series positions her resistance as rooted in a commitment to her identity and ideals. For instance, unlike Trish in *Austin & Ally* (2011-2016) who simply dislikes her quinceañera dress because it is "poofy" (Silver et al., 2012) or Taina in *Taina* (2001-2002) who feels the dress makes her "look like the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man" (Hyman et al., 2001), the series positions Elena's discomfort with her dress as both a negotiation between her lesbian identity and feminist ideals, and her Latinx cultural practices. Up until this point, viewers have only ever seen Elena in gender-neutral clothing and without jewelry, save for the one time when she tries wearing makeup to school (discussed below). Additionally, we have already seen Elena come out as a lesbian and her discomfort with the dress speaks to that identification. Mainstream media often depicts lesbian women, particularly those like Elena who are not hyperfeminine, in more androgynous or masculine-presenting, neutral-colored clothing and no jewelry (Ciasullo, 2001; Farr & Degroult, 2008). Thus, Elena's discomfort with the extravagant and glittery white dress her grandmother made for her is unsurprising. By presenting Elena's rejection of the elaborate makeup, jewelry, and quinceañera dress, the series shows how Elena's preferences function in opposition to her culture. However here, the series presents Elena negotiating this tension and committing to both aspects of her identity. In other words, Elena's willingness to compromise, to keep the dress but trade the traditional heels in for Doc Martens, demonstrates a unique position for her. Further, the series even brings other characters into Elena's negotiation between her culture and preferences. When Elena's quinceañera celebration comes around, Lydia surprises Elena by transforming the original quinceañera dress into a white pantsuit that

Elena can wear with her Doc Martens. Thus, even though Elena comes around to celebrating the ritual, the series demonstrates that she does not celebrate it in the traditional way. As she negotiates the tension between culture and preference, Elena does not completely reject any part of her identity, but instead takes what the series depicts as an “Americanized” approach to her cultural tradition to fit her needs and beliefs. In other words, she abandons a more traditional perspective that would construct the quinceañera as a rite of passage and coming into womanhood to reframe the quinceañera as a means to prove that her mother is doing well raising her alone allows Elena to maintain her commitment to both her feminist ideals and to her Latinx cultural celebration.

Limitations of Latinx Beauty

Even as Elena defies Latinx and lesbian tropes, she is always already an ideal of feminine Latinx beauty. *ODAAT* presents Elena as a potentially perfect embodiment of mainstream media’s Latinx beauty ideals because of her white-passing and ethnically ambiguous appearance, straight hair, and dark eyes (Báez, 2018; Dávila, 2012; Molina-Guzmán, 2010, 2018; Rodríguez, 1997). Additionally, looking specifically at Cubans like Elena, until the 1980s, discourse in U.S. mainstream media reinforced the conceptualization of Cubans as white (Molina-Guzmán, 2018), making her whiteness an ideal depiction of pan-Latinx beauty. Concurrently, however, the series depicts Elena as uncomfortable with and resistant to the beauty ideals expected of Latinxs like her such as red-painted lips and other makeup, form-fitting clothing, and excessive jewelry (Báez, 2018; Molina-Guzmán, 2010). Elena emerges as a paradoxical character who is uncomfortable with traditional styles of dress, gender roles, and makeup associated with Latinxs, and yet presented as having the qualities to perfectly fulfill the white-passing and ethnically ambiguous traits typical of idealized mainstream Latinx appearances. I suggest that the series

demonstrates Elena's negotiation of the tension between the cultural ideals of beauty and the series' depiction of her as a lesbian who is not hyperfeminine as a means of critiquing the limits of Latinx beauty ideals. While the series shows Elena's attempts to take on the traditional styles of dress, gender roles, and makeup, it demonstrates that it is not Elena's desire to be the kind of girl who embodies traditional Latinx beauty ideals.

The series presents Elena attempting to embrace exaggerated (for her) Latinx beauty standards. However, the series portrays Elena's discomfort with the standards and eventually, she rejects Latinx femininity. The episode "Bobos and Mamas" (Mann & Fryman, 2017a) begins with Elena in her typical attire: an unbuttoned and untucked Catholic school uniform shirt, disheveled hair, and no makeup. At this point, Elena's appearance aligns her with mainstream media depictions of makeup-less lesbians or lesbians who are not particularly feminine (Caisullo, 2001; Inness, 1997). Here, Elena maintains her preference in terms of her appearance and her identity. Later in the episode, when Elena is having trouble getting people to pay attention to her conservation project at school, Lydia suggests that if she wears makeup, Elena will "look presentable and then maybe the people in school will listen to your [her] garbage ideas" (Mann et al., 2017a). Elena agrees to allow Lydia to give her a makeover, navigating the balance between her goal of getting people to pay attention to her conservation project, and the beauty ideals of her culture. In attempts to embody the "Latin look," her grandmother has mastered, Elena trades the messy hair, bare face, and untucked uniform shirt for neatly parted hair and a tucked in uniform shirt. Elena removes her glasses, lines her eyes with eyeliner, and puts on lipstick. Television representations of Latina/x characters often rely on the "Latin look" to cue the audience in to a character's Latina/x identity. Latina/x/o cultural models of beauty are determined by "how close a person's physical characteristics are to a particularly

Latino ideal of ‘whiteness’” which works within the logic of a refined appearance (Llorens, 2013, p. 552). In other words, within the “Latino ideal of ‘whiteness’” beauty stems from phenotypic traits indicative of “refinement” such as a light skin tone, a small nose, a well-proportioned body, and straight hair, and altering undesirable traits such as curly hair or a wide nose (Llorens, 2013, p. 552). Elena’s makeover enhances her conventional Latinx appearance. For example, the makeover emphasizes the way her straight dark hair, now out of the messy bun, frames her face, the way her dark eyes are made more visible with the removal of her glasses and the addition of eyeliner. Through this makeover, Elena becomes a more palatable Latinx character, embodying a “refined” appearance through her now styled hair, her makeup, and her tucked in shirt, (del Río & Moran, 2019; Llorens, 2013).

