

GENDER AND FAMILY ROLES IN *GEORGE LOPEZ*:
A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND AUDIENCE STUDY

By

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To my family

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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GENDER AND FAMILY ROLES IN *GEORGE LOPEZ*:
A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND AUDIENCE STUDY

By

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The purpose of my study was to explore and analyze the gender and family roles encoded in a mainstream U.S. English-language television comedy, *George Lopez*; and to attempt to understand how young first-generation Mexican-American women negotiate their lived experience of traditional Mexican culture with the gender and family roles portrayed on a mainstream English-language Latino television show. My study was the first to explore how Mexican-American women negotiate *George Lopez* and whether they accepted, questioned, or resisted the dominant messages about gender/family roles and Latino culture encoded within the television text.

This study contains two-parts: it uses qualitative methods to conduct an in-depth textual analysis of the gender roles portrayed on *George Lopez*; and it uses qualitative methods to collect data from three in-depth small group interviews from a Mexican-American viewing audience. A total of 10 self-identified Mexican-American women and regular viewers of *George Lopez* participated in this study. Findings suggest that certain stereotypical Latino women's roles are indeed encoded into the text of *George Lopez*. Similarly, these stereotypical Mexican cultural

codes and women's roles also exist in the lives of this study's participants, and they influence how these women read the television text.

This study uses a feminist perspective to examine women's gender roles in a mainstream media communication. Using McKee's (2003) post-structuralist perspective of textual analysis, the first part of the study closely examines the gender and family roles of the three lead female characters in *George Lopez*. Findings suggest that two of the three lead characters fall into stereotypical portrayals of Latino women's roles, specifically highlighting the dichotomy between the saintly ideal of mother and wife and the promiscuous bad mother and hyper-sexualized attractive young Latina woman. However, one character's gender portrayal breaks this traditional mold.

The audience study portion uses cultural studies and an encoding, decoding model to analyze and interpret the data, or readings, each woman gave. Using this model, the women's readings were most often negotiated, and resistant to the image of women, and Mexican-Americans/Latinos in particular, as portrayed on *George Lopez*. However, in one respect all women agreed: in their dominant reading of one strong, modern yet traditional female character, all women showed a propensity to incorporate both the traditional Mexican ideal of women and a more mainstream interpretation of a woman's independent role in the household.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis began with a conversation I had with a good friend my first year of graduate school. I was shocked to learn that my friend had never heard or seen many songs and movies that I considered iconic for our generation. My friend, a first-generation Mexican-American woman, explained that until the time she entered high school, she was very unaware of mainstream American pop-culture. She went on to explain that as her parents are both Mexican, and had been migrant laborers, she often only watched or listened to what they did – namely, Spanish language media.

Knowing this about my friend, I began to wonder how she and others like her react to what they see presented on mainstream American television, or if they even watch it at all. This interest then led to exploratory pre-thesis interviews with seven women of a similar lived experience. I wanted to find out what television media they attend to, and why. During the approximately one-hour interviews with each woman, it became clear that they watched both English-language and Spanish-language communication, but while they watched soap operas in Spanish, in English they watched mostly comedies and reality shows. I became intrigued that they all watched comedies, and found that all women had one comedy in common – George Lopez. I found this even more interesting because though they admitted to watching mainstream American comedies, the women seemed to have a love-hate relationship with such family comedy shows as *The Simpsons* and *Malcolm in the Middle*. They explained that what they particularly disliked about these shows was how the family members behaved toward one another – citing disrespectful children and dumb fathers as turn-offs.

These interviews satisfied my intention of pointing me in the direction of this thesis research. They helped me focus on exploring how a certain group of women, young first-

generation Mexican Americans, read the gender and family roles on the Mexican-American/Latino family comedy *George Lopez*.

This thesis is a two-part qualitative study and examination of the television program *George Lopez* and how one of its audiences makes meaning from that mediated text.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Much literature exists in the realm of audience studies, women's studies and cultural studies. This work is varied, and though much of what has been done has similarities with my thesis, there are currently no studies I have found dealing with Latinas reading a specifically Latino English-language television text. Television audience studies abound. Many employ cultural studies (Ang, 1992; Morley & Brundson, 1999; Scott 2003), though they do not seek a focus on a Latino show with a Latino audience. Many focus on women (Heide, 1995; Press, 1995; Scodari, 2004) though they again have not yet studied *George Lopez*, or a Latina audience's reaction to it. Some television studies have focused on family roles (Moore, 1992), and specifically on a minority comedy show (Honeycutt, Wellman & Larson, 1997), but these again did not have a Latina audience with a distinct lived experience. Television studies exist about minorities watching minority-casted shows (Smith-Shomade, 2002), including Latinos watching Spanish-language programs (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003; Rojas, 2004), but here again the focus is not on English-language Latino shows, nor on comedies. Textual analysis studies of gender roles on English-language Latino movies also exist (Flores & Holling, 1999), but here again, the focus is on the text itself and includes no audience analysis. In fact, Flores and Holling (1999) admit in their research that for a full account of Latino roles in the movie, "a review and critique by Mexican Americans ... is necessary" (p. 346). In this thesis study, I strive to do just that: a textual analysis of the text itself, accompanied by how the audience reads it.

Useful literature to this study also includes studies on women and magazines, and specifically Latinas or minorities and magazines (Duke, 2000; Goodman, 2002; Russell, 2005; Johnson, 2000). However, besides studying another medium, much of this work focuses on body image and beauty ideals, and not on gender and family roles specifically.

To date there does not exist an audience study of a Latina audience watching a mainstream American comedy that I could find in the literature. In general, there seems to be a lack of information on how Latinos consume and interact with pop culture. As Rojas (2004) notes, “studies on audience research within the Latino community are recent phenomena” (p. 125). I hope to add to this new but growing body of literature with this thesis study. This is original research about how self-identified Mexican-American women negotiate the gender and family roles on George Lopez with their own lived experience.

First, this is a qualitative textual analysis of George Lopez. This preliminary study focuses on gender and familial roles that exist within the text. It employs McKee’s (2003) method of post-structuralist textual analysis to draw conclusions about how the characters are represented on the program. These characters and the gender/familial roles they signify are examined within the cultural context of traditional Mexican and Mexican-American cultural values.

Secondly, this is a qualitative audience study of how first-generation Latinas from a traditional Mexican background negotiate the familial values and ideas imparted upon them during their upbringing with the mediated messages of family they receive from American media. Specifically, this thesis strives to explore how young Mexican-American women decode the family and gender roles presented in a popular television family comedy show, *George Lopez*. The decoding analysis employs Hall’s (2003) encoding/decoding model and draws from both cultural studies theory and feminist perspectives.

Terminology: Latinos and Hispanics

This thesis will use the term “culture” and “cultural” quite frequently in discussions. Here it means a set of shared values and norms of a group of people with a shared background and lived experience.

This thesis deals specifically with Latinos. The term Latino is one of transculturation, describing a type of hybrid culture that takes elements of cultural heritage from both the U.S. and a Latin American country to form a distinct, third type of culture. In this sense, people with backgrounds from any of the Latin American countries that share cultural, and romance language linguistic traits (Spanish, Portuguese, French, Haitian Creole) can all be considered Latinos. The term Latino can be tricky, however, since both first generation and immigrant populations can consider themselves Latino. Since data does not often differentiate between these groups, they will all be considered Latinos. When referring specifically to a group of female Latinos, the term “Latina(s)” is most appropriate, and will be used accordingly.

The term Hispanic is also problematic. Hispanic also refers to the same basic group as Latinos. However, the term Hispanic denotes origin of a Spanish-speaking country. This would exclude people with Brazilian or Haitian backgrounds, as the primary language spoken in those countries is Portuguese and French Creole, while Hispanic includes those from Spain, most certainly not a Latin America country (Morales, 2002, p. 6). This paper specifically deals with Mexican-American women, who would most certainly be considered both Latino if following even the most restrictive definitions of these terms.

Gonzalez (2000) notes that though neither Latino nor Hispanic is totally accurate, they are both acceptable when describing such a diverse group (Gonzalez, 2000, p. XIX). Much as Gonzalez elects to use these terms interchangeably, so too will this thesis (Gonzalez, 2000, p.

XIX) when describing a person of Latin American heritage living and operating within the United States.

This study makes one further distinction in the use of the terms Mexican-American and Mexican. Gonzalez (2000) uses Mexican Americans to refer to Mexicans born and raised in the U.S., and to this I add those Mexicans who, though not born in the U.S., were raised here for the majority of their lives and consider themselves Mexican-American (Gonzalez, 2000, p. XX).

Justification: Latina Focus

Why should Latinos be of importance to academic study? Firstly, they represent a fast-growing and significant portion of the U.S. population. United States Census data shows that the demography of the United States has shifted in the past twenty years to reflect decreasing numbers of people who identify themselves as “white” and increasing numbers of people who identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic group (Ethnic Media Overview, 2004, p. 1). The most noticeable growth has been among the Hispanic population. In 1980, this group represented 6.4 percent of the U.S. population, but has today this figure has more than doubled (ibid). Latinos have historically been an important group within the United States, and due to their increasing numbers, this group has recently (since the 2000 Census) been gaining more national and business attention (Ethnic Media Overview, 2004, p. 1). According to the United States Census Bureau (2005), Latinos have become the largest minority in the country, which, with a population of 41.3 million individuals, constitutes 14 percent of the total U.S. population (“Hispanic Heritage Month,” www.census.gov, 2005). These numbers could be even larger, when one considers that some sectors of the Hispanic population are undocumented or migratory, and are not always counted in the Census. This group also has the highest birthrate and by 2050, Hispanics are estimated to account for 24 percent of the U.S. population, which means that by mid-century, one in every four Americans will be able to trace their heritage to a

Latin American country (Contreras et al., 2002, p. 5). Therefore, this ethnic minority seems worthy of increased academic study and attention

The fact that this culturally distinct group comprises such a comparatively (to other minorities) large portion of the American populace justifies their importance in academic study. Furthermore, as this study will be influenced by the British cultural studies tradition, in which the focus is often distinct cultural groups, focusing on the Latino culture seems apt.

Latinos, however, are not a homogenous group, but rather an amalgamation of people with backgrounds from varying regions of Latin America: from the island nations of Puerto Rico and Cuba to the North American country of Mexico, to Central American locales such as El Salvador and South American nations like Venezuela and Chile. Out of this large, diverse group of Latinos, I have chosen to focus on Mexican-Americans.

According to Contreras et al. (2002), Mexican-Americans represent about two-thirds of all Latinos in the U.S. (p. 6). That this group is so proportionally significant to Hispanics in general is important, but I have also chosen it due to my personal experience and ties to the Mexican-American migrant community near Tampa.

Among the studies done on Mexican-Americans and communications, my literature review found that most focus on communities located in the Southwest United States, in states such as Arizona, California and Texas. A study that makes a contribution about communities in the South and Southeast where information is lacking, in a state such as Florida, could easily add value to the existing information and literature. The possibility of regional differences is one potential value a study of a different region can offer. Florida is an important state in which to study Hispanics, since 77 percent of Latinos live in just seven states, one of which is Florida (Contreras et al., 2002, p. 5).

Research Questions

In the initial textual analysis portion of the study, my research question was “What dominant codes exist on *George Lopez* and what do they say about gender and family roles?” With an answer to the above question, I went on to the second portion of the study: an audience study of *George Lopez*. The basic research question was “How do young Mexican-American women read the family and gender roles presented on *George Lopez*?” More specifically, I wanted to know “How do these young Mexican-American women negotiate their lived experience with the family and gender roles presented on *George Lopez*?”

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of any culture provides insight into what was previously unknown, or only surmised, perhaps through associations with other cultures. Cultural studies opens doors of understanding, often providing insights that will eventually lead to better communication and positive action. This chapter serves as a literature review intended to explore topics of interest related to qualitatively studying Latina's lived experiences, and how this translates into the way in which they construct meaning from U.S. media and in turn use this meaning in their own lives.

This literature review acts as a means of grounding in the relevant literature a thesis study of how young Mexican-American women decode *George Lopez* and negotiate ideas about family and gender roles they receive from family and television. This chapter will first discuss Latino and Mexican family and cultural values as a means to give insight into the participants' lived experience; the chapter will then discuss the theoretical frameworks of cultural studies and feminist theory that informed this thesis; and finally this chapter will explore relevant literature in audience studies, television studies, women's studies and cultural studies.

Latino Family and Cultural Values

Central to understanding the results of this thesis research will be gaining insight into the lives of those women whom I interview. Much literature concerns the particular and sometimes stereotypical cultural values associated with Latin America, Latinos, and in this case, Mexicans. This section explores some of these cultural values.

Just as there is no 'typical' American, there is no 'typical' Latino. However, some generalizations have been made relating to Hispanic culture, resulting from centuries of shared traditions of language, religion, Iberian heritage, racial composition, and colonialism.

There are values, some considered somewhat mythical, which are distinctly Latino. These include *familismo*, *personalismo*, *marianismo* and *machismo* (Contreras, 2002, p. 12).

Familismo, or familism, refers to the importance of family closeness and getting along with and contributing to the well-being of the (extended) family (ibid).

According to Albert (1998), many studies indicate that all Latinos, regardless of country of origin, are “deeply committed to their families” (p. 165). *Personalismo* is a trait that places higher importance on personal goodness and getting along with others than on individual ability and material success (Contreras, 2002, p.12). *Marianismo* and *machismo* are two more archaic ideals that were a part of a more mythical, traditional Mexican and Hispanic culture. *Marianismo* refers to a woman’s role of mother, and the role of a mother as self-sacrificing. It is based upon Catholic ideals of the Virgin Mary, and assumes that women suffer for their children (ibid).

Additionally, Flores and Holling (1999) add that “within traditional Mexican culture, mothers are expected to remain in the private sphere, whereas fathers are typically held responsible for providing for the family” (p. 350). *Marianismo*, as the counterpart to *machismo*, stresses specific ideas of femininity and submissiveness, which showcases “impossible and contradictory ideals of Latin American womanhood” (Green, 1997, p. 166). *Machismo* signifies the man’s role as father, but more importantly, as head of household (Contreras, 2002). According to Green (1997), the machismo system focuses on the opposition between male and female; in it, “men are fearless, authoritarian, aggressive and promiscuous, while women are naturally submissive, dependent, quiet and devoted to the family and home” (p. 166). Candelaria (2004) notes that the word machismo has a particular connotation among Latinos, and in particular Mexicans; to this group, the word has more complex meanings and has strong ties to its origins in traditional chivalry and respected sex and gender roles.

As I found in a series of pre-interviews I conducted with young Mexican-American women in the summer of 2005, these gender roles within the family, although perhaps not as overtly present in families today, do indeed find a place in some of the gendered ideals family members hold. There is evidence that these roles may be becoming more egalitarian through as a result of migration and urbanization, which often necessitate women working outside of the home, though the ideology behind the *marianismo/machismo* ideals still remains in some part throughout the culture (Contreras et al., 2002, p. 13). Contreras (2002) reports on studies done contrasting substance abuse and opinions about higher education differences between young males and females to support the argument that these traditional roles still exist, and that the ideology of the male as breadwinner can be difficult to change.

Many of the characteristics valued and emphasized by Hispanics relate to aspects of the family structure and unit, and the unique role family plays in everyday life. These include the importance of collectivism (versus the Anglo-valued individualism), family solidarity, obligation, parental authority and family closeness (Contreras et al., 2002, p. 10). The importance and closeness of family is a reality in everyday Latino life (Albert, 1998; Contreras, 2002; Shorris, 1992). The cultural importance of the family among Latinos justifies its importance as an object of study, or at least consideration, when examining any Latino group, as I do in this thesis. In fact, Flores and Holling (1999) state that “the concept of *la familia* [the family] among Mexican Americans serves as a means through which cultural values, attitudes, and assumptions are taught” (p. 340). Additionally, Mexican Americans hold the concept of family in high regard “because of the sense of security, community, and safety that it offers” (Flores & Holling, 1999, p. 347).

As for most other cultural groups, including Anglo-Americans, family serves as the major socializing agent for Latinos. However, the socialization goals differ between these two groups in at least two ways. Firstly, the cultural norms and values among Hispanics are different from those of Anglos, who are united by a common Western European heritage. Also, Latinos quite often grow up in different ecological niches than Anglos, in both location and socioeconomic status (Contreras et al., 2002, p. 12). Contreras (2002) further states that “a growing number of social scientists have noted that the differences between the socialization goals of ethnic minority parents and those of majority White parents are rooted in their distinct cultural norms” (p. 12). One topic of interest in this thesis is how the aforementioned difference between cultures influences the way a Mexican-American would read the dominant (hegemonic) view of families as portrayed on English-language television, even if the program watched is one about Latinos.

I have chosen to study young women as my target group, as they are still in the process of, or have not yet made the transition from, their birth family to a family of their own. Capturing their attitudes and influences at this transition period is important, because it suggests what they may consider as acceptable structure and reality within a future family that they will help to create. Exploring this age group of women seeks to answer how might this influences of their upbringing may contrast or conform with mainstream American media codes, and how this all influences the way they decode *George Lopez*.

Latinos and Television

I have reviewed the importance of studying Latinos in general, and Mexican-Americans in particular, and justified the importance of the family in my study, but the chosen medium of study, television, must also be explained, especially as it relates to Hispanics.

An extensive quantitative study of Mexican-Americans and the mass media by Greenberg et al. (1983) states that Hispanics depend on and trust broadcast media more than print media (p.

80). This is due in large part to the fact that Latinos “have a stronger oral tradition” than do Anglos, resulting in the increased attention to and faith in, broadcast mediums, as well as a tendency to use television and radio as their primary sources of mediated information (ibid). Television, as perhaps the more pervasive and certainly the more seemingly content-rich of the two mediums with the added interest of visual text, seemed most appropriate for this study.

Greenberg (1983) suggests that when comparing Anglos and Hispanics, ethnicity is ‘the single most important predictor’ in time spent watching television entertainment (p.96). Other aspects of the relationship between Latinos and television are as follows: women and the less affluent watch TV longer, as do younger viewers (in comparison with older viewers), and less educated individuals (Greenberg et al., 1983, p. 96-99).

The Greenberg study, though useful, focuses more upon a uses and gratifications framework, and relies on quantitative data. Although my thesis study uses a different framework (the encoding/decoding model proposed by Hall), uses and gratifications literature is useful in that it helps to make an argument for further qualitative studies that will yield a deeper understanding.

Some of the specific functions the Greenberg study (1983) attributes to Mexican-Americans for television-watching are, among others, social extension and new perspectives, cultural learning, and diversion (p. 121). Added to these are those uses outlined in uses and gratifications theory, namely, gaining an identity, affirming moral, cultural and spiritual values, and finding models to imitate. If these are indeed the ways Mexican-Americans use television, to find models to imitate, for example, a qualitative encoding/decoding study would be quite valuable in interpreting how the way something is coded and then received by an audience is applied in their real-life situation.

Like much of the existing literature, the information for the Greenberg study is gathered from Latinos in the Southwest. These factors further show a gap in the existing information that could be filled through a qualitative in-depth examination of Mexican-Americans in another region using a more updated approach.

Theoretical Approach

Cultural Studies and the Encoding/Decoding Model

The theoretical framework for this thesis follows Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, which originated in British cultural studies. Cultural studies is a theoretical approach to communication and media studies that questions and explores the meanings present in pop culture (Heide, 1995, p. 20). It is a Marxist-inspired approach initiated by scholars that traces its roots to the Birmingham School, specifically the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, in England. This school, though it no longer exists now in name, was headed by Stuart Hall in its prime and his theoretical work serves as the backbone for this study.

Cultural studies marked a new wave of media theories in the 1950s and 1960s and a shift from a focus solely on economics and class, which had previously been typical of the Frankfurt School, to foci on additional social relationships such as race, gender and ethnicity (Kellner 1995). Cultural studies also incorporated other disciplines, and borrowed from sociology, economic and literary theory, among others (ibid).

According to Grossberg (1989), cultural studies:

Is concerned with describing & intervening in the ways 'texts' and 'discourses' (i.e., cultural practices) are produced within, inserted into, and operate in the everyday life of human beings and social formations, so as to reproduce, struggle against, and perhaps transform the existing structures of power (p. 371).

Central to cultural studies is the importance of audience studies and an embrace of subjectivity: both the inevitable subjectivity of the researcher and the subjective realities of every person that make up our lived experiences.

Much work in this field is dedicated to examining the interplay of position within the grand structures of our world. Studies are dedicated to examining cultures, subcultures, relationships between cultures, identity and how the media is involved in forming or molding these areas. As Croteau and Hoynes (2003) state when discussing cultural studies, “the distribution of social and cultural power remains significant, for it structures the discursive resources at our command, the context in which we use media, and the production of media texts” (p. 275). The field thus challenges dominant beliefs and understandings. Cultural studies is especially interested in the mass media’s role in society, and as such it is a perfect fit for a study examining how an audience negotiates the dominant messages presented on a popular television show, as this thesis intends to do.

Hall’s encoding/decoding model can be described as a “guide to a meaning-centered semiotic study of mass communication” (Nightingale, 1996, p. 22). As opposed to the more positivist-oriented media analyses of the past, which considered the flow of information from production to consumption as linear and unidirectional, Hall (1993) contended that the television communication process is instead a circuit or loop (p. 508). This circuit is comprised of ‘moments,’ which are indeed linked, but not wholly autonomous from one another. These distinct moments in the communication circuit are: production, circulation, distribution, consumption and reproduction (Hall, 1993, p. 508). The first and last stages of this loop are those that deal most directly with the processes of encoding and decoding.

Encoding

During the production stage of this circuit, messages are constructed, which later will be disseminated to, and received by, an audience. First, messages are coded into the language of a society or culture, the first step of creating a meaningful discourse.

