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# Popular Culture Portrayals of Latinos and Mental Health

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Title: Popular Culture Portrayals of Latinos and Mental Health

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## Introduction:

Research on the portrayals of Latinos and mental health allows for the conceptualization of a long-lasting social issue. This project identifies the different film and television content that erroneously depicts Latinos with mental health issues. This study takes a qualitative approach to help describe what roles Latino characters play in the media and how mental health is portrayed by such characters. We selected a purposive sample of cases where Latino roles were played by Latino actors, non-Latino actors, or actors with an "ambiguous" ethnic identity. This collaborative project poses the following research questions: We ask how are Latinos with mental health issues portrayed in popular culture?

## Objectives:

Through qualitative content analysis this project presents evidence of the dangers popular culture content poses on the perception of the Latino community. Such analysis helps confront how the media targets Latino actors to play disturbing roles that do not actually represent the Latino community; specifically, not appropriately representing the intersectionality identities within the Latino population and mental health issues . Our project can expose people to the inconsistencies the media generates.

## Methods:

Qualitative content analysis approach

Images used in this study were found using google search, IMDb (internet movie database), books that explore Latino film portrayals, and researcher knowledge in Latino portrayal in popular culture. Content comes from movies, show series (television, Netflix, Amazon).

1. Total selection of 29 popular culture content examples.
2. Images were found between Summer 2019 and Spring 2020.
3. Content was purposely selected where the Latino character manifested a mental health issue.
4. We examined our selected content for the ways in which Latino characters were portrayed with mental health issues.
5. The films and television shows selected take place in a U.S. setting.

## Results:

- A majority of roles (20) portraying Latinos and mental health were in fact played by Latino actors
- Four actors playing Latino characters were Spanish actors
- Three non-Latino actors played a Latino role
- We found three tendencies in relation to how the selected content explored mental health which general fit three macro themes trauma, violence, and emotion.

1. Latino characters exhibited anxiety and/or feelings associated with trauma: These two themes frequently appeared together in the same character. Often, the character was portrayed as not being able to recover from past trauma or being consumed by feelings of anxiety.
2. Violent tendencies: Latinos characters appeared hyper violent, remorseless, and in some case drug addicted. The mental illness or issue is used to reinforce for the audience the menacing qualities of the character.
3. Emotional: This theme was portrayed by characters' actions being driven by a lack of control, not rationale, or in anguish. These characters are seen taking medication or drug.

In most cases the films and television programs never explore the mental issues or problems of Latinos in any meaningful way. The mental health issues were assigned as the device to shape negative feelings towards a Latino character. This meant that most of the characters were not the lead character or protagonist.

## Conclusion:

While existing literature supports media usage of negative mental illness stereotypes, this study adds to how an underrepresented ethnic group such as Latinos are negatively overrepresented for media advantages. Our findings show common mental health themes and devices used in the portrayal of Latino characters. This study hopes to additionally analyze not only mental health related themes, but actual mental illnesses and disorders negatively portrayed in popular culture.

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