Following the makeover, Elena fulfills a more refined Latinx appearance, and, importantly, she has light skin. The makeover further marks her as white-passing and ambiguously ethnic. Elena is shown realizing for the first time that she passes as white and the privilege this affords her in “The Turn” (Calderón Kellett et al., 2018). She becomes upset about her light skin, pouting and saying, “This is terrible! I can’t be passing! I’m a proud Latinx!... I mean who even decides what Latinx looks like? I look Latinx!” (Calderón Kellett et al., 2018). To which Penelope responds, “Of course you do! You’re beautiful! I always thought you looked like Anne Hathaway” (Calderón Kellett et al., 2018). Penelope’s response, comparing Elena to American actress Anne Hathaway, highlights Elena’s white-passing appearance as well as her inherent beauty. The comparison emphasizes clear similarities between Hathaway’s light skin, dark hair, and dark eyes and Elena’s appearance. Furthermore, this comparison further aligns Elena with an ideally white-passing Latinx appearance. Elena’s rejection of her “refinement” or makeover speaks to a particularly privileged Latinx experience in that she has the option to

oppose most of the accoutrements associated with Latinx standards of beauty. This kind of thinking suggests that because Elena is already white-passing, already conventionally attractive, she can opt not to wear makeup or emphasize her traits and that decision will not make her any less attractive. Elena's frustration lends a comedic and lightness to the homogenization of Latina/x characters in mainstream media (Molina-Guzmán, 2018). Viewers are invited to join Elena's family in poking fun at how unusual it is for her to be embracing a "Latin look" through makeup and neat ways of dressing. This invitation to ridicule Elena's makeover is noteworthy because it breaks with mainstream media conventions about makeovers. In U.S. media, makeovers are usually used to show confidence-building, to reveal a more desirable identity than the one on the surface, and to make characters more popular after the fact (Hersey, 2007). However, the makeover does almost the opposite of this for Elena. When Elena sees her family after the makeover, Lydia whips out her cellphone to take a picture of Elena and exclaims, "Wonderful news! Elena can be in the Christmas card this year" and Penelope, accompanied by a laugh track, says, "It looks nice, you just look different. What is this? Wear-your-grandma-to-work day?" (Mann et al., 2017a). While her culture's beauty ideals might work well for her grandmother, Elena is uncomfortable abiding by these standards. Here, the series positions Elena's preferences and beliefs in opposition to the defined limits of Latinx beauty standards. Although the series depicts her new appearance as more desirable to her family, it does not build confidence for Elena. Elena's discomfort with these expectations of Latinx beauty is demonstrated through facial expressions and body language: she never fully smiles at her family's comments, she is mostly silent and shifts her weight between her feet, her facial expression is pained. Additionally, she never actually sits down to have breakfast and keeps her hands slightly clenched and shoulders tensed. By making viewers privy to her family's

comments and jokes and placing the laugh track over Penelope's dialogue, the series discourages viewers from empathizing with Elena despite her discomfort and instead invites the audience to join in making fun of Elena. This is significant because it implies that only certain Latinx characters can and should attempt to embrace a Latinx beauty ideal through their hair, makeup, and clothing, and Elena is not one of them. In this scene the laugh track tells the audience that the joke here is Elena's attempt to embrace Latinx beauty standards. Even as the series presents her with the perfect qualities to fulfill an ideal of feminine Latinx beauty, she is uncomfortable with this appearance. As a result, the series cues the audience to laugh at Elena's attempt to embrace the Latinx beauty ideal and to note how her appearance resembles the conventional "Latin look" her grandmother embraces. The laugh track and the joke serve to other Elena, or to mark her as different from her grandmother who frequently embraces Latinx beauty ideals in terms of makeup. Instead, Elena expresses that she feels more comfortable, powerful, and beautiful without makeup and excessive jewelry. Doing so, the series critiques the notion that beauty must be achieved through makeup, jewelry, and an overall neat appearance.

Although she has the physical means to fully embody them, for Elena, the beauty standards imposed upon her are restrictive and uncomfortable. Later the series demonstrates how Elena negotiates her position between the beauty dictates of her culture and her personal beliefs and preferences. For instance, in the episode mentioned above, after Elena has removed her makeup, Lydia encourages her to try it again. Beaming, Lydia enthusiastically says to Elena that when Elena was wearing makeup, Lydia saw "what you [Elena] could be. The granddaughter I have always wanted" (Mann et al., 2017a). Lydia's dialogue suggests that conforming to Latinx standards of beauty made Elena an ideal, perfect, desirable granddaughter, but that without makeup, Elena is undesirable, not good enough. The interaction between Elena and Lydia

implies that Lydia privileges beauty and makeup, deeming outward beauty the thing that makes Elena worthy. In response, Elena pauses, looks away, and then, with a hurt and angry expression on her face, Elena voices her feelings about beauty ideals to Lydia, “You know, you use makeup like armor because it makes you comfortable. Well, this is how I feel comfortable. I like the way I am, even if you don’t” (Mann et al., 2017a). In other words, while Lydia aligns with traditional Latinx beauty standards through her makeup and put-together appearance, Elena does not want to embrace beauty in that way. Here, the series lodges a critique about the expectations of Latinx beauty in mainstream media. Whereas earlier, the series encouraged viewers to ridicule Elena for even attempting to wear makeup and adopt a more refined Latinx appearance, here the dialogue coupled with the pain and anger in Elena’s facial expression cues the audience to sympathize with her. Through this interaction, the series suggests that an appearance without makeup or jewelry can still be beautiful. Despite rejecting the accoutrements of Latinx beauty, Elena is still an attractive white-passing Latinx woman by all mainstream standards. The audience is cued in to sympathize with Elena and understand that she is not inadequate without makeup despite what her grandmother thinks. Ultimately, *ODAAT* presents Elena always already physically fitting the conventional “Latin look” through her white-passing appearance, dark hair, and dark eyes, even as it shows her failing to feel comfortable and natural wearing makeup.