The codes used to create a discursive message are the “fragments of ideology” of the society in which they are created and employed (Hall, 1993, p. 513). Codes are “the means by which power and ideology are made to signify in particular discourses” (ibid.) There are two levels through which codes are constructed and deconstructed: the denotative, or fixed, literal level and the more open, higher connotative level. Hall states that “any society or culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world,” and that this is done on a connotative level unique to each society or culture (ibid). These cultural codes are said to represent the hegemonic ideas or values of a society, and have the “institutional/political/ideological order imprinted on them,” which influence the perceived norm of that society’s practices and beliefs (ibid).

This hegemonic position in American society is a key factor in this study. The perception of the Hispanic-American family and gender roles within the family as codified in televisual messages is the focal point of my thesis. In this work, I explore how young women who belong to a Mexican-American community, that may or may not differ in certain aspects from mainstream American society, receive, or are influenced by, these codes that were constructed for an audience that may or may not necessarily include them. As will be examined later in this chapter, the hegemonic codes of U.S. society represent certain ideas about race and gender, for example, and I wish to extend this examination to ideas about family structure, norms and values.

Hall (1993) also discusses the appearance of naturalized codes, codes that are “so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and ... learned at so early an age, as they appear not to be constructed ... but to be naturally given” (Hall, 1993, p. 511). While these codes appear to be universal, in reality they demonstrate an aligning of production and reproduction, a sort of equivalence between encoding and decoding, and the naturalization only serves to mask “the practices of coding which are present” (ibid).

Decoding

After a television text has been coded and emerges as a meaningful discursive message, it goes through the other two stages of the circuit, circulation and distribution, before it is received by the viewer. Hall posits that a viewer’s reception of a text can be analyzed through three categories of decoding, the process in which the audience takes meaning from a coded text.

The first position from which a televisual text may be decoded is the “dominant-hegemonic position” (Hall, 1993, p. 515). In this instance of transparent communication, a viewer decodes or reads a message in the preferred way, the way it was intended to be understood during the coding process. These audience members can be in agreement with the world as portrayed through television, or simply accept it without question, not consciously realizing an acceptance or agreement exists. In this instance, there exists equivalence in the meaning in both the encoded and decoded message.

The second position of decoding is the negotiated position, a more complex reading of text than the dominant position allows. This position embodies more of a middle ground between the two more extreme positions identified by Hall. As the author explains, a negotiated reading “acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations, while ... at a more restricted ... level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule” (Hall, 1993, p. 516). On the whole, as Scott (2003) found in his study of Mormons

reading their doctrinal text(s), the negotiated reading follows the dominant position, but may make more localized or temporal changes in their interpretations (Scott, 2003, p. 325). Although negotiated readings do depart somewhat from their intended meanings, they do not depart “in terms of their overall, hegemonic crux” (Scodari, 2004, p. 42).

The final position one may take to decode a message is the oppositional reading. In this instance, a viewer understands the codes being presented within the message, on both the literal and connotative level, but rejects them, and instead constructs meaning through his own frame of reference or cultural situation. Oppositional readings represent “self-conscious disagreements with the preferred reading” (Scodari, 2004, p. 42).

The issue has been raised, however, as to whether an oppositional reading always represents resistance to the hegemonic codes of a society. For instance, a television text itself may be coded so as to challenge a hegemonic ideal. A reading in disagreement with this manner of coding would therefore be oppositional, but would actually be more likely to espouse the ideals of hegemonic codes. As an answer to this possible inconsistency among oppositional readings, Scodari (2004) has proposed adding the qualifying terms “hegemonic” or “counter hegemonic” when describing oppositional readings (p. 43). A type of decoding could then be deemed a hegemonic oppositional reading if it opposes the message of a text that is specifically coded to run contrary to the hegemonic view. However, this distinction also seems problematic in that the hegemonic position must first be defined and accepted as such before things can be classified as ‘hegemonic’ or ‘counter hegemonic.’

Hall’s model is an important contribution to understanding the way individuals construct meaning. The encoding/decoding model emphasizes, “the viewers’ class position, gender and lived experience as integral to their decoding of a particular media product” (Heide, 1995, p. 22).

As such, it is an apt model to use for this study, as young Mexican-American women will be studied, and their particular lived experience, especially that of family life, will be examined in its influence on their manner of decoding television text.

A Feminist Perspective

Feminist theory is a wide and varied body of literature. It shares some of the tenets of postmodernism and postmodern critique, and yet has areas that reach into the extremely radical and unique. As Creswell states, “in feminist research approaches, the goals are to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative” (Creswell, 1998, p. 83).

There are a variety of feminist frameworks for a researcher to choose from, but most share the same basic philosophy. Many feminist writers, when outlining or introducing what feminism is, all relate to the same basic principles of feminist scholarship and gender studies.

These principles include the idea of gender as a basic organizing rule or notion that shapes the order or conditions of one’s life. Indeed, “the questions feminists pose relate to the centrality of gender in shaping our consciousness” (Creswell, 1998, p. 83).

According to Steeves (1987), feminism critiques the way gender affects women in a world of male hegemony. Feminism promotes the idea that there is not an innate biological difference between men and women and uses this as the grounds and reason for its theoretical goals. In its most basic form, feminism strives for equality (Cirkensa, and Cuklanz, 1992). This study centers about the issue of perceived gender roles in a televisual text, and liberal feminism is closely related to the idea of equality (or inequality) that arises in discussions of gender roles and power relationships.

Joan Scott (1986) wrote one of the definitive pieces on gender as a social concept and area of study. Scott defines gender as an integral component of social relationships that is based

solely on seeming differences between the sexes. Furthermore, Scott argues that gender, as a perceived category of difference, is used as the chief way of indicating social power relationships. Keeping the goals of feminism in mind (research by women, about women and for women), as well as the basic ideas of gender (a term used to signify an apparent difference between sexes to establish and organize social relationships of power), I approached my research topic.

Creswell (1998) suggests that some of the research procedures feminists might engage in include group interviews, and self-reflexivity in both the research method and writing (p. 94). This subjectivity and self-consciousness while conducting research seems, if not a goal or requisite, then at least a reality of feminist work. My thesis study has a natural inclination towards a feminist approach, as it will examine how the audience reads the idea of gender roles portrayed and sold to them. The methodology of most feminist work, qualitative studies including group interviews, also fits nicely with the study proposed here.

Feminist theory seems to this researcher to be more of an ideological standpoint, a specific lens through which a researcher sees the world and its gendered relations. With this ideology in mind, or through this lens, the researcher then attempts to conduct studies, often employing another theoretical framework. This thesis study follows this pattern of women-focused work. Keeping in mind the goal of achieving equality and promoting women's interests, and directing the study towards women through female interviews, the study has a feminist perspective. But it will use the specific encoding/decoding model as its overall or main theoretical framework to analyze the television medium.

Media Studies

Encoding/Decoding

Much like previous work such as David Morley's (1999) classic *Nationwide* analysis, this study proposes to look beyond the content of a text – to examine how an audience decodes messages embedded in a text. Morley, himself a Birmingham School scholar, first analyzed the text of the UK broadcast news magazine program *Nationwide* to determine the preferred meanings contained in the messages (Morley, 1999). He then interviewed audience members to determine their interpretation of the messages on the program, thus examining the way they decoded the text. Morley employed focus groups to show many examples of people who took preferred, negotiated and oppositional reading of the text, and strove to make linkages between socio-economic status or ideological standpoint and how one reads a text. Morley found that groups differentiated by class, and ideology do indeed interpret the same television text in different ways. Morley's study was important in relating social position and meaning making, by interviewing people of different classes and social position; however, my study does not employ comparative analyses. Rather, I sought a more homogenous group to examine (through a decoding analysis) how these women negotiate between the gender ideas presented at home, and those presented on television. Like Morley, however, this study also conducts an examination of its chosen television program, *George Lopez*, to determine the codes (in this case gender roles) encoded within it.

A more recent study by David Scott (2003) examines how Mormon couples negotiate their church doctrine with television programs, and how they decode what they read on television using the context of these church doctrines. Scott's study narrows in on a certain culture within the larger culture of the U.S., and instead of using comparative analyses between groups it garners a more particular in-depth look at a specific culture. Scott found that among the audience

her studied, the more rigidly a couple adhered to its sub-culture (or here, church doctrine), the more likely they were to resist or take a negotiated meaning of a mainstream media television text (such as a daytime talk program). Scott's study also seeks to understand the relationship between a societal structure (the LDS church) and the media in how a cultural group makes meaning. My study aims to do the same, although using the family structure and the media as its focal points.

Women and Television

A plethora of studies exist that focus on gender issues, in this instance, about women and communications. Here I focus on those that seem most pertinent to television, gender and cultural studies.

Heide (1995), referencing Jensen, states: "television ... has become one of the primary resources that individuals rely on to help them make sense of the world and their actions in the world" (p. 1). She also denotes television as a "site of contestation," which reflects contemporary struggles over gender and family (Heide, 1995, p. 2). Following Heide, TV is a medium that is greatly influential in its connection with reality and real-life situations, and in serving as a battle-site for social meaning and issues. There is much room for analytical work that incorporates these issues.

One influential piece of work that informs my study is Andrea Press's work on the effects of gender and class among audience reception. Press (1995) studied specific television shows, such as *I Love Lucy*, *The Cosby Show* and *Who's The Boss?*, and compared the audience responses of two groups of women, divided by economic class.

Among her most important findings were that working-class women are more likely to view the middle-class status and material world represented on these TV shows as representative of the real world. This portrayal of "reality," as they deemed it to be, actually ran contrary to

their own lived experiences. Interestingly, Press (1995) found that working-class women thought shows that in truth were less idealized, more realistic portrayals of family life and individual problems and struggles, were interpreted as “unrealistic” and were rejected as unentertaining by women of this class. As opposed to personal character issues, this group of women was more susceptible to “the class-specific features of the liberal, middle-class ideology characterizing the television entertainment medium” (Press, 1995, p. 420). An interesting insight into the reception of family values portrayed on television was one regarding working-class women and the comedy *I Love Lucy*. Press (1995) found that working-class women were “disturbed by Lucy’s challenge to the orderly domestic life which might have prevailed in the absence of her comic shenanigans” (p. 424). These women were disturbed by the disruption of domestic order that they work hard to maintain (ibid). Similarly, this study explores if Mexican-American women who are children of the working class have an even greater aversion to disrupted family life due to not only a class situation, but also a background of traditional family values and respect. The “paucity of ... identification with comic television characters” among working-class women has been attributed in part by findings that “working class women believe that television is, or should be, a mirror of the world, or at least reflect the world they would like to see” or be a part of (Press, 1995, p. 423).

When the analytical lens was turned towards middle-class women, Press (1995) found that this group was more likely to identify personally with television characters and their problems, particularly those related to the family and situated in a family context. Since TV shows already portrayed the material world these women lived in and were comfortable with, they more closely identified with the characters, which they felt represented them. These women could often relate to the situation and issues programs portrayed, and could make connections between these and

their personal lived experiences. Middle-class women as a whole were found to be more susceptible to television's gender-specific features. The reception among this group to the comedy *I Love Lucy* was quite different from working class women. These women viewed Lucy as a positive character, who through her "shenanigans," broke some of the barriers of the gender mold (ibid). The "liberatory or feminist aspects" of Lucy's character were identified as "a feisty female image whose rebellion is directed specifically against her traditional role in the nuclear family" (Press, 1995, p. 424).

Press's thesis is that working class women identify more with the material world portrayed on television, and not with the characters and personal issues associated with them. This does not hold true for middle-class women, who tend to identify with exactly those personal issues that are rejected by working-class women.

Margaret Heide (1995) also devotes an entire study to the examination of women's responses to the television show *Thirtysomething*. This study is apt to my purposes not only due to its focus on gender and television, but also because it studies a particular group, some could argue sub-culture, the Baby-boomer generation. Heide (1995) specifically examines how TV frames ideas these women hold about family and gender, especially as these roles are portrayed by characters who exemplify certain stereotypes such as the stay-at-home mom, who in this instance is quite a round character with stress and unhappiness in her middle-class family life. One of Heide's (1995) stated objectives in her study is to "examine the capacity of network television to serve as a kind of cultural forum that organizes and shapes our understanding of our social selves" (p. 1).

In addition to the above studies focused on a particular television program, many authors have dedicated work to a specific genre. One such example is Smith-Shomade's (2002) work on African-American sitcoms. Many others focus on the genre of soap operas.

Smith-Shomade's (2002) work is particularly relevant to cultural studies, and consequently, the topic of my study. She posits that women in television "wear roles," that is, that society and media are conditioned to portray women in certain characteristic and even stereotypical roles. In her study, she gives the example of the "black mammy" as one of these roles (p. 28). Her thesis runs closely to that hypothesized by Hall's theory: that there are certain dominant, hegemonic codes in existence that attempt to re-enforce and regulate cultural norms as well as societal and power relations. As she explains, "television ... drives the cultural milieu it seeks to emulate and profit from ... television emits and constructs racialized, gendered, sexualized and generational tropes" (Smith-Shomade, 2002, p. 26). This viewpoint speaks volumes to the portrayal of families and gender roles that Mexican-American women might receive from English-language media, and even Latino-focused programs such as *George Lopez*. If a hegemonic view is being coded into the mediated discourse, does it represent these women? If not, what sort of image is it projecting as "normal," and does this do anything to affect desires of further acculturation? As the study participants see it, does a show depicting Latinos come embedded with the same genderized codes as those programs depicting Anglo-Americans? These are some questions raised by the issue of hegemonic codes, which this study seeks to address, questions initiated through the reading of Smith-Shomade's (2002) work.

Similar to Smith-Shomade's work is those of others who focus on gender and family roles in media, such as Honeycutt, Wellman and Larson's (1997) study of power structures within the family roles on *The Cosby Show*. Though the goal of research in this study is similar to that of

this thesis, the authors employ a highly different form of analysis – time series analysis for turn of talk -- for the televisual text, an analysis not used in the textual analysis of this thesis.

One work that has much bearing on the textual analysis portion of this thesis is Flores and Holling's (1999) study of two English-language Latino movies. The authors analyzed *The Perez Family*, about Cubans and Cuban-Americans, and *Mi Familia*, about Mexican-Americans, to explore how women are represented in gender and family roles. Of particular interest to my study is the analysis of the former movie, as it deals specifically with Mexican-Americans. The authors note that "historically, depictions of Latinas/os in the mass media have been one-dimensional and, largely, negative" (Flores & Holling, 1999, p. 340). Through their analysis, the authors find that while there still do exist stereotypical roles for women like the virgin/whore dichotomy, some women's roles break out of the private sphere. They find that though women do still play the traditional roles of wife and mother, not all are defined by these roles alone. In *Mi familia* in particular, the women character challenge the traditionally stereotypes of Mexican-American women; for instance, the daughters in the film resist the stereotypical notion of "young Mexican-American women as sexualized beings" (Flores & Holling, 1999, p. 352).

Somewhat similar is a study by Rojas (1999), in which the author explores what it means to be a Puerto Rican woman by analyzing three movies: *Do the Right Thing*, *White Men Can't Jump*, and *It Could Happen to You*. In her analysis, Rojas looks at representations of race, sexuality, power and physical appearance. Rojas (1999) and her study are of interest to the study of Latinos, but as they focus solely on the Puerto Rican woman, this study served as a guideline for how one can look at women in a media text, rather than a format for studying Mexican-American women. In examining these movies, Rojas found that very stereotypical images of Puerto Rican women as loud, eccentric, and highly sexualized were often portrayed.

Authors such as Mary Ellen Brown (2004), Christine Scodari (2004), Robyn Warhol (2003) and Carolina Acosta-Alzuru (2003), among others, have focused studies on women watching soap operas (or in Acosta-Alzuru's case, *telenovelas*, Latin America's equivalent to this television genre). Soap operas have traditionally been considered women's television, and are run during the day to appeal to housewives and stay-at-home mothers. These authors have focused on how women interpret the feminine ideals and women's roles present in these programs. The degree to which fans accept or reject these portrayals is the focus of many of these studies, as well as the question of why women watch them in the first place. In the instance of Brown's (2004) study, she examines active involvement of women soap opera viewers by analyzing their online conversations about the programs they watch, and finds that women use soap operas not just for entertainment purposes, but to create relationships by bonding, or fighting, with other women over the Internet.

Women Reading Written Text

Many important contributions have been made outside the sphere of television studies as well, such as Janice Radway's (1983) study on women reading romance novels. Radway identifies motives such as pleasure, emotional catharsis, and fantasy-seeking as reasons women read romance novels. It is indeed a form of escapism for women, but can also be thought of as empowering. She contends that through their readings of romance novels, women both resist and reinforce meanings in pop-culture.

Magazines are another important medium in which scholars are learning how girls and women read genderized ideals in a text. Goodman's (2002) study has many parallels to this thesis: the targets are Latinas, the method and technique are qualitative and employ group interviews, and the subject matter is a subjective interpretation of an ideal (Goodman uses body image instead of gender roles within the family structure). This is a comparative study of how

both Latina and Anglo women read a body ideal in magazines. Interestingly, the results show that with a different cultural background, Latinas read (and resist) the body-image ideal differently than Anglo women (Goodman, 2002), using their own cultural background as a frame of reference for how women should appear.

Another work, Duke's (2000) study about the interplay of race in the way teen girls interpret the feminine ideal, is important for many reasons. First, it examines perceptions of what magazines portray as the ideal form of femininity, an examination which can inform a study of how television portrays familial gender roles. In Duke's (2000) study, girls were interviewed to "determine how they used or ignored material in those (magazine) texts in constructing notions of beauty" (Duke, 2000, p. 368). This thesis seeks explore similar territory, substituting the previous sentence's "beauty" for "family and gender roles." My study is further illuminated by Duke's, as it is one that focuses on issues of gender and race. My study also applies similar qualitative methods. Duke uses in-depth interviews to ask questions dealing with participants' perceptions and interpretations of an ideal in a text placed before them. Although Duke's (2000) study uses a uses and gratifications theoretical framework, and the participant group is of a different age, education and ethnic demographic, the basic elements of the study are related to those of this thesis .

My study focuses on a specific television text, that of *George Lopez*, and examines the audience responses and manner of decoding of the text. The goal is to glean from the decoding how the Latina participants read gender roles on the show. In this sense, it somewhat follows the studies done by Heide (1995), Ang (1992) and Press (1995), for example, in which audience reception is studied in the context of a particular television show. Here I believe the major focus must be on the cultural group studied, and the cultural context in which they view television,

much like Scott (2003) showed in his study of television reception of Mormons. The decision to follow the work of Hall (1993) and British cultural studies, and examples of how to present work in this way (such as Scott's 2003 article) provides a framework to use during the actual analysis: the coding, interpretation and writing processes.

The Mexican-American women I chose to study are living on the hyphen that separates their Mexican and American identities. This hyphen "becomes a space, sometimes of denial, sometimes of affirmation. It is a border that both separates and links two worlds and we, with a foot on both sides, are both trapped and liberated, defined by others, yet free to define ourselves" (Flores, 1997, p. 257).

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

This is a two-part study involving both a textual analysis of the television program *George Lopez* and an audience study of how young Mexican-American women decode the program. This methodology section shall therefore encompass the procedures and methods used for both parts of the thesis.

This chapter first describes the materials and manner in which the textual analysis was conducted, and develops the post-structural method of analysis used. It then deals with the audience study portion of the thesis: it describes qualitative research in the form of in-depth, small group interviews; it details the research design; and it explains the researcher's reflexivity.

George Lopez: A Textual Analysis

This study, using textual analysis, is an examination of how *George Lopez* represents particular aspects of the world – namely that of the gendered roles within a Latino/Mexican-American family. The textual analysis methodology used here is based on Alan McKee's (2003) presentation of post-structuralist textual analysis. This text is analyzed to create an understanding of what it says about Latino families, specifically Mexican-American families, and, the gender roles within the family.

Materials

This study employed the close analysis of 10 episodes of George Lopez from the show's fourth and fifth years. The selection of these particular seasons was purely a practical one: no compiled DVD sets of the show exist. Therefore, I used self-made videotapes of new fifth season episodes and fourth-season re-runs as they appeared on the air. The selection of the 10 episodes viewed was chosen at random from those on tape, though I specifically chose five episodes from each season to get a fuller idea of the series as a whole. In their original runs, season four

broadcast a total of 24 episodes, and season five broadcast 22 total episodes. Due to timing constraints and access, I was not able to record all of these episodes. However, I did record almost thirty total episodes from the two seasons combined.

The decision to use many episodes to analyze instead of just one was based upon the desire to get as much information about each character and situation the Lopez family encounters as possible and use that wealth of information to make a fuller analysis. This decision was also in accordance with the post-structuralist textual analysis approach: not studying “the text in itself ... as a self-contained work of art” (McKee, 2003, p.74). Had the focus been on just one episode, the analysis would have shifted instead to a study of every detail of every element of the show to answer questions about gender and family. Instead, the post-structuralist approach is more concerned with studying information about a culture’s sense-making practice more generally (McKee, 2003, p. 75).

McKee (2003) suggests that a researcher pick out the parts of text that, based on their knowledge of the culture within which it is circulated, appear to be the most relevant to the question being studied (ibid). To have a thorough understanding and familiarity with the show, I viewed each of the 10 episodes three times, which allowed me to focus on different aspects and levels of the show with each viewing. During the analysis, I took into consideration costumes and props, character appearance, the dialogue both as written and spoken by the actors, and character traits and modulations such as voice tonality and facial expression.

Post-Structuralist Analysis

A post-structuralist analysis conceives that there is no one correct interpretation of any text. However, though there may be a multitude of perspectives, there is a limit or, as McKee (2003) posits, a “finite number of sense-making positions available within a given culture at a given time” (McKee, 2003, p. 19). Since this post-structuralist viewpoint recognizes that there is

no one “correct” interpretation for all people, and yet a finite number of perspectives exist within a given culture, the job of a textual analysis becomes one which finds a likely interpretation within the culture using contextual information. The reason for analyzing texts becomes to “find out what were and what are the reasonable sense-making practices of cultures: rather than just repeating our own interpretation and calling it reality” (McKee, 2003, p. 19). To do this, the researcher must be aware of the contextual situation of the text chosen for analysis. With *George Lopez*, and the thesis project as a whole, the contextual situation is a hybrid of American and Latino cultures, more specifically: the Mexican-American culture. Though the show centers on a Mexican-American man and his family, it is broadcast and received by the American mainstream culture, thus making a knowledge of both cultural contexts necessary.

As this thesis is focused on the Latino cultural and gender aspects of *George Lopez* and the decoding of a Mexican-American female audience, drawing conclusions on the show based on my knowledge of that culture’s interpretation can prove problematic, as I am not myself a member of that cultural group. However, as explained later in this chapter, I have had experience with this culture, and I also had the opportunity to conduct a combined 17 pre-thesis and thesis interviews with young Mexican-American women, and therefore feel more confident in my abilities to understand what they may see and from where they draw their experiences and conclusions about gender, family and *George Lopez*.

According to McKee (2003), an essential part to any textual analysis is context (p. 63). This study used the context of the more traditional Mexican-American family values encountered in audience interviews with Mexican-American female viewers, as well as the context of Anglo-American culture at large to make sense of *George Lopez* in a way that will produce a likely interpretation (McKee, 2003, p. 73).

Determining what is a “likely interpretation” is indeed a less-than-exact science, and correctly identifying how a culture makes sense of a certain text will never be an absolute. And although a culture’s interpretation process may be complex, it will also be at any given time within certain limits (McKee, 2003, p. 51). This is because people interpreting any text will draw upon relevant knowledge about things like television, genre, current events and their own cultural capital to make their meaning.

What I have set forth to do in the textual analysis is analyze *George Lopez* using sense-making practices that take into account Mexican-American cultural and familial values, as well as knowledge of the sitcom as a genre and the historical importance and significance of gender in Anglo-American and Latino cultures.

Decoding *George Lopez*: An Audience Study

The methods employed in this research undertaking consist of many steps. First, participants are asked to watch the television show, while I observe their behaviors, actions, interactions in the group, and home environment. Secondly, the participants are asked to participate in small group and individual interviews, which will be recorded by hand, and by both electronic audio and visual (video) recorders. The data collected will then be transcribed into electronic (typed) notes and scripts. After this stage, the data will undergo first open, then axial coding, after which the data will be ready for final analysis, summary and conclusions.

Participant Selection

This work specifically studies Mexican-Americans based on their large representation within the Latino cultural group, of which they comprise about two-thirds (Contreras et al., 2002, p. 6). I also have chosen this group due to personal connection with people from a Mexican-American community close to my home near Tampa.

Participants for this study are young Mexican-American women from the ages of 16 to 25. These women are all of relatively the same cultural and socio-economic class – mostly first generation Mexican-Americans whose parents emigrated to the U.S. from Mexico and worked for some time as migrant workers or laborers. This distinction is used to better understand a certain group of women, who may share similar upbringings. A more detailed look at each participant’s background is available in the findings chapter of this thesis.

This study is based on in-depth interviews conducted with 10 total participants in small groups (when possible)¹. Three total interviews were conducted: the first with one participant; the second with six participants and the third with three participants.

In the summer of 2005, I conducted seven in-depth pre-interviews with young Mexican-American women about how they interpreted different aspects of U.S. television, in order to better focus the eventual thesis topic. I chose to begin work for this study with three of these same women, as a rapport has already been established and they felt comfortable answering my questions.

Research Design

Like the pre-thesis interviews, I used snowball selection, a procedure in which interview participants recommend others to the researcher. I was introduced to two of the women in the final thesis study through a mutual friend, and in part used snowballing to branch out from these women to include others. I also contacted participants through references by others in the community. The decision not to include in the final audience study all those whom I’d met in

¹ Initially, I defined “small group” interviews as interviews ideally containing two to four participants. However, the participant in interview one knew of no others I could interview with her. Similarly, interview two proved problematic. I anticipated four participants, and upon arriving at the designated participant’s home I found that two additional women showed up. This begs the question: when does an interview become a focus group? In this case, I call interview two a group interview rather than a focus group, in a focus group six people is still the smallest amount recommended.

pre-interviews was due to one qualification of this research: that all participants be regular viewers of *George Lopez*. This pre-requisite ensured that all participants would be familiar enough with the show to answer questions pertaining to more than just the episode viewed together.

Unlike many other audience studies (Morley, 1999; Radway, 1995) which seek to investigate socio-economic differences among participants and the way they decode a text, I designed this study around a group of people that have very much in common (shared language, socioeconomic status, gender, location age and culture). In doing so, the attempt is not to see how different people decode a mainstream text meant for a generic audience, but rather to see how women of a specific group decode aspects of a show that on the surface seems to be representative of their cultural group. In this way, the goal is to better understand how the young women of this study negotiate their ideas of family and gender roles between what they are taught within the familial structure, and what they view on television.

Watching TV

The participants were first asked to watch an episode of *George Lopez*, a family television sitcom portraying everyday situations in the lives of a Mexican-American family. The way(s) in which the participants decode this episode were later discussed during the in-depth interviews.

All research was conducted in a participant's home. As a form of compensation and appreciation for their participation in the proposed study, I provided the participants with food and beverages at each interview.

Participant observation

Observation is a technique borrowed from ethnographic inquiry that provides the researcher with the opportunity to study people in real-life situations. This data collection method is intended in large part to better inform the interviewing process, and arrive at a more

knowledgeable understanding of how the participants engage in television viewing. This data collection technique has many advantages for this study.

Firstly, observation allows one to take note of things like interruptions in the viewing process, verbal or emotional reactions to the show and group interaction during the show that could prove important in understanding the participants' particular decodings. Secondly, observations during the viewing process may also better inform the questioning process for the researcher. Lastly, being present during the viewing may acclimate the participants to a researcher's presence in their homes more readily. However, I did not seek to be an outside observer. Rather, in this research, I employ participant observation, meaning that while I take note of the surroundings and reactions to the television program, I am not exclusive to it – I do not necessarily remain silent, nor do I shun interaction with the participants while they are being studied. This participant observer position also helps to alleviate feelings of viewing in a sterile environment; it is meant to compliment the goal of creating a natural setting for the research.

The first stage of data collection in this study lies in the researcher's observation of the environment in which the participants are watching the episode of the television show *George Lopez*. Also observed are the participants' actions and apparent behavior and emotions while watching the episode. As two of the interviews took place in small groups (3-6 people), the interaction between participants while watching television is observed as well. This data was manually recorded in the form of written notes.

As stated above, the research was conducted in participants' homes to better create and maintain a comfortable, natural environment in which to observe the study subjects and conduct the interviews. Not only is this approach in a natural setting used for practical reasons, such as making respondents comfortable, it is also argued for as a prime method for gaining insight in to

participants' lives, an insight that enriches the data collected. According to Machin (2002), social psychologists of the early 1990s considered it a mistake to study humans in artificial settings (p. 85). These psychologists argued for the "use of ethnography as a method for studying situated action as it happens naturally" (ibid).

Although this study does not attempt an ethnographic inquiry into its participant's lives, it does employ the technique of observation to generate greater understanding. As Tulloch (2000) notes, McKinley put much importance on maintaining a natural setting for her *Beverly Hills, 90210* fan study. In addition to striving for naturalness in the viewing situation, she studied already-existing friendship groups, whom would be more likely to watch and discuss television together, a distinction I also employ in this study (Tulloch, 2000, p. 206).

In-depth interviews

The purpose of this thesis is to study young Mexican-American women's lived experience and how this translates into the way in which they construct meaning from a certain American mediated text and in turn use this meaning in their own lives. The focal point of the thesis lies in the way in which Mexican-American women decode a particular U.S. TV family sitcom, *George Lopez*, about a Mexican-American family. This show is specifically decoded against the backdrop of participants' perceptions of family and of gender roles within families. In addition to conducting in-depth interviews to determine how these women make meaning from *George Lopez*, the interview also asked questions regarding the way in which young Mexican-American women perceive ideas on family, family structure, and gender roles, as learned from their own upbringing. Having this contextual information is necessary to accurately interpret how participants attend to the text.

As these are young women, during the interview they were asked questions about their ideals of their own current or future family relationship structure (one in which they play the role

of wife/girlfriend/mother). A common vein of gender relationships runs through all of the questioning. Thus, one of the dynamics within the family structure my thesis was most keen to explore is gender roles: primarily in the *George Lopez* program but additionally in the participant's current and future families.

Following the television show viewing, the participants were asked to participate in qualitative small group interviews conducted by the researcher. Interviews are "unique in allowing researchers to get inside the minds of people and to gain access to material of considerable importance" (Berger, 2000, p. 125). Thus, I chose to use this technique to gather the majority of research data. Questions regarding the subjects' ideas about family, American television, and specifically the decoding of *George Lopez* were the primary topics discussed during the interviews. A list of prepared questions began the process, allowing for changes in topical direction when necessary. These small group interviews were repeated among different groups and common themes began to emerge that were the same in each group. As George Gaskell (2000) notes, at this "point of meaning saturation," an evaluation of the researcher's understanding can be made, which when corroborated with the evidence, calls for an end to the interview data collection process (p. 43).

The type of research interview employed in this study is the semi-structured interview. Following this approach, the researcher has a written list of questions to ask but strives to maintain a casual quality in the questioning and interaction (Berger, 2000, 112). The role of the researcher is to act as leader in a free-form discussion.

Group interviews

The method of small group interviews was chosen for practical and methodological reasons. The area in which the young women live is rural and not concentrated in one specific town, nor is a system of public transportation in place in this area. Therefore, the women would

have to commute, possibly for relatively long distances with their own mode of transportation, had a focus group technique such as the one Morley (1999) used been chosen.

An advantage of qualitative research and a requisite of ethnographic-type techniques is that they take place in a natural setting. For a study on television, the most natural setting is a participant's home, into which I could not politely invite other participants unknown to the homeowner. Thus, I initially chose to do in-depth individual interviews in participant's homes. However, I felt I could still reap some benefits normally associated with the focus group technique by striving for small group interviews when possible, since original participants recommended one or two other friends or siblings whom I could also interview. In this way, I was able to combine the advantages of both focus groups and in-depth interviews as a means of gathering data. Only those aspects of focus group research that pertain to this study are discussed below.

Group interviews allow people to discuss issues abstracted from their social identities, and through the process of debate and discussion with others, they may "continually reposition themselves in relation to the circulation of discourses" (Gunter, 2000, p. 47). The group interview affords the opportunity to not hear only more than one person's worldview on a matter, but also the way they express it in a conversation with others, and perhaps build off of one another's comments and ideas. This latter possibility has the exciting potential to take conversations about meaning making into areas previously unforeseen by the researcher. As Gaskell (2000) explains, "people in groups are more willing to entertain novel ideas, and to explore their implications," as well as take greater risks in holding extreme positions (p. 46). A group conversation also allows for data collection in the area of things unsaid, in recorded behaviors between group members while the interview takes place.

Group interviewing, in the manner of focus groups, have been commonly used in audience studies and cultural studies. One often-cited work in this vein is that of David Morley (1999) and the *Nationwide* audience study of the early 1980s, a study mentioned in chapter two. Morley used focus groups of people from a variety of ideological standpoints, and ethnic, gender and economic backgrounds to explore relationships in the way different people decoded the UK television news program *Nationwide* (Morley, 1999). In Morley's study, the audience is "seen ... as individuals located in concrete social groups who construct meaningful social action partly through the discursive interrogation of texts" (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 4). In this context, I used small group interviews to likewise examine "the everyday ways in which audiences make sense out of television" (ibid). Whereas Morley strove to include participants from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds in his study, others have focused their studies on a particular group of people.

E. Graham McKinley also used in-depth interviews in her 1997 study of *Beverly Hills, 90210* female college student fans. Methodologically much like my own study, McKinley visited female students in their dorms rooms to observe them watch the show and later interview them about how they reacted to and interacted with various characters and themes in the show (Tulloch, 2000, p. 206).

As mentioned in chapter two, a study that closely resembles my own in many respects is David Scott's (2003) study of how Mormon couples discursively negotiate media, popular culture, and religious doctrine. Both studies share a similar methodological approach. Scott chose six married couples (12 participants in total), of which five couples were also chosen through snowball sampling. Much like Scott (2003), I use these small group interviews of people from extremely similar cultural and perhaps ideological backgrounds, which for me also proved

to “have more moments of shared discourse” between familial/cultural values and the chosen text (Scott, 2003, p. 321). Also like Scott, I am using a semi-structured interview approach, or “conversation with purpose” as he calls it: I seek to let conversation flow freely, allowing for the unexpected, but I have a list of questions I would like to see answered as well (ibid).

Some of the advantages of this research technique are that they allow for follow-up questioning, are not necessarily limited to time, and can cover previously unspecified, but potentially important areas of inquiry (Berger, 1998, p. 57). This last advantage, of obtaining unexpected information, can lead to important insights about the participant’s personal and family lives that lead to a clearer understanding of how they make meaning from the chosen text. Also advantageous to this technique is the ability to adapt with changes that may arise during the interview process (ibid).

Likewise, in-depth interviewing carries with it certain disadvantages, such as the amount of data such a lengthy collection method can produce. Also to be considered is the possibility that study participants may not always be able to give meaningful answers, to articulate the reason they read the text in a certain way, or why they feel as they do about a particular topic (Berger, 1998, p. 58).

Data recording

The data, or qualitative answers, collected during the in-depth interviews were recorded in three ways: through manual notes written by the principal investigator, through the use of a tape recorder, and through visual video recording. The latter two data collection methods are used to ensure no data is lost, and to help eliminate confusion of voice or identity during the transcription process.

Transcription process

After data collection was completed, typed transcripts were made of all records. These transcripts were made by the principal investigator, and outsourced to two paid transcription services; the interviewer transcribed one interview herself. This process, unfortunately, is one of the disadvantages of interviewing. Not only is creating the transcript a time-consuming process, the amounts of data a long interview can generate may be overwhelming. The process may also be expensive if the researcher decides to forgo self-transcription in favor of using a paid transcription service, as I did here.

Coding

According to Arthur Berger (2000), coding is “an attempt by the researcher to see if any common themes and topics inform the interview transcripts” (p. 122). Once these common themes are recognized, a researcher will then be able to determine what is important to the informants, and what information is secondary (ibid).

This thesis follows the grounded theory, or constant-comparative method approach for coding data, in which the researcher constantly identifies new categories and compares them to pre-existing ones, all while continuing to analyze or collect new data (Keyton, 2006, p. 294). After the data from the interviews is collected, it is first coded using open, or unrestricted, coding. During this process information is open to all possibilities of categories, and the researcher remains unconcerned with how the information all fits together. It is in the second phase, in axial coding, that the data is transformed into categories of information that are linked together in a meaningful way (Keyton, 2006, p. 295). In this final coding stage data is further broken down into specific groups, and the relationships between groups and overarching themes are finally determined.

Analysis

The analysis of the data is made using Stuart Hall's (1993) "encoding/decoding" model, noted in the literature review chapter. The purpose of these coding methods is to determine groupings of responses and break them down into Hall's three main categories of decoded text: the preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings.

Reflexivity

As Ien Ang (1992) noted, "any study always bears the traces of the subjectivity of the researcher" (Ang, 1992, p. 12). Indeed, qualitative research embraces the subjectivity of the research and researcher and does not attempt to deny nor avoid its presence. However, it is the job of the researcher to be forthcoming with her subjective nature and any attitudes, experiences or opinions that either hinder or help her understanding throughout the research process.

Keeping this in mind, I must devote some time to self-examination since this study aims to describe the way a group I am not part of makes meaning. The study's participants share a different background than my own. As Mexican-American women specifically, and Latinas generally, they are part of a minority group within the United States, a group to which I cannot claim to belong.

Although through observation and interviewing I play the role of the outsider, I can claim certain aspects of familiarity with the participants. Apart from an education that focused on the Spanish language, Latin American and Latino Studies, I can claim some cultural knowledge of the group. Although we differ in which language was learned first, both the participants and I speak both English and Spanish. I am also to some degree familiar with the cultural norms of Mexican-Americans in this area of Florida. One of my closest friends, whom I have known and spent much time with (years of it as young adults) for twelve years, introduced me to two of the participants, whom she knows well. Growing up, I attended many dances, parties, and soccer

games within the Mexican-American community near Tampa. While none of this garners me total inclusion into the Mexican-American community, I am through these experiences perhaps more familiar with it than the lay outsider.

As for the television show selected, I am neither a fan nor a regular viewer, and therefore do not knowingly hold any preconceived notions about the gender roles of the show's characters, the subject I am most keen to glean from the participants' decodings.

According to Mauthner and Doucet (2003), reflexivity is important to consider during the data analysis portion of a study, for "the interpretation of data is a reflexive exercise through which meanings are made rather than found" (p. 414).

However, the research data is not the only subject at issue during this phase; the methodology of a study must also be examined. The researcher, the data collected and the method used to connect it are all "reflexively interdependent and interconnected" (ibid). In addition to my own background and intellectual tendencies and the backgrounds of the study participants, I must also consider issues such as the weight of importance a qualitative study gives to the voices of those studied. The methods used in research are not only born out of the ideals and assumptions of those who created the methods, they also infused with the assumptions of the researchers who use them (p. 415). In this way, I knowingly or unknowingly will impart certain aspects of my own ideology in not only how I interpret data, but in how I select the pieces of data to interpret and how I present it on paper.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Since the 1950s, The United States has had a rich tradition in television comedies and situation comedies, television's most popular form (Pierson, 2005, p. 45). *George Lopez*, the hit ABC sitcom about a Latino family living in Los Angeles, follows in this tradition, with distinct differences: as a sitcom about a Latino family, it has the ability to pull from and the opportunity to cater to at least two distinct cultural groups: mainstream, Anglo-American culture and the ever-growing Latino population and its cultural idiosyncrasies. As the pervasive nature of television has grown, so too has the commentary about its power and ability to shape mainstream societal values (Tueth, 2005, p.28). If television has the power to shape mainstream values, what are those values it is promoting? Likewise, if television is indeed the primary definer of cultural patterns in the U.S., to which culture does it define patterns, and from which culture does it draw these definitions?

In considering these questions, *George Lopez* becomes an interesting media text for analysis, as it exists within a mainstream television station and schedule lineup, delivered to a mainstream audience, and yet its focus is that of a Latino family – two cultural groups which are not necessarily the same. Not only are the 'mainstream' and Latino audiences and cultures not the same, they also each serve as a different resource from which to draw material for the show.

This chapter attempts to answer these questions in part as they regard the concepts of family and female gender roles. It uses a post-structuralist textual analysis to make a likely interpretation of what it means to be a family and a woman on *George Lopez*. After examining in brief the nature of the sitcom and a summary of *George Lopez*, a textual analysis explores what values Angie, Carmen and Benny, the show's three lead female characters, present to society,

and how these values compare to mainstream and traditional Latino, and in particular Mexican-American, culture.

The Sitcom

The term “sitcom” is actually an abbreviated form of the words “situation comedy.” These two terms did not enter into the public lexicon until after the genre made the move from radio to television in the 1950s and came to describe shows like the widely popular *I Love Lucy*, which heralded a new wave of programming (Marc, 2005, p. 16). In the beginning of the post-war television comedy era, the most successful comedy shows were those that moved from radio to television, and focused heavily on dialectic humor of urban immigrant families (*Amos ‘n Andy*, *The Goldbergs*). These ethnic and racial sitcoms, however, soon gave way to shows that centered on white, middle-class suburban families (*Donna Reed Show*, *Father Knows Best*). In the new age of sitcoms, “the focus on hardship or difference or the conflicts that existed between husbands and wives or parents and children” that typified these earlier shows was gone (Kutulas, 2005, p. 51).. Instead, the emerging dynamic of the sitcom genre exhibited television families that “respected authority, modeled conformity, and followed social rules” (Kutulas, 2005, p. 51). From this point in time and through the next three decades, the sitcom family underwent many evolutions that paralleled the life changes of the baby boomer generation. This new age of baby-boomer-oriented shows included shows which began to celebrate the youth culture, in which parental authority began to be questioned and young adults found independence; and shows which began to portray the generational and socio-political divide existing in the U.S. (*All in the Family*) (Kutulas, 2005, p. 53).

The term situation comedy is used to describe this genre of television because, typically, each show revolves around a situation that arises at the beginning of each episode and must be resolved at the end (Linder, 2005, p. 68). According to Marc (2005), a situation comedy may

also be described as a “comic drama” or “narrative comedy” (p.16). The following section is a brief synopsis of *George Lopez* and how it operates within the genre of situation comedy.

George Lopez

Though it often seemed under the threat of cancellation, *George Lopez* was a popular show in ABC’s situation comedy category (Albiniak & McClellan, 2002). Despite the fact that access to a full account of *George Lopez* viewing audience demographic information was beyond my means as a researcher, some demographic rating information I obtained speaks to the popularity of the show. For instance, in its second-season premiere in the fall of 2002, *George Lopez* took second in households among all networks during the 8:30pm Wednesday night slot (Albiniak & McClellan, 2002,). It seems that *George Lopez* appeals to a large range of ages for which data is available. On that premiere night, *George Lopez* came in first out of all broadcast networks for the following viewing audiences: 18 to 49-year-olds, 18 to 34-year-olds, and 25to 54 –year-olds (ibid). Though these statistics speak to the age of George Lopez viewers, they do not give a in-depth look at the program’s audience. Neilson Media Research reported in September 2004 that George Lopez had an average audience of 1.2 million viewers in 17 markets (Irwin, 2004). However, The Nation Latino Media Council’s ratings survey during the same period in just four of these same markets (Miami, Los Angeles, New York and San Antonio) showed that almost 900,000 Hispanic regularly watch *George Lopez* (ibid). The discrepancy in these statistics alludes to the idea that perhaps Nielsen is not capturing or in some other way under-representing the Latino audience of *George Lopez* viewers. It also suggests that the Hispanic audience of George Lopez, as a percentage of its viewers, can be quite a significant portion.