Cultural Stigma Around Mental Health

Even though quinceañeras and beauty standards are quite different from mental health, I note a common thread between how the series depicts Elena moving through these situations and how Penelope navigates the tension between the Latina/x cultural stigma toward mental health treatment and her need for support. Throughout the series, Penelope struggles with balancing her cultural stigmas about mental health, and her need for therapy and medication which *ODAAT*

portrays as “Americanized” forms of treatment. The series constructs therapy and medication as distinctly “American,” contrasting them with the Latina cultural beliefs that encourage strength and overcoming without support. I suggest that through Penelope’s negotiation of her mental health, the series portrays traditional Latina cultural beliefs as negative and outdated.

ODAAAT’s pilot episode introduces viewers to Penelope, depicting her as nurse, a single mother, an Army veteran, and most importantly, informing viewers about her mental health issues. The episode opens with Penelope taking a man’s blood pressure and asking him questions about his health, writing notes on a clipboard. The man begins to question Penelope about a photograph of her and some friends in Army fatigues that she has on the back of her clipboard and wondering if she is single. Penelope rolls her eyes, saying that she is going to go home after work to feed her kids and that she is a single mother. We learn of Penelope’s dismissive attitude about her mental health issues when she arrives home and her landlord confronts her about throwing her antidepressants in the garbage. The camera centers Penelope looking disdainfully at the antidepressants, denying that she needs them as she throws them away again. Here, the series aligns Penelope with the strong Black woman trope that depicts women of color as strong enough to either not experience mental health issues or to overcome them without support as well as the marianismo archetype (explained below). Media scholarship about women of color with mental health issues mostly centers Black women (excluding Afro-Latinas) through the strong Black woman trope. This trope suggests that because of their supposed strength, Black women cannot and do not experience mental health issues. Media characterizes the strong Black woman as inordinately resilient, silently tolerant of unusual amounts of misery, and suppressing emotions (Beauboeuf-Lafontan, 2007; Carter & Rossi, 2019; Wallace, 1978; Wyatt, 2008). Additionally, the series aligns Penelope with the marianismo archetype for Latinas. In Latin

American gender studies, marianismo is “the expectation for Latinas to be humble and maintain harmony in relationships while emulating the attributes of the Virgin Mary— namely, being self-sacrificing, subordinate to men in the family, and being a pillar of the family and spirituality” (Terrazas-Carillo, Garcia, & Rodriguez, 2021, p. 121). Media depicts marianista characters as generous mothers who deny their needs and interests in favor of serving those of others (Villegas, Lemanski, & Valdéz, 2010). The marianista archetype constructs Latinas as self-sacrificing pillars who cultivate support, console, and offer wisdom (Harris, Velasquez, White, & Renteria, 2004). I engage both the strong Black woman trope and the marianista archetype because while conversations around media portrayals of the strong Black woman have recently begun to address mental health (Junior, 2019; Kopotsha, 2019; Walker-Barnes, 2014), conversations around marianista characters have not yet addressed this topic.

In the scene mentioned above, the camera’s gaze focuses on revealing Penelope’s attitude toward her medication through her facial expression and actions. While her landlord attempts to help Penelope by returning the antidepressants he found in the garbage, Penelope glances at them for a second saying in a monotone and unsurprised voice, “Hmm. Wonder how they got there... they’re antidepressants Dr. Berkowitz thought I might need but he doesn’t know what he’s talking about” as she forcefully throws the medication in the garbage can with a stern look on her face (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). Inviting viewers to see Penelope’s denial and rejection of the medication speaks to the notion that strong women of color should suppress their mental health issues (Harris-Perry, 2011; Beauboeuf-Lafontan, 2007) and to the cultural stigma around receiving treatment for mental health issues that pervades Latina/x/o communities. Within Latina/x/o communities, the existence of mental illness is often denied or dismissed in favor of seeking religious guidance and silencing any mental health issues to avoid bringing shame and

embarrassment to the family, leading Latinas to avoid seeking treatment (Caplan, 2019; Jimenez, Bartels, Cardenas, & Alegría, 2013; Leiva, 2018; Ramos, 2020). Latina/x/o populations view medications typically used to treat mental health as addictive and ineffective and perceives medical help as a sign of weakness (Dupont-Reyes et al., 2020). Penelope's facial expression and tone shows that she denies the need for antidepressants and rejects her identity as a woman with mental health issues. Penelope tells her landlord, "I don't need them, and I have to get them out of here because if my mom finds them it will be, 'Ay, Dios mío, she's a junkie like the Amy Winehouse'" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). As she imitates Lydia's reaction to finding out that she is taking antidepressants, Penelope gasps dramatically, puts one hand over her heart and the other on the counter for stability, feigning concern. Incorporating what Penelope suspects Lydia would say if she found out Penelope was on antidepressants, the series invites viewers to understand that Penelope's rejection of her mental health issues is rooted in the cultural stigma around mental health her mother raised her with. Penelope's confident and matter-of-fact attitude as she disposes of her antidepressants a second time demonstrates that she believes that she is stronger than her mental health issues. Here, we see how Penelope begins to negotiate her position as both a woman with mental health issues and as a Latina. Initially, she chooses to adopt the outdated stigma and cultural beliefs around mental health ingrained in her by her mother. Penelope's dialogue reveals that she and Lydia hold a stigmatized and outdated perspective of mental health and treatment. Penelope imagines that if Lydia found out she was taking antidepressants, she would characterize her as a "junkie" (an addict) and compare her to Amy Winehouse who passed away due to alcohol poisoning (Topping, 2013). Through Lydia's imagined response, *ODAAT* demonstrates the negativity of Latina cultural beliefs toward mental health and toward therapy and medication. By this I mean that what Penelope imagines Lydia