George Lopez takes place in Los Angeles, and focuses on a cast of characters that includes a father, mother, two children (one girl, one boy), a male family friend, a paternal grandmother and a maternal grandfather. The cast is also sprinkled with various smaller roles, such as those of

co-workers, friends and other relatives. The sitcom follows the comic ways in which the characters deal with the problems and situations they come across in life. They are a Latino family: Mexican-American on the father's side and Cuban-American on the mother's. They portray middle-class family life. Each parent works, one as a manager and one as a small business owner. They live in a house they own in which each family member has their own room. Additionally, the Lopez's are able to afford private school for their children, though the cost is certainly felt and noticed within the family's budget. A brief summation of the main characters is provided below:

- **George:** George, the show's namesake, is also its star. Most of the dialogue belongs to him, and he takes the largest role in almost every episode. Rarely is he treated as a supporting character to another's storyline. George is a plant manager at an L.A. airplane parts factory. He grew up without a father, and was raised by his working mother, Benny. George, always a wisecracker, receives most of the comic lines and drives the storyline with the absurd ways he handles the situations in which he finds himself. He is Mexican-American.
- **Angie:** Angie, George's wife, is a devoted and caring mother. Along with Benny, she is probably the character that receives the second-most attention. After losing her job as a makeup saleswoman, Angie opened her own business as a wedding-planner, though the business has yet to become a success. Angie is Cuban-American.
- **Benny:** Benny, George's mother, receives the second-most attention as regards storyline, dialogue and character development (along with Angie). After a life of hard work, Benny is now employed under George at the factory. Benny recently lost her house, possessions and savings in a house fire, and has moved in with her son's family. Benny is a tough, coarse woman with many vices: men and alcohol being most prominent among them. She has difficulty expressing and communicating her emotions. Benny is Mexican-American.
- **Carmen:** Carmen, at 17 years old, is the oldest Lopez child and only daughter. Seasons four and five have seen her kicked out of school, run away from home and fall in love with her football star boyfriend. Most of Carmen's storylines deal with her free-spirited teenage rebellion and her parents' attempts to cope with it.
- **Max:** Max, much like his father, is a jokester and most of his lines are smart wisecracks (often directed at his sister). Max is the youngest child and only son. As a 13-year-old, he has entered middle school and battles with dyslexia.

- **Ernie:** Ernie, George's boyhood pal, is an extension of the Lopez family. For most of his adult life he has lived with his parents. He also works at the plant under George's management. Ernie is Mexican-American.
- **Vic:** Vic, Angie's father, is divorced and lives close to his daughter's family in L.A. His character does not receive much attention in script or storyline, but he still serves as a kind of guide in his daughter's life. Vic was born in Cuba.

The format and content of *George Lopez* is typical to that of the situation comedy genre.

The program uses a half-hour format (commercials included), in which time a situation arises that is resolved by the end of the episode. Almost all of the action takes place in either the home or in George's office, trademarks typical of the genre (Selby & Cowdery, 1995, p. 110). *George Lopez* is comprised of a relatively fixed, stable sitcom group which does not change from one episode to the next, another sitcom trait (Pierson, 2005, p. 42).

An open media text. *George Lopez* can also be considered an open media text. This term is used to describe those television comedies which disrupt the audience's expectations or challenge their preconceptions (Selby, & Cowdery, 1995, p.109). *George Lopez* is an open comedy on a few different levels, and open for different reasons to different audiences.

On one level, the show could be considered open to an Anglo-American audience because it deals with a Latino family in a distinctly non-stereotypical way. Here on this show are seen no shiftless, lazy Mexican stereotypes, nor flamboyant, vibrantly dressed Latinos dancing salsa through scenes, nor overtly exotic females or 'Latin lover' males. Instead, the show portrays a middle-class family that runs into a weekly episodic internal dilemma that must be worked out amongst them. The characters are clearly Latino – references to Mexican and Cuban heritage, as well as phrases and quick quips in Spanish, are sprinkled throughout the show – but these Latino characters do not serve as stereotypical sidekicks on a dominantly Anglo-casted typical American family sitcom. Rather they represent a certain type of 'typical American family

sitcom' all their own. Anglo audiences are therefore challenged to do away with their expectation of these stereotypes, and instead challenged to see this Latino family as an American norm.

On another very similar level, the show can challenge more traditional Latino audiences to change their expectations of how a Latino or Mexican-American family can appear on television and possibly in real life. As will be discussed later in this paper, *George Lopez* does not always portray a family cast in the stereotypical and traditional dyes of authoritative father figures, deeply respected elders, expectations of virginal young girls, and submissive women often seen on Spanish language television and for some families, experienced in real life. In fact, recognition of the dominant existence of these stereotypes in Spanish television and to some degree real life, was made by many first-generation Mexican-American women interviewed for another research aspect of this thesis. Some in the Latino audience may therefore be challenged to accept a more mainstream, "Americanized" Latino family as a norm.

Aside from these generalities, *George Lopez* also displays other characteristics of an open media text. Although there are certain patterns and a formula to the show, and we can usually expect George to somehow bungle a situation before resolving it in the end, not all characters on the show will respond to stock situations in an expected way, a characteristic of closed media texts (Selby & Cowdery, 1995, p.110). Instead, the show's characters, but especially that of its star, can often surprise us with their reactions to a situation. For example when George's daughter, Carmen, in a midst of delusional idealism, comes downstairs wearing a wedding dress she plans to wear when she marries the boyfriend that just sent her a break-up letter, a usually blunt, sarcastic George does not cut her down, mock her or shirk the parental responsibility of comforting his daughter. Instead, admittedly after some prodding from his wife Angie, he sits

down to explain to Carmen that her romance is over, that she needs to move on, and that she is a superb individual, worthy of much more. The audience therefore can never have expectations of a stock response from George: he may display the funnyman, the sensitive father, the hurt son or any number of other roles or reactions to a given situation.

Likewise, the audience can never expect how the show may deal with certain prejudices. One minute, Latino stereotypes may be used in a joking, sarcastic way, such as when George imitates a heavily-accented Mexican day-laborer when Angie asks him to perform yard chores. The next, they may be somewhat embraced, when George admits certain negative notions of a Mexican family, recognizing them as his own. In the former instance, prejudices and stereotypes are exposed as a way to acknowledge that they exist in society and to make them seem ridiculous. In the latter example, prejudices are internalized and accepted by George, perhaps confusing the audience or reinforcing some of them as true aspects of Latino life.

For all of the above-mentioned reasons, *George Lopez* is therefore described as ‘open’ because it encourages active interpretation and involvement on so many different levels (Selby & Cowdery, 1995, p.110). This open state also makes the show an especially valuable resource for academic study and further examination.

George Lopez: A Textual Analysis

What McLuhan envisioned as the new family hearth has become unusually powerful, not only in shaping but also reinforcing mainstream values. Television has become the culture’s primary storyteller and definer of cultural patterns by providing information and entertainment for an enormous and heterogeneous mass public (Tueth, 2005, p.28).

If we understand and accept Tueth’s (2005) point of view, we must recognize television as a powerful force in society, and therefore as a medium worthy of academic study. The textual analysis in this chapter recognizes that the mass public is indeed heterogeneous – in fact, it is a close examination of a unique show that caters to at least two distinct cultural audiences (Anglo-

American and Latino) and all the prejudices and traditional expectations they hold. If the sitcom can be understood as a historical and cultural document for observing and exploring a culture's dominant social ideologies (and defining its cultural patterns), then we can focus in on those ideologies that most interest us. In this case, the analysis will center on what *George Lopez* says about female gender roles and the relationships that make up the familial structure. The analysis begins with a brief look at the conceptualization of family on *George Lopez* before moving on to dissect the gendered roles of its female characters. Particular attention is given in this analysis to the gendered roles of women, as the thesis itself is informed by feminist theory and covers a chapter on decodings by young Mexican-American women. This chapter considers whether *George Lopez* serves merely to replicate the dominant social views of women, held by the Anglo-American and Mexican-American cultures.

Family

Family is a tremendously important social institution outside the sphere of television – family is the one experience to which virtually all viewers can relate (Kutulas, 2005, p. 49). As previously mentioned in this chapter, it is important to place any textual analysis of a media text within a contextual framework to arrive at a likely interpretation of that text. As regards the concept of family, the entire historical progression of the family as portrayed on sitcoms serves as a dense and permeating influence over any likely interpretation of the family as portrayed on *George Lopez*.

Kutulas (2005) opines that such well-known sitcom families such as the Cleavers (*Leave It to Beaver*) represent a type of perfection which pulls at our notions of nostalgia and idealism, but which we ultimately recognize as unrealistic, mostly unattainable and in many ways undesirable (p. 49). Shows like this which fly the banner-flag of familial bliss and perfection contrast with our sometimes flawed, different reality of family life. However, television's ability to define,

shape and reinforce our cultural ideas and ideals nonetheless makes these polite, nuclear suburban families of the 1960s an important influence in terms of how we view and what we expect from familial relationships and the gender roles that operate within them. Kutulas (2005) finds determined familial roles central to these sitcoms:

At the heart of these television families is the clear articulation of roles and responsibilities and the gentle lines of authority that flow from wise dad and understanding mom to obedient children (p.49).

One of the challenges in critically analyzing a show like *George Lopez* becomes whether or not this “clear articulation” mentioned above is the same for everyone in the US – for all viewing audiences. This paper argues that it is not, that though Anglo-Americans and Latinos may in many instances hold shared ideals and conceptions, there exist cultural differences that make it difficult for a Latino family to fit into this Cleaver-esque model of television Americana. The cultural context from which such a show draws its material may differ in many regards from the mainstream Anglo-American norm, and yet it may mirror and embrace it in so many regards as to make it differ widely from the Spanish-television norm. Therefore, throughout the analysis, family and gender roles will be viewed from both perspectives.

However omnipresent the ideas of a wise father, caring mother and docile child described by Kutulas (2005) may be in the American psyche, for those who grew up in households where traditional Mexican values ruled the roost, or archetypal family roles dominated on Spanish-language television, there are still yet other cultural ideals that must be acknowledged.

Many of the characteristics valued and emphasized by Hispanics relate to aspects of the family structure and unit, and the unique role family plays in everyday life. These include the importance of collectivism (versus the Anglo-valued individualism), family solidarity, obligation, parental authority and family closeness (Contreras et al., 2002, p. 10; Shorris, 1992).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of my thesis, certain stereotypical and mythical values exist within the Latino, and certainly the more traditional Mexican-American cultures (something again confirmed with the previously mentioned in-depth interviews conducted). *Familismo*, or familism, refers to the importance of family closeness and getting along with and contributing to the well-being of the (extended) family (Contreras, 2002, p. 12). Therefore, apart from the American expectation of family perfection exists the Latino expectation of the magnitude of family, of the unit itself holding an important and respected place within the cultural psyche. Additionally, many of the characteristics valued and emphasized by Hispanics relate to aspects of the family structure and unit, and the unique role family plays in everyday life. These include the importance of collectivism (versus the Anglo-valued individualism), family solidarity, obligation, parental authority and family closeness (Contreras et al., 2002, p. 10). This makes the consideration of the concept of family particularly important in a textual analysis such as this.

George Lopez on Family

Although *familismo* may be a given in the reality of Mexican-American households and on Spanish-language television, it can be presented in contradictory ways on *George Lopez*. The overall sense of the importance of family is certainly present, and yet many backhanded remarks and one-line wisecracks serve to cast doubt upon the positive image typically created by the idea of the all-importance of family.

Most storylines on *George Lopez* revolve around the family unit, which is not surprising, as it is a family sitcom. In “You Dropped a Mom on Me” (Caplan & Regalubto, 2005b), Angie tells of how an uncle took in her family when they arrived from Cuba to the U.S., although her uncle did not like her father. She simply states, “That’s what families do for each other,” implying that no matter the situation it’s a given the family unit will be there to help, because

that is its role in life, in the Latino culture (ibid). In one instance George, showing male bravado, claims ownership and responsibility when it comes to family: “it’s my family, let me deal with it” (Caplan & Regalbuto, 2005b). However, Angie quickly counters with: “when we got married, we all became one family,” suggesting that family is a shared burden, and therefore taking out the focus on the individual and again placing it on the family as one cohesive unit.

To the contrary of these emotive statements about the centrality and closeness of family are many of George’s sarcastic, negative wisecracks about the nature of Mexican families. For instance, the topic of family plays a central role in the episode “You Dropped a Mom on Me” (Caplan & Regalbuto, 2005b). When Angie and George are discussing family, George quips, “we’re Mexican – we don’t like a relative, we don’t deal with him,” in this instance implying he does not like his mother and does not want her to move in with his family (ibid).

These dialogical examples, while not denying the centrality of the familial institution to life, do criticize it. By making the critical comments veiled as jokes, *George Lopez* is able to comment on the institution and perhaps demote its mythical importance in Mexican culture by revealing familial realities (such as uncaring mothers, the sometimes unwanted presence of extended family, and individual character flaws that can harm the family unit).

The Lopez Women: Gender Roles

George Lopez portrays three very different types of women through the characters of its three lead female roles: Angie, Carmen and Benny. All different ages and at different stages in life, these women through television have the potential to project to an age-diverse audience representations of women that may inform or influence the way people view a woman’s role in the family and in society. At work in *George Lopez* is the contrast between more mainstream Anglo-American, and the more traditional Mexican ideal of woman, such as *marianismo*.

As detailed in chapter two, *marianismo* refers to a woman's role of mother, and the role of a mother as self-sacrificing and is based upon Catholic ideals of the Virgin Mary; conversely, *machismo* denotes the man's role as father and head of household (Green, 1997, p. 166). As this thesis research has found in pre-interviews and audience interviews, these gender roles within a family, are present in some gendered ideals family members hold.

As this textual analysis focuses on the gender roles prescribed to women within *George Lopez*, it is informed by feminist thought, which critiques the way gender affects women in a male-dominated world. Again, feminism rejects the idea of innate biological difference between the sexes as the grounds for its theoretical goals, and instead is a movement and ideology that strives for equality (Cirkensa & Cuklanz, 1992). This study centers about the issue of perceived gender roles in a televisual text, and these ideas of feminism are closely related to the idea of equality (or inequality) that arises in discussions of gender roles and power relationships.

Angie: traditionally modern. The character of Angie appears to be the most idealistic woman in terms of gender roles. She embodies both the traditional Latino and mainstream mother, complete with traces of *marianismo* and overwhelming attention to children and family matters, as well as an independent, assertive role of working-woman and co-head of household.

As George tells Carmen in "Home Sweet Homeschool" (Leschin & Regalbuto, 2004): "Your mother considers you children her greatest achievement." Angie comes across as the ultimate mother and wife. She is caring enough to home-school her child, supportive of her husband's endeavors, and accepting and un-critical of her mother-in-law when others are not. Angie is sensitive: she wants as her only anniversary present for George to remember and show he cares; she always encourages George to be more sensitive and emotional and "go deeper;" she

wants to protect and help Max make friends (Hope & Regalbuto, 2004); and she tries to help and understand Benny in her depression (Kaplan & Torgrove, 2005).

The American Broadcasting Company Inc., ABC, which is the network that airs *George Lopez*, describes Angie on its website as a “devoted” mother, with the “patience of a saint” (ABC, Inc., 2006). Indeed, Angie’s devotion and saintly patience take on a feeling of religiosity when viewed in the context of the cultural idea of *marianismo*. Though religion itself is not dealt with in the 10 episodes viewed for this study, the implications of *marianismo* – the pure, virginal qualities of women combined with their long-suffering for children – are evident in Angie’s character. She is treated almost as an asexual being in many regards. For instance, she and George never share a romantic or passionate kiss – the one kiss in the 10 episodes occurs when George lightly kisses Angie on the head to comfort her (Leschin & Regalbuto, 2004). The one time Angie appears in an intimate way – in their bedroom in a piece of lingerie – it is in a dream sequence George experiences, as if sex with Angie is something unrealistic, only a dream (Nyholm & Gonzalez, 2005). And even in this dream, when Angie comes to be the most sexually suggestive as ever seen on the show, her lingerie is of the conservative black slip variety – more resembling a sundress and certainly nowhere as revealing as some of the school outfits Carmen attempts to get away with. In “Home Sweet Homeschool” (Leschin & Regalbuto, 2004), Angie must change out of her wedding dress so that George will not see her in it and create bad luck. However, even in changing, she hides from her husband behind a curtain. We do see her in her underwear while changing, but it is again conservative and this time white, signifying purity, cleanliness and the virginal.

This lack of Angie’s sexual appeal in the storylines is odd, as she is a young, attractive woman. However, her character is consistently dressed conservatively in long-sleeve or button-

up tops and cardigans in solid colors paired with dressy jeans or slacks. Despite her obvious attractive qualities, George never comments on her beauty, figure or attractiveness. The one time he does, in “George Drives the Batmobile” (Zipper & Koherr, 2005), it is to reject her. When Angie gives suggestions about being an adult in a situation – in the process coming across as rational, smart and decisive – George replies with “you are so unattractive to me right now” (ibid).

However much Angie may subscribe to the Mexican cultural ideal of a caring, suffering mother, and somewhat virginal and family-oriented woman, she also represents a woman’s role as it is perceived by liberal feminism. In many areas, her equality and power roles are equal to, or greater than her husband’s. This is seen in two areas: work and running the household.

Angie, like George (and Benny), has a full-time job. Though she is not in a managerial position, hers is still one of independence and importance. She is an entrepreneur and runs her own small business. She arrived at this career after losing her job as a makeup saleswoman in the episode “Home Sweet Homeschool” (Leschin & Regalbuto, 2004), but instead of taking another position working under another in a job she considered sub-par, Angie pursues her dream of success and creates her own wedding-planning business. This determination and assertiveness land her equality in position and though her salary is never discussed outright, her dedication to work and contribution to the family income is woven subtly through the episodes of seasons four and five. By holding a job and bringing in a salary, Angie (though admittedly Cuban-American) challenges one of the stereotypically traditional roles of Latina and Mexican women. As mentioned earlier in this thesis Flores and Holling (1999) write that, “within traditional Mexican culture, mothers are expected to remain in the private sphere, whereas fathers are typically held responsible for providing for the family” (p. 350).

In a more noticeable way (evident in dialogue and body language), Angie is more than just a partner in her marriage and as a parent: she often plays the assertive, dominant role as head of household. In emotional and family matters, she is almost always right, whereas George is often wrong and bumbles through each situation, creating plans to work through problems that border on the absurd. At the beginning of many episodes, such as “Landlord Almighty” (Morey & Regalbuto, 2004), George and Angie are faced with a problem or situation that they must deal with to maintain familial equilibrium and happiness. The two parents usually leave the room or have a whispered aside to discuss how best to deal with the situation. Instead of each making suggestions, it is usually Angie who tells George what to do and how to do it. George usually does not listen and makes a mistake. Though it turns out alright in the end, the audience knows Angie has been right all along.

Not only is Angie therefore perceived as wiser (more than an equal to her male counterpart), she also seems stern and dominant. In the episode “You Dropped a Mom on Me” (Caplan & Regalbuto, 2005b), Angie and George discuss Benny’s move into their house. Throughout the conversation, Angie’s tone with George changes from sensitive and suggestive to authoritative as he refuses to agree. She ends the conversation with a directive – that Benny will stay, “end of discussion.” Angie gives a commanding finality to the discussion – ensuring that she has won the argument and things will proceed her way. In juxtaposition to George, whom both Benny and George himself joke about as being “whipped” or “neutered,” (Kaplan & Torgrove, 2005), Angie seems dominant, playing the alpha role. As this is a pattern that occurs repeatedly in the series, Angie appears to have at least equal footing in the power relationship between George and herself, though she takes on a larger burden as regards caring for the children. This perception of Angie as empowered is more in line with the liberal feminist point

of view than the traditional Mexican ideal of mother and wife, and can said to be more mainstream in Anglo-America.

The perception of the mother, portrayed in a mostly asexual way, who is caring and sensitive and lives for her children, is incorporated into the strong-willed, authoritative, combative, entrepreneurial working woman that also makes up Angie's character. Though she may encapsulate all that is desired in the traditional Mexican role of woman, she rejects certain elements of this role: as demonstrated in Angie's move into the public sphere through employment, and in her authoritative power position at least equal to that of George, Angie does not play the traditional stereotypical role of *Madre Sufrida*.

The representation of woman seen in Angie's character can be interpreted as an attempt to create the ultimate woman, one who encapsulates all the societal ideals about women: she is a good, caring mother as well as a self-sufficient woman. Here, the mother' role is to focus not as much on herself as she does the family.

Young women/daughters: a study in contrast. At the opposite end of the spectrum from Angie, we find Carmen, the only daughter, who by season five is almost an adult at 17 years old. Whereas Angie displays many of the cultural expectations of women's roles as sensitive, caring, a woman concerned with family and children, a *saint*, Carmen is often anything but. This is displayed in the way she operates in two roles: that of child (specifically daughter), and that of a young woman (her particular gendered role).

In the last two seasons, Carmen has run away with a boyfriend, been forced to leave or kicked out from two schools, and is described by her caring mother as a "moody, emotional brat." A rebellious, disobedient child is seemingly nothing new on many of today's sitcoms, but it does break with the traditional Mexican and Latino idea of children, especially female

children, as docile and respectful as regards their parents and elders. As ABC, Inc. (2006) describes it on the show's website, "Carmen's free-spirited, teenage rebellion has left her parents at a total loss about what to do next" (ABC, Inc., 2006). This is not to say that Carmen is rotten and uncaring or that her character is without soul and is a stock character that can be easily labeled as 'the rebel.' However, the very fact that her dialogue and situations are often rebellious in some way breaks an expectation of "the good girl," especially for a Latino audience as I found in my audience interviews and analysis.

As a (young) woman, Carmen's gendered role strays greatly from that of her mother's more traditional one. Here are no traces of the cultural *marianismo*. Although instances of a wishful, caring teenage girl do play a part in her role, the exploration of her character as provocative seems to predominate in seasons four and five of the show. In fact, though it is a sitcom and therefore not everything can be taken as fact or reality, a large part of Carmen's characterization is that of overt sexuality. Different mechanisms such as wardrobe, plot/situation, and dialogue help to enforce this idea.

Carmen is often dressed in tight clothing. While this may merely reflect an increasingly sexualized American youth culture at large, the notice and mention of her clothes in the dialogue draws specific attention to her outfits at times. For example, in the episode "George Takes a Sentimental Ernie" (Nyholm & Gonzalez, 2005), George has moved out of his family's house in protest. With her father gone, Carmen chooses to dress in a more risqué fashion. She enters the kitchen in one scene wearing a very short, tight skirt, high-heeled boots and a low-cut tank top and announces she is going on a field trip that day. This causes her brother, Max to quip, "where, to a strip club?" This is soon followed by his command: "go change – you look like a slut!" (ibid). This ribald opinion from Max is but one instance of how Carmen is portrayed as a sexual

object. Later Carmen, while coming down the stairs, spots her father and stops in her tracks, a look of apprehension on her face. As she is wearing another low-cut top that this time exposes her bare midriff, she presumably knows that it is not acceptable attire –she quickly runs upstairs before he sees her and emerges moments later with her body fully covered in a sweat suit.

Another instance of her provocative role comes in the episode “Home Sweet Homeschool” when she admits to her vice principal that “in public school, they called me a whore” (Leschin & Regalbuto, 2004). In the same episode, Max again cuts her down and intones of her promiscuity. When George suggests Max can be home-schooled with his sister and they can attend prom together in the garage, Max retorts: “Are you kidding? She’s the kind of girl you meet after prom, when you drop your real date off” (ibid).

These examples, though in line with the idea of young, attractive women as sexual, provocative objects, are made through the dialogue of others. The fact that Carmen attempts to emulate and project this provocative image can also be seen in her own actions. Carmen picks friends who also seem a little risqué: in one episode, “Landlord Almighty” (Morey & Regalbuto, 2004), she attempts to be like her friend who wants to model for motorcycle magazines, likes to wear extremely revealing clothing, and brings boys she doesn’t know home with her from parties she crashes. In another episode, “Sk8erboyz” (Hope & Regalbuto, 2004), Carmen brags to a girl friend from Catholic school that she has performed a shocking sex act with a boy (though Carmen is lying and is clueless as to which act she is bragging about).

The contrasting roles the character of Carmen must fill – that of a young, attractive woman (which she is), and that of daughter are difficult to mold together in the context of traditional Mexican values. On Spanish television, most young, attractive women are overtly sexual characters – often wearing skin-tight or very revealing clothing. However, these women do not

fill these roles in the context of their own families – we see these women as single and apart from their families. Carmen on the other hand must play her role within the confines of her family, and so her character as a sexual object seems out of place, and is rejected by some viewers (as seen in my thesis chapter on audience decoding).

What is interesting to note, however, is that although Carmen's attire, the labels others give her, and the façade she tries to maintain of a provocative girl, we never actually see a situation in which Carmen participates in, or alludes to her true participation in, a sexual act. In fact, although she does take part in a rap video and represents a desirable sexual object, she also dons the apparel (quite literally) of a traditional girl who wants to be married to her football star boyfriend when she emerges from her room wearing her mother's wedding dress in a delusional state of wishful matrimony in the episode "You Dropped a Mom on Me" (Caplan & Regalbuto, 2005b). These instances may be an attempt to show that though Carmen may seem young and provocative, that is not her true character, and that she may still grow out of it – that perhaps this perception is only meant for women while young and single, and this role will one day be given up when they become married. Seen this way, the character of Carmen may still somewhat fit into the expected role of a woman in a traditional Latino family.

Not your typical abuela. Far from being a saintly mother or a provocative young woman is the character of Benny, George's "tough and acerbic" mother (ABC, Inc., 2006). The ideal of woman and parent represented through this character diverges heavily from any sort of feminine ideal. In fact, the role of Benny is very masculine. From the onset, we are given the character's name, Benny, which itself is androgynous: it has definite masculine overtones, as nicknamed forms of "Ben" in our society are usually given to males. Yet, there is much more substantive

textual evidence to suggest the role of woman as masculine as embodied in her character. This is evident through her relationships with others, her behavior, and the dialogue surrounding her.

In striking contrast to Angie, the sensitive and caring mother, Benny is repeatedly (in almost every episode) shown to be a sarcastic mother who offered George a hard childhood, filled with lies and a brittle (seemingly uncaring) mother-son relationship. In fact, this void between the mothering styles of Angie and Benny is juxtaposed in the episode “Home Sweet Homeschool” (Leschin & Regalbutto, 2004). Angie dives into the role of educator when Carmen decides to be home-schooled, and does her best to teach a variety of subjects, including French and chemistry. In fact, Angie becomes consumed with doing an excellent job, and we see her as a very involved, caring mother yet again. When Benny criticizes the job Angie is doing, George responds “at least she is involved in her children’s education” (ibid). The next few lines reveal that Benny did not have the patience or desire to spend time encouraging a dyslexic George as a child, a stark contrast to Angie, who also has a dyslexic son (Max), but rallies around him to help. Most jokes about the George-Benny relationship deal with the past and Benny’s failings as a mother. Some comic examples are: using a young George as shield to a hornet’s nest; making him sleep in a crib until he was seven years old; and not expressing physical or emotional closeness with her son. Appearing as the anti-mother in these regards, Benny resembles in some respects the traditional father figure in Mexican culture: uninvolved in the minutiae of family life and emotionally distant from the children. In fact, many in-depth interviews conducted for this thesis have found this father-figure type to be the lived experience of young Mexican-American women. This is not to say Benny never shows love or concern for her son, but when she does, it is almost grudgingly displayed. For example, in the episode “George Drives the Batmobile” (Zipper & Koherr, 2005), when Benny after much heckling admits that the reason she wouldn’t

let George drive as a teenager is because she was worried something might happen to him, she quickly follows this admission with the line “don’t flatter yourself” (ibid). Although deep down Benny does care about and love her family, she is emotionally closed and rarely admits it.

Perhaps most telling of Benny’s androgyny or perceived masculinity is certain aspects of the lifestyle to which she subscribes. Benny is often portrayed as having a somewhat voracious sexual appetite. On many episodes, George makes sarcastic remarks about Benny bringing home men, but never does the idea of a romantic relationship enter the conversation or situation. Again in “George Drives the Batmobile,” (Zipper & Koherr, 2005) Angie picks Benny up from a bar to drive her home, and is surprised when a man follows Benny into the backseat. Benny and the man begin to kiss in the backseat, and Benny asks Angie to take her to a motel – implying that this will be a one-night stand, and she just happens to know the location of the cheapest, seediest one. Among her other vices (also much commented upon in the dialogue) are gambling (she has a bookie), alcohol and cigarettes. In the episode “George’s Dog Days of Bummer” (Kaplan & Torgrove, 2005), George and Ernie try to bring Benny out of a depression by offering her an assortment of full bottles of hard liquor – and they don’t become truly concerned about her state of mental well-being until she refuses it all, a move obviously out of character for her. The idea of a liquor-loving, smoking, sexually active grandmother goes against the stereotypical image of women (and especially elderly women) present in traditional Mexican cultural norms and expectations, and it is an image which certainly serves as a contradiction to Angie’s polite, conservative character.

There are subtle (and not so subtle) nods to Benny’s masculinity peppered throughout some of the episodes. One instance occurs in the episode “Sk8erboyz” (Hope & Regalbuto, 2004) when Benny jokes to Max that if he wants friends, he should put on more makeup and

he'll find a few (gay) boys who will befriend him. Upon hearing this, George jibes: "we only have room for one guy wearing makeup in this house, mom, and that's you" (ibid).

These images of an un-emotional, unconventional woman, and distant mother and grandmother go against stereotypes in both American and Spanish television. It creates the possibility of a new type of woman – a woman whose characterization and comic appeal lie not in her ability to be feminine, but in her ability to eschew that role in favor of snappy comeback remarks, harsh criticisms of her progeny, and her hedonistic tendencies towards men and alcohol. This image of woman cast in a light traditionally belonging to men has the possibility of being a powerful, liberating force. However, the fact that most of the other characters' (even the neighbors!) dialogue concerning Benny is negative and critical means that *George Lopez* shows that these aspects of her character are not to be idolized. She is not revered – she is disrespected by her children and grandchildren, an unthinkable and certainly uncommon representation in Spanish-language television and in traditional Mexican-American families that value older generations. The negative aspects of Benny's character (and those that fall more in line with a masculine character) are themselves part of a stereotypical woman's role. Flores and Holling (1999) report that "in much traditional Latino culture, the promiscuous woman, especially the promiscuous ... mother, is responsible for the destruction of her family" (p.345). According to this stereotype, Benny's promiscuity is at fault for the difficult relationship between herself and her son. According to this stereotype, Benny, who became pregnant as a teen, was doomed to fail her son as a mother.

Conclusion. This textual analysis shows that although the importance of family is indeed highlighted in each episode, the dialogue uses comedy as a convention to criticize the idealism of the perception of perfect families. As concerns female gender roles as exhibited by the show's

women characters, *George Lopez* offers an interesting take: it both replicates and reinforces the dominant Mexican social view of a traditional mother, while incorporating the more liberated, modern, strong woman championed in feminist theory and Anglo-American progressive social views. However, the incorporation of the traditional view of women into the modern stops at Angie's character: Carmen, as a provocative rebellious teenage girl, represents the fare of Anglo-American shows and pop culture than the traditional Mexican-American perception of young daughters. Likewise, Benny breaks the mold of a traditional grandmother and instead eschews the feminine for the masculine, the old and predictable for the independent and somewhat reckless. The representation of woman as hyper-sexualized, as seen in Carmen and Benny, plays into a stereotypical view of Latino women (Flores & Holling, 1999). Furthermore, the juxtaposition of these two characters on the show with Angie's representation of ideal woman brings to the forefront another stereotype: that of the virgin/whore, positive/negative dichotomy which also exists in media representations of Latino women (Flores & Holling, 1999).

Though these gendered representations of values and familial roles may represent that of more mainstream Anglo-America, there is more than just a nod to the Latino/Mexican audience, through jokes and Spanish slang that only insiders of that culture of Spanish-speaking individuals will probably pick up on. Much like Latinos bridge the two cultures and "live on the hyphen," *George Lopez* seems to do so as well (Flores, 1997, p. 257).

Indeed, *George Lopez* represents traditional Mexican-American cultural values to a certain extent, but cannot be said to replicate these dominant social values – the show is too subversive towards these ideals in terms of its comedy, and the show is instead imbued with the American mainstream gender representation.

In the following chapter on how a young female Mexican-American audience makes meaning from and decodes *George Lopez*, this viewpoint becomes clear, as many women reject the character portrayals, especially that of Carmen, and call the show “too Americanized.”

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS: AN AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the results of the study's in-depth interview data. The findings include the ideas and themes that resulted from the data, along with the participants' responses from the interview transcripts. These themes and responses explore how a specific group of young Mexican-American women negotiate the gender and family roles presented on the television sitcom *George Lopez*.

Research Participant Demographics

A total of ten self-identified Mexican Americans participated in this study. They attended one of three total interviews: interview one had one participant; interview two had six participants; and interview three had three participants. The average age of these women was 20.5 years old. The age range of the participants was 18 to 25 years old. All women identified themselves as regular viewers of *George Lopez*, or had been a regular viewer in the past.

The research strove to focus on young Mexican-American women in Florida from relatively the same socio-economic and environmental background. Specifically, I attempted to interview first-generation Mexican-Americans whose parents were born in Mexico and had worked for some time as migrant or manual laborers. For the most part, all of the participants fit this description. However, there were a few exceptions. Unlike the other participants, Cristina² has only one Mexican parent: her mother is Puerto Rican. Linette likewise has a background slightly different from the other participants: her father, though from a heavily Mexican community in Texas, was born in the U.S. Of the ten women interviewed, four were born in the United States, and six were born in Mexico. All who were born in Mexico moved to the United States at an early age and were raised in the United States. All study participants currently attend

² Names of all participants have been changed to ensure anonymity.

a four-year university, though one (Veronica) has already graduated with a bachelor's degree. Three participants – Elena, Mary, and Veronica – are married. Two – Mary and Veronica – either have a child or were pregnant at the time of the interview. The three participants in interview three are sisters. These women were also participants in the pre-thesis interviews which informed the direction of this work. As a relationship with them had thus been previously established, these women also took part in the thesis research. The basic demographics of the interview participants are summarized in table 5-1.

Table 5-1. Participant Demographic Summary

Interview	Born/From	Name	Age	Father	Mother	Occupation
1	U.S. Dade City, FL	Cristina	19	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S at 20	Born in Puerto Rico, arrived in U.S. at 19	University sociology student. Works with local non- profit
2	U.S. Miami, FL	Rose	19	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	University marketing student. Tutor and intern
2	U.S. South Central FL	Gloria	21	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	University Economics student. Works at catering company
2	Mexico, moved to U.S. when 5 years old Arcadia, FL	Eva	19	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	University student
2	Born in U.S., FL	Linette	18	Born in U.S. Texas	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as teen	University Tele- communications student
2	Mexico, moved to U.S. when 7 years old South FL	Sara	19	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	University Nursing student

Table 5-1. (continued)

Interview	Born/From	Name	Age	Father	Mother	Occupation
2	Mexico, moved to U.S. when 4 years old Arcadia, FL	Ana	21	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	University psychology student
3	Mexico, moved to U.S. when 4 years old South and Central FL	Elena	21	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	University elementary education student; part-time education counselor. Married 8 months
3	Mexico, moved to U.S. when 6 years old. South and Central FL	Mary	23	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	University elementary education student. Married 2 years; pregnant
3	Mexico, moved to U.S. when 8 years old. South and Central FL	Veronica	25	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	Born in Mexico, arrived in U.S. as adult	University finance graduate. Elementary school teacher. Married 6years; 2-year-old daughter, pregnant

Summary of Findings

The in-depth interview participants were asked to watch a 30-minute episode of George Lopez and after answer questions about the show, its characters and their own lives, with a focus on gender and family roles. In general, the participants' readings of the gender/family roles of each George Lopez character were negotiated and at times somewhat oppositional. The women's answers were in large part influenced by their lived experiences and contextualized by Mexican cultural codes and ideals.

This chapter begins by exploring how the study participants decoded the gender/family roles of the main characters on *George Lopez*, and how the participants negotiate the portrayal of these gender/family roles with their own lived experience as Mexican-American women. The chapter then goes on to explore aspects of the women's lived experiences that informed their reading of *George Lopez* and its characters.

A Mexican-American/Latino Family?

Before delving into the heart of the study's findings, it is necessary to first note a very important distinction study participants made about the televisual text *George Lopez*. This study sought to determine how the participants read the gender and familial roles within a mediated text about a Latino family (of which the father and grandmother are Mexican-American). Before participants were even asked questions about specific characters or their place within the family structure, they were first asked of their general impressions of the television program *George Lopez* as a whole. Almost instantly in each interview, at least one (if not all) participant replied that the show was "too Americanized," a comment met with strong agreement from all participants in the room. Participants took a negotiated reading of the Latino or Mexican-American premise of the show. That is to say, they accepted some elements of this premise, while rejecting or opposing others. They asserted that very few components of the show seemed to them Mexican or Latino-specific. It seemed forefront in the participants' minds that *George Lopez*, a show based on a Mexican-American's (George's) family life, had very few elements of the Mexican or Mexican-American culture attached to it. That the participants expected a representation of Mexican or Latino culture when watching *George Lopez* is consistent with Davila's (2002) findings in her study of New York Latinos and Latino-oriented media:

One of the most generalized beliefs advanced in different forms by focus group participants was that the Hispanic/Latino-oriented media are representative of U.S. Latinos ... Again and again, participants would mirror the discourse of

representation ... attesting to the extent to which this discourse permeated almost all of my informants' diverse interpretations. (p. 27).

Likewise, this comparison between Mexican-American daily cultural reality and that represented on *George Lopez* was a common thread throughout each of the three interviews. In interview three, one participant had particularly strong feelings about the show. Her first impression and voiced opinion of the show had to do with its lack of Mexican culture.

Veronica: George is not...in my opinion, George is not, like, a true Mexican family...well, his phrases and stuff he uses are Mexican, but ... (trails off)

Participants read this idea of a “too Americanized” family in two ways: through the noted absence of Mexican culture; and conversely through the presence of habits, dialogue or interactions that were seen as distinctly part of the Anglo-American culture.

The topic of *George Lopez* lacking Mexican culture became a common theme in answering many questions about each character and the family as a whole, meriting further discussion of the participant's perception of what makes a television family Mexican.

Interviewer: Are there things in the show in particular that are missing, that should be in a show about a Mexican-American family?

Veronica: Yeah, Mexican food. [Laughs]

Interviewer: Anything else?

Mary: Not only that, but just regular, Mexican, everyday habits, you know?

Interviewer: Can you give an example of some of them?

Mary: Like, for example, like...the food and stuff. You never see...you always see—Well, you don't see any food at all, but you never see tortillas or anything specific to that.

Veronica: What happened to all the cousins? Mexicans have large families. Big family gatherings. When you go to a party, you don't, you know—*My Big Fat Greek Wedding* has a pretty good example. Although they're not Mexican, but in that sense they have a good example. [In *George Lopez*] You don't see cousins, or aunts, or uncles, or anybody, and I...I always wonder where they're at. I...I know

that George is an only child, but where is Benny's mom—not mom, but sisters, and cousins, and things like that?

Many other women voiced similar opinions regarding the absence of Mexican culture on the program. In interview two, Ana also noticed how different the show was from her perception of a Mexican-American family.

Ana: It's too Americanized. Like, I like watching it because, you know, it's a funny show. But it's not much like I feel like my life [was] growing up. Maybe ... for people that have been living here longer, you know, more generations here, maybe that's more like what they grew up with. But for me it wasn't at all like that.

Ana's comments demonstrate this negotiated reading of *George Lopez* as a show about Mexican-Americans or Latinos. Though she thinks it "too Americanized," she concedes that perhaps this is Latino life for people whose families have been in the United States for more than one generation. In interview one, Cristina expressed a very similar opinion when discussing what kind of audience she thought would attend to the show. She thought more Anglos watch the show, due to the fact that Mexican-Americans tune in more often to novellas than to mainstream situation comedy – with an exception.

Cristina: I mean, unless they are like second-generation here in the States, where they grew up speaking English, and grew up with friends that aren't Hispanic.

In addition to the missing elements of Mexican culture in *George Lopez*, participants noted the presence of some cultural traits and behaviors that they read as Anglo-American. When asked what in *George Lopez* seemed unrealistic, Veronica laughingly replied: "Golf. Mexicans don't play golf." This stereotype of dads who play golf on the weekends seemed to Veronica and her sisters another example of the "too Americanized" show.

Similar to Ana's comment about *George Lopez* being more representative of second or third generation Mexican-Americans, participants made the concession that George's use of Spanish words, and in particular Mexican-American slang such as "watcha" and "bato," did give

some credibility to the character's Mexican heritage, though most of the women perceived this to be the only real Mexican-American element.

Cristina: Well, just the jokes, how they'll say it ... they are kind of like, I guess, Mexican jokes. You can kind of say, "Yeah, you know my family does that too." ... Like the things he'll say to his children are the things my parents would say to me.

Veronica also agreed that these jokes or "sayings," that are an integral part of George's dialogue, give the show a sense of Mexican culture, though she made the point later in the interview that these sayings seem to be one of the only overtly Mexican things on the show.

Veronica: There's a lot of sayings, or a lot of old sayings, or a lot of little funny things that George Lopez says that portrays Mexicans. But, it's not a true picture, in my opinion.

In fact, it appeared to most participants that George seemed to be the only Mexican-American or indeed Latino character on the show, a perception that occurs repeatedly in the proceeding sections as participants refer to other characters as "not Mexican." Again, this may in fact be due to the fact that Angie is Cuban-American, not Mexican-American, and the children are likewise not precisely Mexican-American, but Latinos.

This perception of a lack of *Mexicanidad* on *George Lopez*, combined with the traditional Mexican cultural context in which most participants were raised helps to explain how the women decoded various characters and familial roles. As Davila (2002) found, study participants use their own backgrounds as a frame of reference through which they interpret the media (p.30). Keeping the participants' perception of Mexican-American culture in mind, this chapter will now examine how they read the text and made meaning of the various elements of *George Lopez*, focusing specifically on gender and family roles.

Family and Gender Roles

Research participants were asked a variety of questions about how they interpreted a character's personality, appearance and role within the family structure. Many gender and familial roles, as well as a diverse range of issues, arose during the interviews in connection to each character. For ease of understanding, this chapter dissects how participants made meaning from *George Lopez* by doing a character-by-character analysis. Participants' responses are divided into dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings of each character. As stated in Chapter 3, the framework for analyzing readings as dominant, negotiated, or oppositional was created by using: the textual analysis findings; character and episode descriptions from ABC's website, ABC.com; and the overt messages and character portrayals on *George Lopez* seasons four and five. This combination of sources served as the basis from which all participants comments were compared and analyzed.

Male Gender Roles

George. Though there are three other male characters (Ernie, Max, and Vic), George is the focus of the show, and the participants had the most to say about his character. The others are in comparison minor, static characters, and elicited little discussion from the women. Thus, the reading of male gender/family roles in this thesis focuses solely on how the participants decoded George.