would say reveals to viewers that Latina/x/o cultural beliefs perceive medication as addictive and harmful rather than beneficial ways of treating mental health issues (Caplan, 2019; Jimenez, Bartels, Cardenas, & Alegría, 2013; Leiva, 2018; Ramos, 2020) thus discouraging Latina characters like Penelope from taking them. *ODAAT* positions outdated Latina cultural beliefs around mental health treatment as a barrier to Penelope taking her antidepressants. As Penelope confidently and matter-of-factly disposes of her antidepressants a second time, her landlord chastises her, reminding her that her doctor does care about her and gave her the antidepressants for a reason. At first, Penelope rejects both her need for the antidepressants and the idea that the doctor who prescribed them to her did so for a valid reason. The series encourages viewers to note how Penelope holds her cultural beliefs above the advice of a medical professional. However, soon the series demonstrates the price Penelope pays for adopting the outdated cultural beliefs of the older generation.

The series reemphasizes the tensions between Penelope's cultural values about mental health and her training as a nurse later in the episode when she talks to her coworker and doctor about her refusal to take her medication. As Penelope talks to her coworker and doctor, viewers learn that because she sides with her cultural beliefs, Penelope experiences symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder such as nightmares, feelings of guilt and self-blame, anxious episodes, and intense sadness. The series further presents Latina cultural beliefs around mental health as negative when, even as she experiences these intense symptoms, the series depicts Penelope continuing to reject "Americanized" forms of treatment such as medication and therapy due to her culture. A laugh track plays as she scoffs, smiles, and says to her coworker and doctor, "I mean, as a *nurse* [emphasis added], I would totally recommend it, but as a *Cuban* [emphasis added], I suffer in silence" (Calderón Kellett et al., 2017a). As she

speaks, Penelope frowns, shakes her head, and then smiles. She puts weight on words such as “nurse” and “Cuban.” *ODAAT* invites viewers to recognize how Penelope silently and resiliently suffers through her mental health issues, much like strong Black woman characters (Beauboeuf-Lafontan, 2007; Carter & Rossi, 2019; Wallace, 1978; Wyatt, 2008). At the same time, Penelope denies her needs in favor of serving and tending to the needs of her patients much like the marianista character (Villegas, Lemanski, & Valdéz, 2010). Although Penelope even admits that she suffers without therapy and medication, the series does not depict her following the “American” way because it does not align with her cultural beliefs. Penelope’s tone and the emphasis in her dialogue cues viewers in to the contrasting ideologies she holds given her identities as both a Latina and as a nurse. This contrast is significant because as a nurse, Penelope says she would recommend using medication to treat mental health. Here, her emphasis suggests that as a medical professional, she perceives antidepressants and other “Americanized” forms of support as acceptable treatment methods for mental health. Further, her dialogue demonstrates that she understands how medication serves patients. In other words, Penelope acknowledges the helpfulness of therapy and medication, the treatment that she refuses to take because of her cultural beliefs. Through Penelope’s dialogue, the series suggests that the “Americanized” way of treating mental health is better, so much better that Penelope would encourage others to engage in it. However, even as she sees the benefits of medicinal treatment, Penelope says she would “recommend it” to a patient, not that she would take the treatment herself. Her second point, that as a Cuban she suffers in silence, fully emphasizes the series’ portrayal of Latina/x/o cultural beliefs as negative and outdated. The series suggests that by following her culture’s dictates around mental health, Penelope suffers. Here, Penelope’s dialogue reminds viewers of the symptoms she experiences because of her refusal to engage with

what the series depicts as “Americanized” forms of mental health treatment. The series uses this scene to signal how negative and deeply ingrained Penelope’s cultural beliefs around mental health are. Through this scene, the series encourages viewers to remember that Penelope has an option to receive therapy and medication and yet chooses to endure her mental health issues without them. Here, her dialogue explicitly signals the suffering that is caused by following her cultural beliefs (“as a Cuban, I suffer in silence”). Her facial expression, and the tone in which she notes the contrast between her beliefs as a nurse and her beliefs as a Cuban, indicate that it should be obvious that due to her cultural beliefs she would choose to suffer in silence rather than take her antidepressants or any medication. Through Penelope’s response to her doctor and coworker, the series clearly illustrates the price Penelope pays for aligning with Latina cultural beliefs that deem mental health treatments ineffective. Penelope’s actions allow the series to further characterize her as strong and self-sacrificial due to cultural ideas. *ODAAT* portrays Penelope as a strong Latina who denies that she needs support. Characterizing Penelope in this way, the series allows its audience to understand how her cultural beliefs impact the way in which she handles her mental health issues. Eventually, as I will show below, Penelope realizes that she does need “Americanized” support. Here, the series depicts cultural stigmas around mental health as harmful and suggests that Latina women should not blindly follow the dictates of their culture, but rather, should follow more “Americanized” ideals of health by using medication and going to therapy.