The participants on the whole had a great affinity for George's character, which was attributed in main part to his comedic ability – the character's humorous dialogue and comic delivery on the show. When the women were asked to discuss George and began to analyze his character, they had mostly negotiated readings, finding positives and negatives in his roles as a man, father, son, husband and in his cultural identity of a Mexican-American. The women decoded George's dialogue, actions and relationships in a way that often compared him to their

fathers or boyfriends/husbands: in short, when reading the character of George, participants used Mexican male realities as a point of reference.

George, as the title character of *George Lopez*, is also the show's main character. In this aspect, all the participants took the dominant view. In other words, they read the text as a show primarily about this man and his family. However, it was practically only in this facet of the show that all participants were in agreement, and in which they all took the dominant view. Other topical and gender-specific concerns elicited a wider array of opinion, and the participants responded with more divergent readings. One such example lies at the very core of familial life, both as it concerns this actual televisual text, and as it concerns the participants' lived experience in Mexican-American families.

George as head of the family. While George may earn importance as the focal character of each episode, study participants took a negotiated view of his magnitude and authority within the family structure. The notion of power, authority and control is a pervasive one in family life, and can affect each relationship within the familial structure. Authority or power is therefore interesting as it applies to gender roles and cultural implications: does it follow a traditional Mexican cultural idea, does it conform to more modern or outdated ideals, is it descriptive of Anglo-American ideals? In answering the question of who holds power in the family unit, the participants had differing views. Similarly, the text *George Lopez* is itself unclear. Though the show's online character descriptions (ABC, Inc., 2006) intend George to represent an equal partner in his marriage and position as family authority figure, the textual analysis and overt situations on *George Lopez* show George as very often submissive to Angie's will. The text itself seems a negotiated representation of family power structures. The participants' responses to George were likewise somewhat ambiguous and, on the whole, negotiated. While some women

saw in George the head-of-household and a latent authority figure, other women found his character subordinate to that of his wife in terms of intelligence, power, and status as head of household.

Negotiated: George (male) in charge. Though Cristina initially took the opposite view, that Angie seems to be the one with more control over the household, in her comment exhibited below she takes a more negotiated reading of George-as-head-of-household.

Cristina: I think that since she has such a strong personality, he kind of lets her decide a lot of the things. Unless it's something he's really adamant about, I think he'll take the passive role when it comes to her.

From this negotiated viewpoint, neither George nor Angie has total control in the family or relationship. Though Angie is a “strong” and “opinionated” character who makes most of the decisions on a daily basis, George seems to have a latent ability to take control if he wished; he merely “lets” Angie make decisions. This subtle qualification implies that the image of George's second-tier authority is only superficial. Likewise, two participants from interview two found George to be quietly in control.

Eva: The mom, like, it looks like she makes all the decisions. But I don't know. Like, I kind of feel like George Lopez, he says “OK, she can make the decisions. I don't really have to.” But, I feel like he has the potential inside of him to just one day be like, Bam! This is how it's gonna be. And you can't say anything about it. I just feel like he's, what do you call it, you know that nothing has triggered? His potential powers.

Rose: I agree George Lopez is more in control.

Also on the negotiated side of George as authority figure is Sara, who in imagining her boyfriend in George's place, saw in George the roles of provider and protector.

Sara: I can kind of relate to my boyfriend having that same personality as him in a way ... Like the way he is, “It's my family and I'm going to take care of them” because that's how he is. He's like “I'm gonna take care of this, and I'm gonna take care of that.”

By reading in George this sense of responsibility and ownership for his family Sara positions him in a head-of-household role.

Negotiated: Angie (woman) in charge. Many study participants took this view, and read George's character as second in command to Angie in terms of power and authority within the family unit. The three participants in interview three read George in this way.

Elena: From what I've seen, it seems like Angie works and brings in the money, and she's more like the soft side toward the kids and toward the family in general. He seems to be more stupid about everything, and just kind of, like, blow things, where she's more sensitive when she talks and takes his feelings into consideration.

Veronica: She seems smarter.

Elena: --the feelings, and maybe consequences to the actions, and he's more, like, "[Heavy sigh] Help here."

Veronica: Or, it's not that he doesn't care; he kind of leaves it up to her.

Elena: Right.

Veronica: "Well, your mother said..." he'll tell the kids, "Well, your mother said." I don't recall him ever punishing any of his kids. Well, except for Carmen when she snuck out on that episode. But I don't ever recall him, like, setting the law down, or doing anything... To where, most of the Mexican families, it's the father setting the law down, not the mother. And, to some extent, it seems like Angie is the head of the household. You know, she does a lot of the things—and George is kind of like...they just portray him as dumb.

Mary: I agree. It's basically like he goes to work, brings home whatever money he does, and Angie keeps track of finances and everything—bills. Pretty much [she's] the head of the household.

The above comments illustrate the negotiated, ambiguous reading of George as portrayed in the context of mainstream Anglo-American culture. However, study participants noted that George's character's position in the show is atypical to that of a man's within the Mexican culture. In the participants' experience, men are looked upon as the head of household. They are the breadwinners in each family, and exert more control in the decision-making process than

George does on his show. The ambiguous portrayal of males roles on the show through George is in stark contrast to the participants' own lived experiences. In examining these later in the chapter, participants echo research findings that the importance and position of a male and father within a more traditional Mexican family reigns supreme (Green, 1997; Contreras, 2002).

The one exception to this male-dominated lived experience is Cristina. She admitted that within her own family, her mother is also strong-willed and that she believes that the power relationship and marriage on *George Lopez* mirrors that among her own immediate family, one she believes more closely mirrors equality between the parents. However, she commented that generally in the Mexican-American community, the case is different.

Cristina: I do believe the man is usually *machista* ... in a typical Mexican-American family, it is the male; the husband has more control.

On the whole, the participants read in *George Lopez*'s title character a man who breaks the traditional mold of a Mexican-American man, and operates outside the perceived norm of male gender roles within the family unit. As detailed below, the participants continued to draw on their lived experience as Mexican-Americans to further understand George's embodiment of male gender roles in other areas of family life.

The discussion of George's authority within the family structure begs further examination of his relationships to those that surround him. Though the participants all read George as the most Mexican character in this Latino family, they rejected many aspects of his relationships with his family, because they seemed to be in direct opposition to their perception of an adult Mexican man. The readings of George as a husband, father and son were mostly negotiated, though most participants had very strong objections to George's relationship with his daughter, Carmen, and his mother, Benny.

George as husband. The idea of authority, though important, is not the only issue worth noting in examining George's character and relationships. George's role as a husband, and his relationship with Angie are given significant air time within the program.

All participants took the dominant view of George and Angie's romantic relationship. They all read George-as-husband as a loving man, who displays more tender emotions in private than he necessarily does in outward, public situations. In this, as with his slang-filled quips, George again portrays to the participants a more typical Mexican male.

Elena: I think he kind of acts likes Mexicans, too, because a lot of Mexican guys are rough, or not as nice, to other people. But when it comes to their wives, they soften up. They don't talk to them really harsh or whatever. They kind of soften up.

Elena and her sisters agreed that George "acts as a good husband." Their definition revolved around the way a husband treats his wife.

Elena: Like, he has patience for her. He listens to her. He treats her well. He doesn't scream at her.

Veronica: Doesn't talk down to her.

Elena: Doesn't talk down to her. Listens to her--and if she asks him to do something, he'll do it.

In viewing George as a "good husband," study participants even went so far as to express a desire to have a similar sort of relationship in their own lives with their current or future partners. In this respect, George-as-husband received a markedly unanimous and positive reading from study participants. Interestingly, George was seen as a good husband both by mainstream Anglo-American standards and Mexican standards. Again, this is a unique distinction among the character readings. As the research found, characters were often read differently depending upon which cultural standard (mainstream American or traditional Mexican) was applied.

George as father. Most participants took a negotiated reading of George's role as a father. However, one participant took the dominant view – that he is a good, albeit comedic, father who is available to his children and involved in their lives.

Dominant reading. Only one participant, Cristina, had a dominant reading of George's role as father. ABC describes George on the shows website on ABC.com as making “lemonade from lemons,” including how he “handles” his two “rebellious” children, all while keeping his “sense of humor intact” (2006). From this description George appears to be a man who, though he sometimes struggles with parenting, still comes out on top as a funny, interactive father.

Cristina: I see him as a pretty relaxed guy. He's very straight forward, he tell you how it is, but he's still, he still, he loves his family, and he doesn't want anything to happen to them, but he does it in a lighthearted way. You know, like – he's the father, he's got that father-figure “I'll love you and I'll hate you but I'm still going to be there for you” kind of thing.

Cristina later goes on to expand upon this comment about George as a father.

Cristina: The way he relates to his children. I see it as he sees them as his children, he wants to protect them. His tone changes ... like in moments when it's time to be the understanding father ... of course he's kind of blunt and straight-forward with his way of being with the children. But if he sees them I feel like he'll be there, you know, to rub their shoulders and be there ... maybe not for too long, but he's still loving.

Similarly, Cristina took a dominant, “George as a father *does* care,” reading in decoding the scene in which George and Carmen have a tête-à-tête about an ex-boyfriend (a scene which elicited quite an opposite reaction for the other participants, as described in the proceeding section). Here, she links George to her own father, in how they would handle a discussion about letting go of a romantic relationship.

Cristina: Even in this show, when he was reading that thing to his daughter. I feel like my dad would have been like, “Listen, Cristina, he's not interested in you.” You know? Like, they kind of open your eyes for you.

Negotiated reading. Though the study participants read the role of father in George's character – they accepted the show's premise that he has two children who call him "dad," etc – many rejected aspects of his fatherhood. Either they saw him negatively, as a "bad father," or they internalized the George Lopez version of fatherhood and, after comparing it to their own experiences, found something lacking. In his interactions with Max, the youngest child, participants had nothing to say. This silence in itself may be taken as an indicator that perhaps not much attention is devoted to George as a father in the television text. However, in "You Dropped a Mom on Me," George has a memorable scene with daughter Carmen about which the participants had much to say.

A problem with Carmen. One thing that all participants agreed upon has to do with a scene in the episode they watched before their interview. In this episode, Carmen receives a letter from her ex-boyfriend, to whom she is deluded enough to think she will one day marry. Carmen enters the scene in her wedding dress, holding a final break-up letter from the boyfriend. The scene ends with George having a heart-to-heart with a tearful Carmen about her heartache and the prospect of future romantic relationships.

All the participants had a strong reaction to this scene, both making comments about it during the viewing "I would never do that!" and bringing it up in each interview. They were uncomfortable with the idea of a father and daughter talking so willingly and openly on such a personal subject as boys and romantic relationships. Most participants agreed that though the George/Carmen talk seemed odd to them, they would feel comfortable having a similar conversation with their mothers. In fact, it seemed to the participants that this type of personal exchange belongs in the realm of the mother-daughter relationship. For many, the entire mechanism of communication within George's family seemed a foreign concept. Gloria's lived

experience of father-daughter communication appeared to be the norm among the women interviewed.

Gloria: I thought like, I don't know, George Lopez and how he talks to his daughter, we don't usually do that. I know that if my dad has to communicate something to me, it goes through my mom and my mom tells me. I never speak to my dad about something he's concerned about. It always goes through my mom and I tell my mom whatever it is and then she relates it back to him, so it's never like ... My mom's the middle person, so it's never like "let's sit down and talk about boys" or whatever.

The women in interview three (Veronica, Elena, and Mary) read George's position as a father very negatively, going so far as to call him a "bad father." In this way, they also exhibited a negotiated reading of George-as-father. They accepted the premise that George is the children's father and has the potential to be caring, but they also strongly rejected how he fulfills this role as father.

The two things that the women in interview three seemed to find so disjointed in George's role of father are, oddly enough, seemingly diametrically opposed – he is at once too caring and personal, as well as too rude and disinterested.

In the first complaint of George being too personal, Veronica and her sisters, like the other participants, had strong reactions to the conversation between George and Carmen. They also found the conversation uncomfortable and "unrealistic." Also like the others, their aversion to this type of father-daughter bond stems from their lived experiences. The participants' relationships with their own father, which did not include conversations about intimate or personal matters, gave them the cultural context from which to read the George/Carmen dynamic in the negotiated, slightly oppositional way they did.

In the second complaint, Veronica and her sisters found George to be rude to his children in his jokes and comments. These participants also read his fatherly role as one of

disinterestedness: George seems to be always “blowing off” his children and their problems or needs. In fact to Elena, George seemed to fall more easily into a different type of family role with his children.

Elena: I think, to me, he’s more like a big brother to them than a father.

Interviewer: And what makes him more like a big brother than a father?

Elena: His comments ... To me, they [Carmen, Max] don’t show respect for him like we would for our dad. [Other participants murmur agreement] They treat him like I would treat my brother, kind of –

Veronica: They talk back to him, they don’t –

Elena: “Hey listen to this, [imitates babbling].” And if he tells them something, it’s like “If I want it, I take it.” That’s what they do to him – if they want it, they take it.

Veronica: Maybe this whole thing goes back to the other comment, but, if that’s the way he’s been dealing with his kids since they were born, *they* wouldn’t turn out to be the way they are.

All of the participants that found something lacking in George’s role as a father again attributed it to his difference from a “typical” Mexican or Mexican-American father. Much of the rejection of George-as-father emanates from the women’s experiences of what a Mexican father is or is not.

Veronica: Because he doesn’t seem to set the law, he doesn’t seem to...he doesn’t seem to stabilize the home in any way. He’s just the kind of character that kind of—as Maria said—goes, “Ah, I go get the money, whatever money I can, bring it back, and she takes care of everything else.” And, in a Mexican family, I think that it’s the father holding the family together, the father the go-getter, the bread-getter. And he doesn’t seem to fit any of those roles.

Interviewer: Okay. If you were to compare George as a father to the ‘typical’³ Mexican-American guy with two teenage kids in your community, how would they be different?

³ Following cues from answered receive during the pre-interviewing stage, words like “common” and “typical” were used in questions and answers during the thesis interviews to describe accepted cultural norms within Mexican and Mexican-American communities with which the participants are connected and closely familiar.

Elena: I don't think he's like a Mexican father, because Mexican fathers are more controlling, and try to keep their kids, like, under control, and are assertive when they talk to them, very "Hey, [imitates assertive rambling]." They're kind of more like, "You need to do this and this and this and your mom said [imitates rambling]." Where he says it more like it's an option: "Don't listen to me, I'm just saying it."

Veronica: Yeah. It seems like he gives them options. And with Mexican families, you don't seem to get options. You know, "It's the way it's going to be because I said so" kind of thing. "It's the best thing for you, and you don't understand me, but that's okay right now—"

Elena: "You'll understand later."

Once again, by eschewing the dominant, authoritative character in his role of father, the participants find it difficult to consider George a Mexican-American father. In the following section, George continues to distance himself from the participants' reality of a Mexican male in his role as son.

George as son. In the episode the participants viewed during the study, Benny moves in with her son's family after her house burns down, much to George's displeasure. Watching such an episode perhaps encouraged the discussions of George as a son, and Benny as a mother, that are present in this chapter. Study participants took the dominant view that George and his mother have an antagonistic relationship. However, even though they realized that George had a seemingly rough childhood for which he blames his mother, the participants still had an extremely negative reaction to the way George treats Benny. It is because they read so much disrespect in his behavior as son that their reading of George's role as son is deemed negotiated-oppositional.

Negotiated-oppositional reading. While watching the show, participants often seemed shocked at the dialogue between George and his mother. Though they would laugh at some of the jokes, participants also gasped and said things like "nuh-uh" after a particularly low blow by George. By constantly comparing the way George treats Benny with the way they treat their

parents and grandparents, the participants expressed how they felt a son should act towards a parent. In their unwillingness to accept that George portrays the way a Mexican-American child should act towards his parent, the participants' readings verge to the oppositional end of a negotiated reading. The reading still remains negotiated, however, because the participants verbalized what they believed to be underlying issues between the two characters, and the love they still saw in the relationship.

Cristina: With his mother, she kind of messed up raising him, and not that he doesn't respect her, but he disregards her. You know, "you messed me up and I want you out."

Along with Cristina, women in interviews two and three also read George as defying the expected role of a Mexican son. However, these women were not as kind to George's character. Gloria called him "mean," and Veronica took a similarly negotiated-oppositional reading when she declared George is "not a true son ... he talks to Benny the way a neighbor would." This antagonistic, disrespectful reading of the *George Lopez* child-parent dynamic is discussed more in depth later in the chapter.

Female Gender Roles

The study participants had much to say about the two central female family members on *George Lopez*, Angie and Benny, and to a lesser degree about Carmen (who serves a smaller, more supporting role). As explained in the previous chapter on textual analysis, these characters can represent very differing aspects of the idea of "woman," and a woman's role with the family and society. The interviewees echoed this finding in their comments. They found in Angie positive ideals of woman, wife and mother, and some went so far as to identify directly with her character. Conversely, they read many aspects of Benny's character more negatively and took a more negotiated view. The reading of Carmen failed to create a meaningful discussion among any participants, and accordingly less attention is spent on this character's portrayal of woman.

In the interviews, each character's representation of "woman" is held up to both Mexican and Anglo-American cultural ideals – a result of the participants' lived experience of themselves operating within both cultures, as first-generation Mexican-American women living and working in a mainstream Anglo-American U.S. environment.

Angie

Overall, the study participants had a positive reading of Angie's character. They used words like "strong," "caring," "good mother," and "kind" to describe her. In short, the participants had a largely dominant reading of Angie as woman, wife and mother. That is, their reading mirrored the intended portrayal of Angie's character, and matched well with the description given by ABC, Inc. and the textual analysis. However, this reading was only dominant when held up to what the participants felt were modern, mainstream Anglo-American cultural expectations. For instance, in discussing the concept of authority, participants found Angie's character fitted closely to Anglo-American cultural values, but being unrealistic for Mexican cultural values. Again, Angie is not Mexican, but Cuban-American, but the women still able to use their own status as Latinas to read another Latina, Angie.

Angie as head-of-household. In general, the women all took the dominant reading of Angie as the smarter, more mature, more rational character in the two-parent household. This is due in part to the show being comedic in nature and the necessity of Angie as a straight character to George's overwhelmingly humorous one.

Continuing the discussion of authority figures within the family unit on *George Lopez*, the participants, as previously noted, had a negotiated reading of Angie as the main decision-maker and power-holder within the family. In the husband-wife relationship, some participants still saw examples of Angie's authority. Examples of this are Elena's previously noted comment, "it

seems like Angie works and brings in the money,” and Veronica’s comment that “to some extent, it seems Angie is head of household.”

In all, the women held a negotiated view of the power relationship between Angie and George, but as is evident below all participants had the dominant view that this shared power relationship is the way a woman’s role should operate within a marriage and household.

Angie as wife. Notions of authority are intermixed with the participants’ reading of the George/Angie marital relationship. Thus, many of the comments regarding Angie as a wife relate again to the power relationship with George, and eschew a focus on the romantic relationship alone.

In addition to the general agreement that Angie and George have a good marital relationship, participants in interview two read Angie’s role in the relationship as one to be emulated.

Sara: Like, now that I’m going to get married soon, I can kind of, like, see myself having, like, the same kind of life that they are, George Lopez and his wife.

Interviewer: How would you describe their relationship?

Sara: Like, they’re Mexican, but at the same time – like they have a Mexican family, but at the same time, they both work, and they both, you know, are pretty independent of each other.

Gloria: Like Sandra was saying, how she thinks she would be with her boyfriend or husband soon to be, I mean, how she would relate with him, I think that’s how I would be too, sort of, that type of relationship. But my parents don’t carry that type of relationship. They’re not like, I don’t know, they just don’t carry themselves like that. But I could see myself being like that with like my husband also.

Interviewer: How would you describe that kind of relationship? I mean, like, when you see it on the TV, like, how would you say she is towards him, and he is towards her?

Gloria: Well, I kind of feel like she’s the head person in the family, and he’s the – he’s not the head person, but he wants to be seen as the head person. But in the end, she’s the one who makes the final decisions. But in front of his friends he wants it

to be like “OK, I’m the one who’s in charge here. I’m the one wearing the pants.” But really she’s the one behind everything. So I think that’s how, even with my boyfriend right now, that’s how I see it. Like, “Oh he’s making” – No! I’m serious. Like, I could see myself relating like that. Like, Ok, make it seem like he’s the one doing all the decision making but really it’s me. I don’t know. I can relate to that. Not as far as my parents though.

As seen in these comments, it is not precisely the romantic relationship that draws the participants’ interest, but specifically things like being “pretty independent of each other,” and knowingly yourself to be “the head person.” Though the participants specifically describe what attracts them to Angie’s role in the marital relationship, it was not the lived reality for their parents in their own household. In this instance, the participants are rejecting in their own future lives what they identify as the more Mexican marital relationship for the “Americanized” one portrayed on *George Lopez*. Others who identified with Angie, such as Cristina, didn’t have to necessarily break with the Mexican marital idea of woman; Cristina explained that within her immediate family, her mother actually is very outspoken and holds much sway in the marital relationship. In fact, Christina called the Angie/George relationship a “realistic” Latino one if compared to a family like her own. Again, however, it must be noted that Cristina’s mother is Puerto Rican, and Angie is herself Cuban, however much the women in each interview might negotiate her character against Mexican gender roles.

Angie as mother. The authoritative role of woman Angie personifies in her marriage exists alongside the more traditional domestic role she plays as mother. In motherhood, Angie portrays the “ultimate mom,” a role that encompasses many aspects of the Mexican cultural stereotype of *marianismo* as described by Green (1997) and Contreras (2002) in chapter two. The participants’ reading of Angie as an authority figure continues into the discussion of Angie-as-mother, where the women took the dominant view of Angie’s superiority in this role.

Dominant reading. All the participants took the dominant view of Angie as a saintly, patient, good mother, as described for instance on the ABC website for George Lopez.

Cristina: Um, well, she's opinionated. Strong-willed. Loving, caring, generous. She's all of those things. I feel like she's kind of that, you know, ultimate mom. She's strong when she needs to be strong, but can be gentle when it comes time to be gentle, and understanding and willing.