Therapy as Resistance

ODAAT problematically depicts Penelope refusing treatment because of her cultural beliefs thus further emphasizing the idea that the stigma around mental health in Latina cultures is outdated and negative. *ODAAT* suggests that to attend to her mental health issues, Penelope

must abandon her negative, outdated cultural beliefs and instead, adopt “Americanized” versions of treatment through group therapy. I engage the trope of the strong Black woman here to show how, even after admitting that she needs therapy to treat her mental health, Penelope hesitates to participate. Typically, media presents strong Black woman characters as reluctant to seek therapy or, if they do choose to seek therapy, they choose not to disclose what they are going through or minimize their experiences to seem strong (Donovan & Williams, 2002). The series resists the ideal of a strong Latina woman who does not need support to deal with her mental health issues by inviting viewers into Penelope’s first women veterans group therapy session. When Penelope arrives at her first group therapy session, she avoids eye contact with the other women, a half-smile planted on her face as she listens to what the other women are discussing. She actively avoids speaking and her body language communicates her uneasiness with being in therapy. Compared to the other women who lean into the group therapy circle, exchanging stories, Penelope sits quietly with her arms and legs crossed showing her detachment from the group (Kuhnke, 2016; Pease & Pease, 2006). Penelope’s arms and legs serve as a barrier between her and the other women veterans around her and allows Penelope to avoid the discomfort of speaking up in the session. It is only after a woman encourages her and the other women lean in to hear her speak that she hides her face and says, “Sorry. I’m fighting my nature on all of this. I’m Cuban! You know, we don’t really do therapy” (Wolfe & Lewis, 2017). Penelope is visibly uncomfortable as she talks about the cultural expectation not to need support dealing with her mental health issues. Here, again, the series depicts Latina cultural beliefs around mental health treatment as negative and outdated. When Penelope says that she is fighting her nature and that Cubans “don’t really do therapy” (Wolfe & Lewis, 2017) the series highlights the problematic nature of cultural values that encouraged Penelope to silence her turmoil and to deal with her

issues without support. By this I mean that even though Penelope forgoes her culture to go to therapy at all, when she is there, she still cannot overcome the dictates of her culture that tell her to be stronger than her mental health issues. At this point, Penelope's dialogue acknowledges that her culture is outdated. The negativity of these traditional values lies in that even as Penelope takes the first step to treat her mental health issues, she believes she should be strong and is reluctant to participate because it goes against her "nature" or in other words, goes against her culture (Donovan & Williams, 2002). As she speaks her eyes shift all over the room, avoiding the faces of the other women, and she gestures wildly, putting emphasis on "fighting my nature," "Cuban," and "don't really do" therapy. *ODAAT* connects Penelope's discomfort with therapy and the need for strength to her Latina identity, encouraging viewers to once again understand that within Latina culture, the topic of mental health is taboo. Due to these cultural beliefs, the series suggests it is unusual for Penelope to attend any kind of therapy. The series allows viewers to sense the stigma Penelope negotiates and her uneasiness through her shifting eyes and refusal to meet the other women's gazes. By avoiding eye contact, Penelope's body language communicates that she is not comfortable being there and, as she covers her face, that she feels ashamed for receiving support (Kuhnke, 2016). Additionally, as she participates in the therapy session, Penelope gestures with open palms raised in an imploring position as if she is desperately and earnestly asking the women around her to understand and sympathize with her cultural dilemma. Coupled with the dialogue that directly notes how weary Penelope is about therapy, her gestures demonstrate the struggle she still has with receiving help. This depiction of Penelope's struggle to participate in therapy due to her cultural beliefs is problematic because it shows the stronghold of culture and how, even when she takes the first step toward therapy, or an "Americanized" approach to mental health, her culture is still a barrier. Therapy is not something

she should have to do per her cultural beliefs. *ODAAT* situates Penelope in a position where she clearly struggles with the cultural expectation to show strength rather than admitting her struggles. However, rather than characterizing Penelope as stubborn and resistant to therapy, the series shows Penelope battling against this common characterization when she makes the decision to attend group therapy first place and to continue attending later in the series.

The series furthers the depiction of Latina cultural stigma around mental health as negative when Penelope says that she did not tell Lydia about attending therapy. Penelope becomes serious and lowers her face when she mentions that Lydia finds it humiliating that Penelope is on antidepressants. Lydia believes Penelope should “fight the crazy” like “a good strong woman” because therapy is shameful and “for the locos” (Wolfe & Lewis, 2017). Here, the series emphasizes how Latina culture views therapy as something for people who are “loco” or crazy and not as a place for support with mental health or other issues. Within mainstream media representations of Latina/x/o families, the preference is for characters to silence feelings and issues such as mental health rather than seeking out support (Blossom, 2019; Candelario, 2018; Orozco, 2020). Through Penelope’s dialogue here, the series emphasizes that negative belief in Latina culture that the only reason one would need therapy or support for their mental health is if something is wrong with them or if they are weak. Further, by stating that Penelope should overcome her mental health issues like a “good strong woman” the series highlights forms of toxic femininity such as marianismo and the idea of the strong Black woman to suggest that Latina culture perceives women who cannot overcome mental health issues alone as weak, embarrassing, and disgraceful. Equating mental health issues with shame and weakness speaks particularly to the nature of Latina/x/o dynamics in media. According to Candelario (2018) much of the negative stigma around mental health in Latina/x/o communities ties to the collectivistic

nature of the Latina/x/o community where mental health issues do not just reflect on the individual, but the whole family. In other words, Penelope's decisions to take antidepressants and go to therapy are not just shameful for her, but they become the family's shame. The series presents Latina cultural beliefs as negative and harmful to Penelope's ability to treat her mental health issues, and implies that by discarding these beliefs, Penelope impacts her family.