In addition to taking the dominant viewpoint of Angie as a successful, caring wife and mother, one participant, Cristina, actually identified with the Angie character.

Cristina: I kind of feel like, I kind of see myself as ... the mom. I have a strong personality like her, and it comes out. She's very opinionated and she'll tell you how it is. I may not be like that with everybody, but within my family, I'm like her. I feel like, you know, I'll tell you how I feel. If I don't like it then I'll tell you and if I don't think this is what you should be doing, then I'm going to let you know that's not what you should be doing. I kind of see myself, in her, through her eyes.

Though the women professed the dominant view some, in still championing the idea of Angie's role as a strong woman, offered one criticism. Eva and Ana commented that sometimes Angie's saintly character was nurturing to a fault.

Eva: Oh, about the mom, I think she's such an idealist. Like, she wants her kids to grow up wonderfully. She doesn't want to really do anything or scream at them or whatever, to hurt them. But, like, when she put on the wedding dress, she was just like "Oh my gosh, George. You handle this." You know what I'm saying? And she, like to me, if I were her, or if she were in my family, I would have just slapped her. "Get out of that dress now." You know, she wants everything to be this way that it can never be. She could be tougher.

Ana: Yeah, she's strong in other aspects, like dealing with her husband, and she's obviously independent. She has her job and everything. But with her kids, I think she wants to be the nurturing, you know type, and be the sweet one they can talk to and everything. But I agree. She should be tougher.

The dominant view that participants took of Angie in her role of mother is in this instance an amalgam of Mexican/Latino and American cultural values. Angie exemplifies all the attributes of motherhood associated with *marianismo*: she takes care of the children, runs the

household, and exhibits all the emotionally caring characteristics of a mother. Additionally, she juggles these responsibilities with a career.

Benny

Most participants had a negotiated reading of Benny in her role as matriarch on the show. While the participants accepted that Benny is a mother and grandmother according to the show, they made it clear that Benny does not act like either one; or rather she doesn't fit the preconceived idea any of the participants have of how a woman fits into these familial roles. Thus, the participants agreed with many aspects of the encoded image of Benny as a promiscuous woman prone to certain vices, yet they still in some part resisted this encoded message as something commonplace or conceivably acceptable among Mexican women.

The participants in interview three had difficulty reconciling Benny's age and status in the family to her gender roles.

Interviewer: What about Benny, the grandmother? [Participant Laughter] How do you describe her?

Mary: Mean. She's very mean, very cruel—even towards the children. She never been very, like, nurturing—

Elena: Grandmotherly.

Mary: —or grandmother-like at all. A grandmother's supposed to be, like, better than Mom and Dad because, you know...but in that sense, she's not. I've never seen her be nice to, actually, either one, so...

Veronica: How often have you ever seen her be kind to anybody? Like, her character in the sitcom, she's very rude.

Mary: I agree, but then, you know, she's a grandmother, and most grandmothers are—

Veronica: Very loving.

Mary: —very loving, and especially because she only has two grandchildren, you'd figure, she'd be very close to them, right? And you don't see that, which is really strange.

Elena: I agree

Not only does Benny not fit into their idea of what a grandmother should be, her character in general elicited negative reactions. Some of the key words used to describe Benny in interview three were “lazy” (she doesn’t make tamales), “slutty,” “mean,” and “cruel.” What seems to offend most in particular is that Benny is not what a Mexican grandmother should be. Not only is she interpreted as a selfish and unaffectionate being, she doesn’t make traditional Mexican food and she displays her love life too openly. As regards the latter transgression, Veronica explained what is normally expected of a woman like Benny.

Veronica: And most Mexican ladies, most Mexican grandmas, they just kind of keep to themselves, and tend to the kids, and...Even when they’re younger—she seems like an older lady or a grandma—but, even when they’re younger, they maybe marry once. But, they won’t go two or three times, or, you know, date so openly.

The idea of Benny as “slutty,” clearly intentionally overt on the show, was a subject broached by all participants in each interview. While most participants interpreted Benny as “slutty,” they were also conscious of the fact that the creative forces behind the show purposefully mean for the character to be this way. That is to say, the women aren’t putting a ‘normal’ dramatic character up to seemingly ultra-conservative ideals to arrive at the “slutty” judgment – rather, they accept that promiscuity is one of the elements of the ridiculous built into this character and comedy show. As Elena laughingly recalls, the show jokes about Benny “getting a prize at the STD clinic,” clearly an absurdly improbable event. This being said, the participants still undeniably read Benny’s love life as licentious. When the participants spoke of Benny’s open, seemingly promiscuous love life, it was often juxtaposed with how a woman, specifically an older woman (a grandmother), should comport herself instead. These alternative suggestions included being “helpful around the house,” “patient,” and other activities that are not

directly connected to sexual activity, as if being “slutty” was prohibitive to any other grandmotherly activity. Benny’s perceived faults didn’t stop at her amorous escapades. Participants also spoke of her other vices as similarly un-grandmotherly. Namely, participants mentioned Benny’s proclivity for drinking and gambling as things in opposition to acceptable grandmother behavior.

According to the women interviewed, the above-mentioned vices are all contradictory to the Mexican cultural expectations of a grandmother. It is in this aspect of refusing to accept Benny as a Mexican grandmother that the generally negotiated reading seems to be most oppositional. Many descriptions of Benny focus not on who or what she is, but on what she is not. Specifically, for example, she is “not a grandmother,” and “un-grandmotherly.”

The constant reference to Benny as a grandmother reinforces her position within the family, and her responsibility to it. Her gender role becomes not one of a single working woman, but instead one of a woman who is tied to children, the role of compassionate provider and all the implications therein. By always being a grandmother and linked to a collective unit, Benny loses some individuality. The word grandmother also clearly has implicit cultural and gender connotations, as evident in the participants’ constant desire to compare the individual character “Benny” with the idea of “grandmother,” and further personalizing the comparison by viewing Benny in reference to their own grandmothers. For example, Gloria says, “That’s not typical of a grandma to be. And if they were slutty, they shouldn’t be slutty once they’re grandmas.” In saying this, Gloria is not objecting necessarily to the idea of a woman being “slutty” or dating often, she is specifically judging Benny based on her position as a grandmother.

This being said, though many participants were quick to label Benny as a “slut” and woman of loose morals, some girls began to display a more liberal feminist view the more they

discussed Benny's character and place in the show. They conceded that Benny is, after all, a woman (not just a grandmother!) who displays behaviors not always too far from reality, though they themselves don't want to own up to or associate her behavior with themselves.

Sara: But I know a lot of families that have grown up in our area that have grandmas that are always at the bars and always at the nightclubs. And because I used to work at a store, you know, selling clothes to go out, and I used to have like the grandmas coming in "Hey, I'm gonna go to a baile. (which is like a dance) What should I wear?" And they would get little thongs. But, of course, my grandma – she lives in Mexico – and she would never come out in that way, of course.

Similarly, Elena acknowledges and even perhaps identifies with Benny's situation: "I mean, so, she's lonely, she's a single woman, and she's just taking care of her own business."

Benny as mother. With as much as the word "grandmother" was used to describe Benny in each interview, participants had little to say about her actual relationship with Carmen and Max. Apart from commenting that Benny seemed unaffectionate towards the children, the participants noted that their interaction on the show was extremely limited. Not so with George.

The antagonism that exists between Benny and George is the focal point of much of the dialogue on George Lopez, and it is also the foundation of the episode, "You Dropped a Mom on Me" (Caplan & Regalbuto, 2005b), that each group was asked to watch prior to the interviews. Thus, each participant had much to say about the mother-son relationship and in particular, Benny-as-mother. Similar to their reaction to Benny's general character, the participants had a negative reading of Benny's behavior in her relationships with others. Eva commented that she doesn't "like the way she [Benny] carries herself with her son, or his wife." In fact, two of the participants in interview three failed to read in Benny's character motherly traits.

Interviewer: how do you describe her as a mother? ... What kind of mother is she?

Veronica: Not a very good one. I would think that...they tell you it's the mother, and they tell you, and he makes a lot of comments about the way he grew up, so it

makes you think of a mother. But, if they didn't tell you that she was the mother, I wouldn't think she would be a mother. Not to him.

Elena: She's more—She seemed more of a mother-in-law than his actual mother.

Veronica: Yeah.

Interviewer: How—What's the difference between a mother and a mother-in-law? Like, how...do you know what I mean? Can you explain that? How do you—

Veronica: They don't seem close.

Elena: I think Mexican men are close to their mom, or they don't talk to their mom. Just as simple as that. If they're close to them, it's because they had a really good relationship. And if...if they don't have a good relationship, they don't talk to them at all. They don't really have that where they disrespect their mom and call them all kinds of names. Either they stay mad at their mom, they don't talk to their mom at all because they're upset, or they respect them.

Veronica: I think he's just kind of in-between. He's just like, "I love you, Mom, but I kind of hate you for what you did when I was growing up." And she's more...she seems to find an excuse for everything she did. Like, all the things she thinks she did good. I mean, "You were alive and well at the age of eighteen."
[Audible agreement] So, I don't think she's much of a mother.

Though the relationship seemed to the participants "rude" and "blunt," two of the participants in interview two perceived that the seemingly faulty relationship may stem from what Elizabeth said is the fact that Benny "doesn't straight up tell George Lopez whatever she'd feeling." Eva and Ana went on to further dissect this non-communicative tendency in Benny.

As much as Benny may not resemble the participants' own grandmothers and what they imagine the ideal of a Mexican grandmother/mother to be, some thought that Benny does channel one aspect of the more traditional woman. In her relationships with others, the participants of interview two found Benny to be emotionally closed. When she does express her feelings about being wanted to George in the "You Dropped a Mom on Me" (Caplan & Regalbuto, 2005b) episode, she does so in an indirect way. In fact, "indirecta" is the word Ana used to describe her. In talking about the prevalence in some families of being indirect and

adhering to unspoken cultural codes when dealing with emotional and sexual topics, Ana and Eva found Benny to closely fit a certain traditional woman's role.

Ana: I noticed that it stems from traditional Mexican values and stuff. Women, they cannot, I know that they can't exceed – not exceed – demand a lot from men, and like if they feel sad, like usually you're not like, you don't tell, like a wife will not tell her husband, you know –
Eva: You suck it up.

Ana: Yeah, you suck it up. You learn to suck it up and be strong, because I know both of my grandparents, like my grandma's from both sides, they a lot of times in their families they were made to clean like their sisters' homes or stuff like that and they don't complain. They just suck it up, and then they'll complain to someone else, but they won't say it directly or anything. And I think that also too might be like the grandma not telling her son like "I don't want to stay with you" because like it's not – you don't really do that. Especially to men.

It seems that in being emotionally closed with her son, Benny adheres to one woman's notion of "traditional Mexican values."

Carmen

Most of the participants had a negotiated position on Carmen. They read in Carmen not so much the rebellious teen who gives her parents trouble, but rather they dismissed her as "dumb" and in one instance unimportant to the show.

Though ABC, Inc's website about the show on ABC.com (2006) described Carmen as "free-spirited" and "rebellious," what the participants focused on most was her seeming lack of common sense.

Ana: I think ... Carmen, she is very, very, I don't know, she's living in a dream world. Like, I seriously don't know how she – I think it's too over the top. I don't even see Americans – Mexicans, of course not – I don't think Americans dream like that either, you know. I think it's just too unrealistic.

Eva: Yeah, and the way that her parents react to her, makes it even worse. I can't stand her character ... she's just so annoying. She's not real world smart. She's just annoying.

This negative reaction to Carmen's lack of brains and dreamy character, when compared to the way the participants lauded Angie, speaks to what these participants seem to value in women. Though closer in age to Carmen, the participants clearly more closely identified with, or had appreciation for, aspects of Angie's character. Where Angie is strong, smart, independent and successful, the participants saw in Carmen a dumb, immature "daddy's girl" in need of a dose of reality. Through their (sometimes strongly worded) comments, the participants showed what role of woman they valued and aspired to be.

Later in interview two, Ana goes on to take an oppositional reading in the mere presence of Carmen's character on the show.

Ana: Like, the one I think is really out of place is the girl, the daughter. Like, I don't know what they were trying to do with her because I don't think she's a portrayal of anything really. She's just like a ditzy, stupid little kid.

Not only does Ana view the character negatively, she challenges her existence. In this way, far from saying that Carmen represents a certain idea of woman or woman's role, Ana reads Carmen as portraying nothing. In this way Carmen, as a dreamy, ditzy girl, doesn't seem to Ana worth the trouble of considering or analyzing as a reality of woman.

Cristina's reading was also somewhat oppositional as it applies to Carmen. Here, though, Cristina challenged the idea that Carmen truly portrayed a Mexican-American character.

Cristina: (Laughs). I see her kind of ...more as your typical Anglo-girl. The way her character is and mannerisms and everything, I see it more of an American style than a Mexican style.

When asked repeatedly what things do or don't make her more of an "Anglo-girl" versus a Mexican girl, Cristina is unable to qualify the answer, except by saying "There are so many ways you can see it, and I just can't pinpoint anything."

One the whole, the study participants did not identify with, but rather distanced themselves from, the portrayal of woman that is Carmen. In doing this and giving her little attention in their decoding, the participants weren't able to ascribe a familial role to Carmen.

Again, of interest here may be what is not being said. Though *George Lopez* portrays Carmen as a sexual object in the dialogue (of all characters, but particularly Carmen), and the textual analysis likewise pegged Carmen as the other character (along with Benny) to have much said about her sexuality, no participant mentioned this in the interviews. Though they took note that Max used innuendo to tease his sister (in the dialogue about losing her shirt), no participant took the issue further than just believing it was simply a younger brother's teasing dialogue. Perhaps their lived experience in Mexican households where daughters are protected from dating and other subjects contributed to their inability see in Carmen a sexual object, because daughters *shouldn't* be one.

Overall findings: gender/family roles. For the most part, negotiated and oppositional readings resulted from a discord between what was presented on *George Lopez* and what the participants were accustomed to believe as a result of their experience in a Mexican/Latino family and community.

Interestingly, the women had negotiated or oppositional readings of some characters based on their lack of adherence to Mexican cultural values. Examples of these instances are Benny's role of woman and grandmother and George's role of son, roles which go against cultural codes of decency (as an expectation of women) and reverence for elders, respectively. In decoding these roles, the women were highly influenced by their Mexican cultural background.

However, when presented with the idea of a break from a *machista* male-dominated marriage and family unit, the participants readily accepted the rupture in stereotypical traditional

Mexican values. The women eschewed the reality of their lived experience in their desire to emulate Angie's role of woman, wife and mother. In doing this, they held the *George Lopez* dominant view of woman as an authority figure, independent working woman, and "ultimate mom." This idea of woman presented by George Lopez retains what the women felt are the positive aspects of Mexican culture, while deleting the more *machista* aspects. As Sara said of the George-Angie marital relationship, "they both work, and they both ... are pretty independent of each other." Thus the women are, through their decoding of the *George Lopez* text, expressing a category of woman's role which they accept and aspire to live: a woman who is still clearly Mexican, but empowered with more professional and personal independence. This idea, gleaned through the decoding, is echoed in the following section in their comments on their childhood experience and future wishes.

Other Findings

In analyzing the research data and transcripts of each interview, some larger themes emerged that could not be pegged to just one character or gender/family role. One theme in particular has to do with ingrained ideals from the participants' lived experiences: the respect due among family members, particularly to one's elders and parents.

Other emergent themes had to do with the specific gender roles the women experienced within their own families growing up. Gaining insight into these roles through the women's anecdotal responses helps to better understand from what cultural background these women negotiated the characters on *George Lopez*.

Respect

In terms of identifying and accepting certain familial behaviors and relationships on the show that center on respect, the women took an oppositional view. While many instances of disrespect on *George Lopez* seem intended for comedic value only, the participants read much

further into it. Instead of the dominant view of simple teasing between characters, the women read large amounts of irreverence. Instances of disrespect were viewed negatively, especially when they consisted of younger family members acting rudely towards an older one. This is not to say that the women did not enjoy some comedic value in the teasing or rude one-liners, but often in some funny moments of the show, the women wore looks of shock rather than mirth.

During the course of interview two, the participants made several comments pertaining to respect, particularly as it relates to how it operates on an inter-generational level with the family unit. In examining the George/Benny relationship, the study participants read mutual disrespect in their highly antagonistic behavior. Reigning prominent in this reading of disrespect were George's behavior and dialogue in the "You Dropped a Mom on Me" (Caplan & Regalbuto, 2005b) episode. Throughout the episode, George tries his hardest to keep his mother from permanently moving into his house, before agreeing resignedly at the end. The participants interpreted George's reaction to a family member in need as almost unthinkable, and the sign of the highest disrespect. Again, the participants internalized the text and compared it to their own lived experience in describing the televised scenario.

Eva: In the show, the dad, I mean the guy, George Lopez, does not want to be living with his mother. At all. Like, and he even expresses it, like "I don't want you in my house." But in my family, it would never be like that. Even if you didn't like the person, if they needed a spot to stay, you would let them stay. I mean, you might not like it, but you know, you're going to suck it up because, you know, they provided for you when you were growing up, so it only makes sense that you do the same.

Gloria: I agree with Eva because, how he was just like, I would say mean to his parents, like, I know my parents would never be like that. They would do anything for their parents, and I kind of find it disrespectful the way that he interacts with her, and says certain things to her, like I know that my parents wouldn't do things like that. And I think maybe all of us, or most of us, don't relate to certain things on there because our parents are like, they were born in Mexico, and raised in Mexico, as opposed to maybe I believe George Lopez is more like, his parents were

probably from Mexico, but he was born here. So I think that's why we can't relate as much.

Sara: I can't really relate to him and his mom, in my opinion, because my mom, she's very respectful to her mother, and my dad too. They treat them as if they were such a respectful person up there.

These participants seemed bothered by the way George treats his mother. To them, accepting an immediate family member into their household is done without question, especially when that family member is experiencing a hardship.

Interviewer: Can you describe George as a son?

Veronica: He's so... In my opinion, he's not a true son. Like – how does he act as a son? He doesn't act like a son. He just... he talks more to Benny the way a neighbor would, or even like a brother, like Elena said. But, he's not... there's nothing typical of a son from him.

Mary: I also think, like, he always tends to be taking revenge on how she used to be with him growing up as a kid. And, a real Mexican would be like, "Okay, that's forgotten. Now you're older, you need my help, and here I am for anything, in case you need anything." He just tends to always whine, "Well, this is the way you treated me, so this is the way I'm going to treat you." It doesn't portray—

Elena: There's a guy that I know who his mom has not been a very good mom to him throughout growing up. Even now, married, she has this gorgeous house, and ... she charges him rent, and it's her own son. And she understands that they have a baby, I think his ride wasn't working at time, they were low with income. Even then, she didn't want—she made them move everything into the trailer, and then when she asked for a deposit from her own son, and he's like, "Mom, I still need to work. Let me get the deposit—I'll give it to you later," she was like, "You don't have the deposit? You can't stay here." So, he had to move all his stuff back to his wife's ... grandparent's house, and they stay there ... But, even though she's done that to her own son, he loves her. He knows that about his mom. He knows that his mom doesn't have his back, but he still loves his mom. And no matter what, he's always there for her. And it's kind of like that's how it is.

This idea of disrespect between son and mother on *George Lopez* also brought about a more personalized look at the linguistic framework for respect in the Spanish language.

Ana: Like, I know my grandparents, they weren't the best parents either and they made a lot of mistakes. But regardless, all my dad's brothers and sisters, they're all so respectful. They refer to them, because in Spanish it's different, like you can

refer to people like common people – just “tu” – or in more respectful situations, say usted. So my dad and all his brothers, they refer to my grandparents as usted whenever they talk to them. Us, for me and my brother and cousins, we talk to our parents as tu. It’s different.

Sara: I talk to my dad as *usted*, and my mom as *tu*. So I talk to my dad in a more, what do you call it? Less personal way.

Ana: Yeah, less personal, more respectful.

Sara: More respectful way.

Some participants also broached the topic of respect when speaking of the relationship between Carmen and Max on *George Lopez*. Here again, participants read disrespect in the antagonist relationship between brother and sister. And once again, the participants felt that seniority accorded Carmen more respect from her younger familial counterpart.

Ana: I know in a lot of families, the older sibling is – older siblings are respected you know. There’s a lot of respect for your older siblings and stuff. And with her and her brother they’re just like, you know, whatever. Like, he’s telling about – he’s talking about her with her shirt off with her boyfriend and stuff-

Eva: - and he said it in front of the parents!-

Ana: That was also very, very, like, untypical because at that point, my mom would have been like POP.

Rose: Oh, yeah, that’s a difference too. How she said “Go up to your room.” Our parents don’t say “Go to your room.” Our parents, you’ll see something coming towards you.

Interviewer: Alright, so what else about the brother, Max’s character? Do you guys have anything else to say about his character?

Gloria: I agree with what Rose said. But, like, I have a little brother and he’s pretty blunt about things, but he’s not disrespectful. Like, he would never come out saying “Oh, but did you have your top off?” You know, you don’t say things like that. So, I feel like he knows, like my little brother knows where to draw the line, and he wouldn’t come out of his mouth saying something like that. He would probably be blunt, but he wouldn’t be disrespectful.

In these comments, the participants display their pre-conceived tendency to attach respect to age. Much as a mother deserves it from her son, older siblings seem to warrant a certain

amount of reverence from the younger ones. But as Ana and Rose note, it is not just the younger brother who should be aware of codes of respect. In their families, parents teach and enforce respectful behavior. Instead of laughing along with Max or handing out a mild punishment as Angie did, the participants explain that punishment for stepping outside the lines of respectful behavior is swift and perhaps more severe.