Penelope's facial expressions demonstrate to viewers that the cultural standpoint on mental health treatment expressed by her mother put her in a difficult position between either receiving support or aligning herself with her culture. When Penelope mentions the embarrassment of telling her mother about the help she is receiving, the camera focuses on the counselor leading the group therapy session who sighs and looks sadly at Penelope, encouraging viewers to feel sympathy for Penelope as she attempts to navigate cultural and familial barriers to treating her mental health. Through the mention of Lydia's perception of therapy, the series allows viewers to understand the cultural and familial standards which dictate Penelope's decisions to treat her mental health and suggest that openly expressing her mental health issues is incongruent with the expectation that she should self-silence and negate her struggles (Beaubeouf-Lafontan, 2003). This once again calls back to the stigma around receiving mental health treatment that pervades Latina/x/o communities. Receiving treatment is perceived as a sign of weakness or a path to addiction and instead Penelope should be strong and overcome any such afflictions.

The series highlights the negativity of embracing Latina mental health stigmas when Penelope's mental health suffers. Penelope experiences a depressive episode after deciding she will no longer attend group therapy or use her antidepressants. The series reveals that Penelope feels that therapy and the antidepressants have served their purpose, but she now feels happy and more like herself. Penelope's decision to stop going to therapy thrills Lydia who tears up and

says, “You really are my daughter” (Badillo et al., 2018). At this point, the series reminds viewers of the beliefs about mental health treatment ingrained in Penelope by Lydia. Although earlier, viewers watch Penelope forgo her culture to seek treatment, here we see the outdated cultural perspective coming back as Penelope thinks that because her life is going well, that must mean she is cured. However, the series soon shows the deeply negative side effects of this decision. Soon after stopping therapy and medication, at the height of her depressive episode, there is a scene in which Penelope records herself expressing feelings of inadequacy, exhaustion, failure. Penelope sits or lays under blankets in her darkened room, crying and alone. Her hair is messy and her voice shakes. It is when she hears her own recording that she admits she is not handling her mental health well without her antidepressants and group therapy. Even though Penelope has previously denied that she needs support for her mental health issues, here, the series shows that she can no longer pretend that she is strong enough to overcome her mental health issues in the way her Latina cultural beliefs encourage. In other words, she cannot overcome her mental health issues without medication or therapy. She brings the recording to her landlord and seeks his guidance. In this scene, her landlord encourages her to go back on her medication, to which she exclaims with tears running down her face, “I don’t want to be on a drug for the rest of my life! I shouldn’t have to need it!” (Badillo et al., 2018b). By allowing viewers to see how, even during a breakdown, Penelope still resists her antidepressants, the series reiterates the ingrained notion that strong women of color should be capable of overcoming their mental health issues without medicinal support. Here, the series uses both Penelope’s dialogue and what we see onscreen to emphasize the negativity and outdatedness of Latina cultural beliefs around mental health. As we hear Penelope describing her feelings and then articulating the idea that she “shouldn’t have to need” medication, the series depicts her

struggling. Onscreen we see Penelope's red, tearstained face, and runny nose. We watch as Penelope sits or lays in darkness for days, surrounded by pillows and blankets; how she rejects food, refuses to go to work, and isolates herself. The series highlights the detrimental side effects of choosing to align with her cultural beliefs rather than opting for the antidepressants, the "Americanized" form of treatment. Here, the series invites viewers to recall how Penelope was feeling when she was attending therapy and taking her antidepressants (happy, more like herself) versus how she feels now that she has reverted to the dictates of her culture. The series encourages viewers to feel sympathetic toward Penelope as she negotiates the cultural expectation that she should be strong and self-silence, alongside the emotional challenges posed by her mental health issues. At the same time, though, the series calls viewers to notice how much better "Americanized" treatment was for Penelope's health.

Despite aligning with her Latina cultural beliefs about the ineffectiveness of mental health medications, the viewers see that Penelope finally comes to accept that the "American" way of treatment is the best way. In the episode mentioned above, the series invites viewers into a conversation between Penelope and Lydia following Penelope's depressive episode. Previously, the series demonstrated how the stigma Lydia holds toward mental health impacts the way Penelope copes with her mental health issues. Whether she was feeling shame about attending therapy or taking her antidepressants, the series used Penelope's dialogue to tie her perspective to her mother's beliefs, emphasizing the harmfulness of said beliefs to Penelope's health. However, after her depressive episode, Penelope actively works against the stigma ingrained in her by her cultural beliefs. With a tearstained face, Penelope confesses to mother that she will start taking her antidepressants again and go back to therapy despite the expectation that her "Cuban brain should be able to fight off the crazy like a matador in a bullfight" (Badillo

et al., 2018b). In spite of her cultural perspective about receiving support for mental health, Lydia responds that she supports Penelope. So, in the end, the “American” way is again the better more progressive way. The series highlights the cultural beliefs that influence Penelope’s perspective on the effectiveness of receiving support for her mental health, while also showing that Lydia put her beliefs aside to support her child. Up until this point, the series depicts Penelope aligning herself with her cultural beliefs and refusing to acknowledge or accept her mental health issues. However, following her depressive episode, the series shows Penelope’s shift in perspective to resist the conventional depiction that women of color must be strong and cannot experience mental health issues and instead show Penelope as a mother who comes to terms with needing antidepressants.

Closing Thoughts on Culture

Mainstream media applauds *ODAAT* for the ways in which it handles its characters’ tensions with their cultural traditions, expectations, and beliefs. For example, Anne Cohen (2019), Senior Entertainment Writer for Refinery29 calls the series’ depiction of Penelope’s way of dealing with her mental health “careful, sensitive” (para. 1) and “groundbreaking” given that it centers a Latina (para. 2). Additionally, others call Elena’s navigation of her quinceañera celebration “unique, realistic, and refreshing” (Lawler, 2017, para. 5). Throughout this chapter, I suggest that *ODAAT* positions Latina/x cultural traditions, standards, and beliefs as barriers to happiness and wellbeing. Instead, the offers the idea that modifying these practices and approaching them from unique vantage points rather than following them blindly is more suitable.

CHAPTER THREE:

CONCLUSION

This thesis conducted a close critical textual analysis of three Latina/x characters on *ODAAT* paying particular attention to the tensions between contemporary representation and conventional depictions. This project uses scholarship in feminist media studies, Latina/o media studies, studies of mental health in the media, and Black feminist media studies as a guiding framework. Within these areas, other critical scholars are doing important work on contemporary Latina/x/o representation. Their work provides a foundation for this project. Gutiérrez (2020) reminds us that to achieve visibility and power in U.S. mainstream media Latina/x/o people must often rely on homogenization and the flattening of difference to construct identity. Doing so, results in representation that ignores the nuances of the Latina/x/o community and favors media representations of white Latina/x/o people while erasing Afro-Latina/x/o people. This is not a new phenomenon. Aldama and González (2019) highlight tensions that have historically impacted representations of Latina/x/o people and continue to do so. Some of these tensions include ethnic and racial markers (i.e., exaggerated accents, food, music, etc.), tokenization, and relegation to roles as sidekicks or common and one-dimensional characterizations. Hinojos (2019) and Fernández-L'Hoeste (2017) analyze how Spanish accents racialize, gender, and exoticify Latina woman in U.S. media. Leon-Boys (2019) explores the ways *Dexter* (2006-2013) constructs Afro-Latina character Captain Maria LaGuerta within the constraints of the political, televisual, and racial climate in the U.S. Avilés-Santiago (2019) reflects upon the politics of labeling the Latina/x/o community, the cultural history of Latina/x/o representation in U.S.

media, and the complexity of modern representation. Hurtado (2017) examines the portrayal of Latinas in *Vogue* magazine in terms of sex, service, and scenery tropes. This thesis project adds to this work by examining tensions around constructions of Latina/x identity in media with a focus on *ODAAT*. I explore the representation of coming out, expressions of straight sexuality by an older Latina grandmother, the negotiation of cultural traditions, and the framing of mental health issues.

As mentioned, after four seasons, *ODAAT* was officially canceled in December 2020. For many, the cancelation felt like an egregious erasure of Latinas/xs/os at a time when anti-Latina/x/o rhetoric filled U.S. mainstream media and when many series featuring Latina/x/o people were facing cancellation. (Erazo, 2019; Gonzales, 2020). For others, the cancelation felt especially unfortunate given that the series committed to developing its characters by addressing trivialized and taboo subjects in the Latina/x/o community in a way that aligned with the evolving world (Taveras, 2021). Watching *ODAAT* was one of the first times some Latina/x/o people felt that a series centering Latina/x/o characters both resisted and played into tropes (Taveras, 2021). According to Justina Machado, the actress who plays Penelope in the series, the way *ODAAT* defined its characters by their sexuality, mental health challenges, and culture made it relatable to everyone, not just to Latina/x/o people (Romero, 2020). Therein lie some of *ODAAT*'s representational tensions: the series creates multi-dimensional Latina/x characters by engaging with some Latina/x tropes and resisting others. This calls us to ask: how does *ODAAT* depict its Latina/x characters? What tropes does the series engage? What tropes does the series resist? What does this mean?

One Day at a Time

To create its central Latina/x characters, *ODAAT* plays into tropes we have seen in mainstream media for years. Through Elena, Penelope, and Lydia *ODAAT* invites us to engage with Spanish accents and Spanglish jokes, props that signal Cuban heritage, and cultural celebrations and beliefs. In many ways, the conclusions I draw about *ODAAT* are the ones we have heard time and time again: U.S. television relies on stereotypes, tropes, and typical roles to depict Latina/x characters. However, what I add through this project is the exploration of the tensions between contemporary Latina/x representations and problematic tropes in *ODAAT* at the intersections of ethnicity, sexuality and sexual expression, culture, and mental health. Through this project, I uncover that even nuanced, contemporary representations of Latina/x people continue to engage tropes.

Chapter 1 looked at *ODAAT*'s depictions of Latinx lesbian sexuality and hypersexual older Latina sexuality. Here, I began by exploring the tensions between Elena's sexuality as a lesbian and cultural expectation of heterosexuality. I addressed how the series encouraged the audience to laugh at her awkwardness as she explored her sexuality. Additionally, I examined Elena's coming out story, arguing that the series positions positive, accepting responses of Elena's sexuality as the "correct" response and villainized characters who disapproved. I then looked at the tensions between age and sexual expression in Lydia, the grandmother's character. I suggested that although the series characterized Lydia's sexual expression as comical it was not the same. In other words, the series cues audience to laugh at Lydia's expressions because she is overtly and unexpectedly sexual, not because she is awkward. Based on this depiction, I also addressed how *ODAAT* used Lydia as a reinvention of the Latina spitfire stereotype, situating her as the sexy older Latina as opposed to a younger woman as we would usually see. The main

takeaway here is that even as we are encouraged to find both lesbian and heterosexual expressions of sexuality comical, it is an important time to study depictions of Latina/x sexuality given that we have more complex representations available onscreen.

Chapter 2 looked at how *ODAAAT* positions cultural values as harmful and strict. I argued that the series encourages Latina/x women not to blindly follow the dictates of their culture, but to partake in modified or “Americanized” forms of their cultural practices. For instance, television often depicts Latina/x characters wearing excess jewelry and makeup and having hypersexual and curvaceous bodies. However, Elena’s character actively resists these traits in favor of what is more comfortable to her, which means wearing no makeup and baggy clothing. While Elena eventually comes around to having the celebration, she resists the typical quinceañera dress and modifies the tradition. In terms of Penelope’s navigation of mental health, the series suggests that in order for Penelope to take care of her mental health issues, she must forgo her culture. In other words, Penelope must overcome the belief in Latina/x/o culture that treatments for mental health are ineffective and unnecessary. The main takeaway here is that in the end, the “American” way is the better more progressive way of navigating culture and cultural tensions.

A Changing Landscape

As of 2019, the U.S. Census Bureau reports Latina/x/o people are 18% (60.6 million) of the U.S. population (Lopez, Krogstad, & Passel, 2020). This shows growth from 2010 when Latinas/xs/os made up 16% (50.7 million) of the population (Noe-Bustamante, Lopez, & Krogstad, 2020). However, at this time in U.S. mainstream media, the number of Latina/x/o series regulars on primetime scripted broadcast television has decreased from 80 characters to 54 characters (Townsend et al., 2021). Additionally, a report by the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative

examining 500 films between 2015 and 2019 shows that only 7 out of 500 films featured representation of Latina/x/o people that was proportional with the population of Latinas/xs/os in the U.S. with 44 of 100 films in 2019 failing to represent a Latina/x/o speaking or named character at all (Smith et al., 2020). While representation is changing, there is more to be done.

In October 2020, a group of over 270 showrunners, television and film writers, and creators called the Untitled Latinx Project, put out a letter calling for systemic change in the entertainment industry regarding Latinx representation in media. The letter details the group's frustration with the "continued lack of representation in our industry, especially among the Black and Indigenous members of our community" (para. 2) and the relegation to stereotypical roles or portrayal as villains. At the time of this writing, the Untitled Latinx Project's petition for increased "Latinx representation in television, broadcast, cable, and streaming platforms through content created by Latinx writers" (Untitled Latinx Project, 2020) has more than 800 signatures. Now, the initiative lives under the hashtag #EndLatinXclusion. The Untitled Latinx Project is not the only group who has come together to call for greater Latina/x/o representation in U.S. mainstream media. In the same month, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (2020), a group dedicated to articulating and promoting issues affecting Latina/x/o people the U.S, wrote to the Comptroller General of the U.S. calling for a report on representation of Latina/x/o people in film, television and publishing industries. Their letter highlights underrepresentation of Latina/x/o people in film and television as well as the potential harm of distorted or one-dimensional representations. The caucus rejoined in January 2021 to ensure that the National Film Registry increased the number of films in the National Film Registry that center Latina/x/o experiences or highlight the talents and accomplishments of Latinas/xs/os in the industry (National Hispanic Caucus, 2021). These explicit calls for greater and broader representation and

inclusion are significant given that at this time in U.S. mainstream media Latina/x/o representation continues to grow and to change. We continue to see homogenization and pan-ethnic representation of Latinas/xs/os in media. However, as my project highlights, we are not simply in search of more representation. We are in search of nuanced, multidimensional depictions of Latina/x/o people. A quote from the Untitled Latinx project reflects these demands:

We are a diaspora from more than 20 different countries. We are more than just White Latinx and Mestizxs. We are Black and Indigenous. We are LGBTQIA. We are Undocumented. We are Disabled. We have different religious backgrounds and spiritual beliefs. We are more than our trauma. We write stories of joy, origin stories, genre stories, children's stories, and much more. We demand to be seen and heard in our entirety (para. 16).

Thus, we are called to ask what Latina/x/o representation will look like in the coming years.

Will U.S. mainstream media continue to rely on harmful tropes, and what will it mean if they do?

The Future of Latina/x/o Representation

ODAAAT explores many facets and intersections of Latina/x identity through Elena, Penelope, and Lydia. Depicting these three Latina/x characters in such a way opens an inquiry into the possibilities of Latina/x/o representation in U.S. television that extend beyond tropes and into multidimensional and well-rounded characters. Perhaps the biggest takeaway from *ODAAAT* is that although we are moving into greater and more well-rounded representation for Latina/x/o people, even these depictions engage with tropes and traits when depicting Latina/x/o characters.

In the coming years, I am hopeful that we will continue to see more nuanced depictions of Latina/x/o in mainstream media. While we have recently seen praise for television series that focus on Latina/x/o stories (for instance, *Selena: The Series* was the number one show on Netflix

in the U.S. and in 12 other countries the week it premiered (Acevedo, 2020)), as we learned with *ODAAT*, high ratings and simply depicting Latinas/xs/os on the screen is not enough to save a series.

Many mainstream representations of Latina/x/o people are shifting away from primetime and toward streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, and Disney+. This means that we create niche markets where Latina/x/o programming is segregated, but the mainstream remains white and devoid of greater and more nuanced Latina/x/o representation. Between 2020 and February 2021 (the time of writing) there are 17 Latina/x/o-centered shows that are either newly released or received a new season on Netflix alone. These series include *Invisible City* (2021-), *Control Z* (2020-), *Dark Desire* (2020-), *All for Love* (2020-), *Good Morning Veronica* (2020-), *The Great Heist* (2020-), *The Queen and the Conqueror* (2020-), *The Search* (2020-), *The Unremarkable Juanquini* (2020-), *Almost Happy* (2020-), *Kissing Game* (2020-), *Carmel* (2020-), *Unstoppable* (2020-), *Reality Z* (2020-), *El Dragon* (2020-), *Selena: The Series* (2020-), *Monarca* (2019-), and *Julie and the Phantoms* (2020). Furthermore, Martinez (2021) notes that media network Telemundo launched a YouTube commentary and news program hosted by Mexican-American actress Gabriele Fresquez called *Radar 2021*. The series addresses current events from the perspective of the Latina/x/o community. Additionally, on February 19, 2021, Argentinian director Andy Muschietti announced that he had cast Colombian actress Sasha Calle as Supergirl in the upcoming superhero comic film, *The Flash* (expected 2022). Calle will become the first Latina to star as Supergirl. As I conclude this thesis project, I am hopeful that critical scholars will continue to examine the changing landscape of Latina/x/o media representation. As more and more television series and films include Latina/x/o characters, my

hope is that we continue to study the nuances of these representations, examining their intersectional identities.

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