Growing Up Mexican in Florida: Mexican-American Daughters and Women

When the questioning began in each of the three interviews, some of the first responses the participants made were comments rejecting the portrayal of the *George Lopez* family as Mexican-American. And throughout the interviews, the participants used experiences with their own families to negotiate the gender and family roles they saw presented on the screen, often specifically comparing *George Lopez* characters to Mexican ideals. What is it, then, in the participants' lived experience that caused them to read *George Lopez* as "too Americanized" and not authentically Mexican like their own families? This section explores what it means to the study participants to be Mexican-American girls and women. Drawing from stories and comments made during the interviews about how they grew up in their families and communities and learned Mexican and Mexican-American family roles.

Women's roles. Each interview contained questions about the participants' upbringing and how gender and family roles operated within their own families. When asked what chores or responsibilities they had within their families growing up, many participants responded by detailing more traditional domestic roles for women. Most participants describe a marked difference in the roles or chores that are expected of girls within the Mexican household.

Domestic chores. Elena related an example of how a woman's role operates within the more traditionally *machista* Mexican household when speaking of her sister-in-law. When

Elena's sister-in-law lived with her, Elena witnessed how she catered to her husband, and strongly objected to the subservient role she saw in her relative

Elena: She would wait on him. And she was raised here. She was raised here, but she would wait on him. And she watches TV—I'm sure she knows of other ways of, you know ... And she would still wait on him, and I would tell her, "Why are you waiting on him? He's not no king. He's not nothing, to me, more special than you are. If he'd wait on you on Monday, and you'd wait on him on Tuesday, I don't see why you should be waiting on him Monday through Saturday." Or, Sunday. ... And she was like, "Oh, no!" She was to the point where she would wash his clothes, she would put it back up for him in his room, she would do his bed, serve him his dinner, pick up his plates. It was...it would get me pissed off. And I have nothing to do with it. I'm not—you know what I mean? And it would get me so mad, like, "You don't need to be doing this."

Girls in interview two had extremely similar stories and expressed the expected role of women with their families growing up by relating the difference in chores and behaviors between the women in their families and the men.

Gloria: My brothers don't do anything. If they do something it's because they want to do it, which is never, so they don't ever do anything. So, if my brothers come home from work and, like everyone else ate, it's my job or my mom's job to warm up the food, to serve them, do they want drinks, do they want – that's how it is at my house ... if I'm doing something, it's like "drop everything you're doing and serve your brothers" as soon as they came home from work and they're tired and hungry and whatever. My brothers ... everything is done for them. Their job is to go to work, come home, watch TV, mow the lawn, stuff like that. But as far as housework, they don't do anything.

Sara: My boyfriend ... his family is very traditional, you know, with gender roles, and his mom used to work and she would come home and she would still have to clean and wash the dishes, cook, and she pretty much has taught her son, my boyfriend, that that's fine. And it's been very hard for me to, like, get him from that idea and try to teach him come on, we've got to work together and all these things. And my dad, like, he thinks it's ok. So he will actually whenever we go and we eat, they sit down at the table, we have to serve them, we have to cook. If there's no space for us to sit, we have to wait and stand up, and it just makes me feel really, really bad, like the way that they, like, you know? But that's the respectful way that you're supposed to behave, so you know, you have no, like, choice. So that's one thing that I don't really like that much

Eva: Yeah ... I would have to do dishes. And my mom, she would always be like, "How are you supposed to please your husband if you can't clean? Go clean the

bathroom. How are you supposed to please your husband if you can't make tortillas from scratch? ... So she's always been saying you've got to know how to cook and clean so you can please your husband and he won't run away or whatever. But I guess that's one of the rules.

The women, in relating these stories, make it clear that though the expectations of them were traditional and relegated their role of woman as subservient and domestic in nature, they were not pleased with these roles. As some participants describe in the next section, the women all voiced plans to break away from such traditional expectations of women in their futures as adult women, wives and mothers.

Dating. When commenting upon their own families and those in the Mexican community, all participants spoke of a double-standard that exists between girls and their male family members. In particular, the participants spoke to social situations such as dating, and spending time away from home with friends.

For instance, Cristina speaks about the disparity between what she and her brother were allowed to do as teens. Her brother was given more allowance in what he could do in his social life, and his action more easily met with approval from their parents. When asked to examine this discrepancy, Cristina was quick to point to gender as an underlying reason.

Interviewer: Why do you think there is a difference?

Cristina: I think it has to do with gender. In their heads, males can do certain things, and women should *not* do certain things. And I believe they don't want me to get caught up in, I guess, the wrong friends and in order to avoid that it could be that they just see the mistakes they made with him and are trying to correct that with me. But I kind of see them more as, I'm a female, he's a male and "this is what you should be doing, and this is what he could be doing."

Interviewer: You said they'd be lenient with him about some things, like what kind of things?

Cristina: Well, like, for instance, um ... If he were to go out with a girl, just him and a girl, they wouldn't worry about him as much. He could stay out till whatever time of night and come back and they would know nothing's going to go wrong.

But if I were to do the same thing, they'd need to know the guy I'm going with. They need to have his phone number, they need to have met him at least twice before they'll let me go out just with him. They'll need to, I don't know. I feel like they're very judgmental and they look at the guy and make sure he's ok. Approve – they have to pre-approve of him before I can even consider going anywhere with him. Even if it's just in a group setting, but especially when it's a one-on-one kind of thing.

Other participants had similar experiences with their families. Their brothers and males in general are given more liberty, whereas girls are kept closer to home, and expected to follow certain codes of behavior when it comes to dating. For instance, in interview two, Gloria's comments about always being looked after by her brothers, and feeling that she has to watch that her behavior is acceptable in front of them leads to a discussion of how and why boys are treated differently than girls when it comes to dating. Gloria then explains why she thinks this is the case.

Gloria: I think it has a lot to do with the different roles, I guess you could say, that a guy has. Like, I feel like even if ... you have a younger sibling and he's a boy, like ... it has been instilled in your little brother to protect your sister. So, that's how I see the boys. They're always looking out, like even if the sister's older, they're always looking out for the sister because she's a female and that's what you're supposed to do.

Interviewer: What else exists in your family that's different if you're a girl versus a boy?

Gloria: Going out. Doing – having boyfriends, girlfriends. Like, ok he has a girlfriend. That's ok. If you want to go out they question you extremely, like “Who are you gonna go with?” and then like after asking all those questions, you might not even be able to go. With them, it's like “Ok, where are you going?” “Oh, I'm going here.” “Alright, don't be back to late.” You know, they don't get really questioned, it's like “Where are you going. I know where he's going. He can take care of himself.” And with us it's like, “You have to go with your brother” or you have to go with someone they know, or you have to go, you know. So that was a big difference between me and my brothers.

Rose: Yeah, I can relate totally to that. Like, my brother, he was the only boy, so when he was in the university, if he called, good. If he didn't, you know, he'll call soon. But me, if I don't call my mom one day, my mom's like “What? What were you doing? Who were you with? Why didn't you call me?” And I'm like, “But, how

come Jr. doesn't have to call you everyday?" "Because he's a boy." And I'm just like, "That's not my fault I'm a girl." And my mom's like, she goes, "You know that I never, like, prevented you from doing, like if you wanted to go to school just because you were a girl, but you have to realize that girls are just more harshly than boys." And even, like, now that I'm older, I'm like, once you start hearing what people say, you're like, "Oh, how could she, like, go live with him?" And if it was my cousin, they're like "Oh when are you guys getting married?" But if it's one of my girl cousins it's like, "How could she do that? What a disgrace." But if it was one of my guy cousins it's just like "Oh, well it was about time they got together because they were going out." But, you know, girls have always been judged more harshly than guys.

Gloria: I can totally relate to what Rose is saying, because my brother just got this girl pregnant. And, like, my parents are the happiest people in the world. But if I came home and told my parents that I'm pregnant, oh all hell would break loose. But since that's not their daughter, it's like, I know they're happy because they're having a grandchild. But it's not as bad as if I came home and was like "OK, I'm pregnant, you know. And I'm not married or anything." So I could so see that happening with the girl's that get really, like, if you do something wrong, it's ten times worse than if a guy does something wrong, because they're not, I don't know, its just worse for us.

Sara: The parents would be proud of the boy, "Yeah, we're gonna have a grandchild" and then the mom for, like the girl would be like, "My daughter. What have you done?"

Eva: When I went to Mexico, you know, like, I would go out with my aunt – we're the same age – and we'd always go see the hot guys, tra la la, you know, like girls do on vacation. And it was getting really late, and I was having so much fun, and she was like "Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh! This night is almost done. We have to go home." And I'm like, "Why? You know, I'm on vacation here. Why do I have to go home?" And she's like "Everyone's gonna think you're a slut." I'm like "Why?" And she's like, "Well, cause you know good girls are supposed to be home before the sun sets now." So I have to go home, and I was so disappointed. But it is true. Like in Mexico, where we're from, if you come late then you are a slut.

Changing times. In contrast to what the women described they felt were marked domestic expectations for women within their household growing up, was the participants' admiration for the strong character they saw in Angie, and the equal partnership she and George exhibited in their marriage. Though they may reminisce over more traditional gender roles, many make clear their intentions for equitable relationships in their adult married lives.

Veronica: Oh, yeah! I—from the very, very beginning—to this day, I will wait on my dad hand and foot. But, that’s about the only man I wait on hand and foot, because I won’t...because I’ve always, always been the big and strong one. I am not waiting on anybody! If anybody’s going to wait on anybody, somebody’s going to be waiting on me.

Mary: But, ourselves—ourselves, like, my husband and I? I don’t wait on him. You know, it’s like, if he gets home first, then he’s starting on dinner. Or, he gets home early or whatever, he’s going to start on laundry. It’s not like I have to do anything, and it’s very important because to a certain extent, they’re all Mexican, and I know my husband can get sometimes, I guess...If I worked to let him, he’d probably be like, “I’m okay with this.” But, it’s like, you know, I’m trying to work, I’m trying to work, I’m trying to go to school, I’m trying to do this. You have to help me—

Veronica: I even used to tell my mom, “When I get older I’m going to... marry an American man. A white man who likes bread, who likes to eat sandwiches, and who likes to get up and do things for himself, because no way in hell I’m waiting on anybody, and I’m not making tortillas, slaving myself in the kitchen.” And, I got lucky—I got Juan, and he’s very Americanized. I mean, he went to college, he lived on his own, he knows how to do his own laundry, he knows how to cook. So, we share our responsibility. He bathes Isabel one day, I bathe her the next day. So, we...our role--or our family life--with me, and him, and Isabel, it’s half and half, you know? ... I got what I wanted; I’m not waiting on anybody.

The participants in these comments display a desire to move away from their more traditional upbringing and embrace a different ideal of woman. These descriptions, evident in all three interviews, echo the way the women decoded *George Lopez*. In their dominant reading of Angie’s role, they accepted a woman’s role as equal, strong, independent and professionally successful.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore gender roles encoded in *George Lopez*, a television comedy show about a Mexican-American family. My study also sought to explore how these roles are later decoded by an audience of young Mexican-American women. This study does not attempt to provide a generalized view of how an audience reads *George Lopez*, but rather the intention is to give an understanding of how this group of women reads the show's gender and family roles.

Summary of Findings

As this study is two-fold, so are the research questions and findings, though they are closely related and mirror one another in many ways. The research questions central to this thesis were "What gender and family roles are encoded on *George Lopez*?" and "How do young Mexican-American women read gender roles on *George Lopez* and negotiate them with their lived experience?" These questions brought about important findings, both as regards gender, and the influence of the participants' cultural capital on their reading of the text.

The textual analysis portion of this study found that though the series highlights the importance of family, the dialogue uses comedy as a convention to criticize the idealism of the perception of perfect families. As concerns female gender roles as exhibited by the show's women characters, *George Lopez* offers an interesting take: it both replicates and reinforces the dominant Mexican social view of a traditional mother, while incorporating the more liberated, modern, strong woman championed in feminist theory and Anglo-American progressive social views.

George Lopez produces an ideal of woman in Angie, while portraying the other roles of women on the show in a negative way. Angie is an amalgam of both American and Latino/Mexican cultural values for women. She is the ultimate mother, caring wife, sexually

reserved and seemingly pure woman of *marianismo* stereotypes, yet she also displays an image of woman as intelligent, independent, successful in business, vocal in her opinions, and an equal partner in marriage and authority, an image that seems to dominate the American television screen. However, the incorporation of traditional gender roles into the modern stops with Angie's character. Neither Benny nor Carmen ascribed in any way to traditional Mexican cultural feminine ideals, a finding echoed in the audience analysis.

In the audience analysis portion of the study, findings were much the same as regards women's roles. Most of the participants' attitudes were at various points resistant to the gender role messages on George Lopez, and their readings were accordingly analyzed as mainly negotiated and somewhat oppositional. However, this was not always the case. Especially as it concerns Angie's portrayal of woman, participants' readings aligned with the dominant ideology.

The purpose of the audience study was to explore how a certain group of women negotiate their lived experience with the gendered roles they see presented in *George Lopez*. Indeed, the way in which these women do so has become the major finding of this study. Much as Press (1995) found that class affects how women read television shows, even comedies such as *I Love Lucy*, and Scott (2003) found that religious values affect how Mormons read television texts, so too does this study find that Mexican cultural heritage affects how these women read *George Lopez*.

In the previous chapter, one participant, Cristina, had difficulty in explaining what made the character of Carmen an "Anglo-girl" rather than a Mexican-American. She just knew. Cristina's inability to articulate what makes a person "Anglo" or Mexican-American may lie in the difficulty she and scholars have in defining exact parameters of what is *Mexicanidad*, or even *Latinidad* in general. In this instance, Cristina can pull from her lived experience to say what

something *is not* – Carmen is not Mexican-American – but she has trouble explaining exactly what Mexican-American *is*. The difficult, somewhat controversial, task of summing up multiple cultures into the title Latino, and indeed even one culture into the title Mexican presents a problem for Cristina, as it has others. These ethnic titles seem to be vague notions that change depending on each individual’s lived experience. It is for this reason that I included in my research interview questions and a findings section on the participants’ lived experience. It is also this lived experience, however, which in part informed the participants’ reading of *George Lopez*. As was evident in the textual analysis, and from the women’s responses, certain known Mexican cultural stereotypes do apply to this study: ideas like *familiasmo*, *marianismo* and *machismo*, as well as ideas about respect.

No matter exactly what defines Mexican, however, the participants often based their negotiated readings on a character’s gender role not living up to some Mexican cultural ideal. An example of this is the participants’ rejection of Benny as a grandmother for being “slutty” and gambling and drinking, for this is not what a grandmother *should* do, nor did it in any way resemble the way their own grandmother would behave. Another example of the influence of the women’s lived experience on their readings was the negotiated-oppositional view they took of respect within the show’s family, specifically in the way they read George as a son. Through internalizing the notion of disrespect by using real-life comparisons and hypothetical situations involving their own families, the women arrived at a reading which refused to accept such behavior.

Theories

Cultural Studies: Encoding Decoding Model

In his encoding/decoding essay, Hall (1993) argues that messages, such as the *George Lopez* text, have a “complex structure of dominance.” During each of the four stages of

communication, these messages are marked or “imprinted” by outside factors – by institutional power relations. Relevant to this study are the institutions of family, and societal gender expectations. According to Hall (1993), a text or message like *George Lopez* would be created, disseminated, received and reproduced with certain cultural or gender power structures embedded in the text. By embedding these power relations in a text in a continuous communication circuit, a message is able to perpetuate a dominant or hegemonic code. Examples of these dominant codes as it applies to my study are gender roles and the Americanized Latino.

Hall (1993) argues that the communication circuit reproduces a pattern of domination. Thus, the gender messages encoded in *George Lopez* that represent an institutional power relationship between men and women are decoded by the women who watch it and reproduced in their daily lives, and in doing so fed back into the circuit. For instance, the women see the empowered role of Angie tempered by her role as a stereotypical Catholic Mary-esque “ultimate mom,” and not only accept this portrayal of woman, but as seen in chapter five, opt to emulate it.

Another facet of *George Lopez* that participants noted was the lack of Mexican culture on the show. In portraying its characters and situations as “too Americanized,” one could argue that produces are perpetuating a dominant ideology of what it means to be Latino by embedding the hegemonic codes of American culture into this television message. By showing Latinos not as distinct cultural groups, such as Mexican-Americans, and instead generalizing them into an Americanized Latino group, a media message can reproduce the dominant or mainstream ideology – whether it pertains to gender, family, speech, or appearance of Latinos.

Of interest in considering hegemonic codes is whether an audience is, as Morely (1992) posits, unable to exert power to negotiate the text, or whether an audience is active and exhibits some agency in the ability to recognize interpret the dominant ideology they find in a media text.

Scholars who research women and magazines as a media text (Goodman 2002; Durham 2004) have found that though some women may be able to identify dominant ideology in messages, they are not able to entirely resist the hegemonic codes contained therein. Thus, by constantly receiving “Americanized” messages, the participants themselves start to accept the dominant American messages.

Likewise, Johnson (2000) might argue that *George Lopez* is producing and reproducing a dominant ideology with the ultimate result of making its audience more Americanized. Johnson (2000) says that ethnic media produced in the United States have assimilative functions. Though it may be difficult to pinhole *George Lopez* as ethnic media, it can be argued that this show might operate in a similar way.

The Feminine Ideal: Feminist Perspective

As stated previously, both the textual analysis and the audience responses showed Angie to embody those aspects of woman central to both a traditional *marianismo* feminine ideal as well as those of a more progressive feminine ideal. The women, much like the *George Lopez* producers, have synthesized the two cultural ideals of what it is to be a woman to create their own feminine ideal, much as they themselves absorb and embody elements of both cultures.

Though the participants may reject the submissive role of woman tied to *marianismo* and embrace the ideal of an “equal” partnership for women, their view of women’s gender role goes no further than that. All the women voiced opinions that they wanted to emulate Angie, and be a similar wife, and a similarly “ultimate” mother. No participants took more extreme feminist viewpoints and rejected the ideas of marriage, or being closely associated with the home. They participants likewise eschewed the hyper-sexualized idea of woman sometimes present in Benny or Carmen. Their feminine ideal shoots for equality, not dominance.

One of the hallmarks of feminist research is that it is most often by women, about women, and for women. In this latter regard, the research conducted during this thesis has benefited women by allowing a forum for a certain group of women, the study participants, to come together to share their lived experiences. As a result of this communal sharing and meeting, hopefully the women of this study were further empowered, achieved a greater self-understanding, or made a stronger connection to their friends and family members with whom they share these experiences.

Filling a Gap in Research

The implications of the findings of this study support and enrich the body of literature about audience research, Latinas, and theories dealing with cultural studies.

Most importantly, this study adds to the body of research literature as this is the first study to explore how Mexican-American women negotiate their traditional lived experience with gender roles on a Latino television show. Though studies exist that examine Spanish-language television shows, Latina magazines, and Latino and Spanish-language ethnic media, Latino television shows, possibly due in large part to their scarcity, have gone mostly unexplored. In particular, I have to date found no studies focusing on gender and *George Lopez*. While the topics of interest in previous Latina studies have focused on issues like body image, beauty, and the identity of being Latino, this study explores ideas of gender and family roles.

Limitations

The first part of this thesis study consisted of a small-scale qualitative textual analysis to explore the gender and family roles encoded in *George Lopez*. Since this part of the study focused only on ten episodes chosen from only two seasons of the show, it cannot be said to encompass all content from each of the show's seven seasons and thus the results cannot be generalized to content of the entire series.

Indeed, episode selection itself proved complicated, and was not representative of the show's entire run. At the time of this study, *George Lopez* as a series had not yet been released on DVD or VHS for consumer purchase. Thus, all the episodes taped for this study were done during the course of season five, or over the summer when re-runs of season four were also shown.

One final limitation of the textual analysis portion of the study is that though it explores the encoded family/gender roles in the show, it does so by using the secondary source – the show itself. Originally, the research plan included interviews with writers, producers, actors, and others involved in the creation of *George Lopez*. Though many attempts were made to contact both these creative producers and their representatives, all attempts were unfortunately unsuccessful.

The second part of this study was a small-scale qualitative inquiry focusing on the way a particular group of women decode gender and family roles from a televisual text. As such, it is unlikely that the results from this study can be generalized to a large population. Despite this limitation often associated with qualitative inquiry, the study does offer an understanding of how first-generation Mexican-American women of similar education, and socio-economic class negotiate the gender roles they see presented in the media with their lived experience.

The women in the study, though self-described “regular viewers” of *George Lopez*, may have been particularly influenced in their answers by the content they watched in the episode they previewed before giving the interviews. Perhaps the participants answers would have varied greatly had the content of the show they watched focused more on, say, the show's children, rather than the George/Benny relationship.

An additional limitation was the difficulty and inability of procuring any in-depth demographic information about the *George Lopez* viewing audience. Resources available to me did not include, for example, Nielsen statistics, from which I could have derived this information. Instead, what I was able to produce in the study was gleaned from short mentions in trade publications and other sources. Having information on the viewing audience would help future researchers understand just who is watching the show and receiving its message.

Finally, as mentioned in the reflexivity section of chapter three, I am not a member of the group I interviewed. Though I feel my education and close friendships have lent me some understanding of this group of women, the fact remains that as a white woman from an upper-middle class family who studies communication, I am in this case an outsider. Though I believe it is not the object of qualitative communication to remain objective, nor is it possible, I tried my utmost to remain objective and not influence the results or conversations. That the study's participants and I do not share the same lived experience may also be a limitation because they may have felt more inhibited in responding openly to me during interviews than if I were a Mexican-American myself.

Suggestions for Future Research

In conducting this research, though there were a multitude of television studies to learn from, I found none focusing in a qualitative way on English-language Latino television. The aforementioned limitations, in addition to the gap in the current body of literature, leave much room for future research in this area. In fact, the possibilities of building on these thesis findings seem limitless. Future research can change parameters or the focus of the study in subtle or more extreme ways to explore the topic and related areas further. Changes made in the approach, audience, text and theory offer some suggestions for future research.

One suggestion for future research would be to gain access to the creative producers of *George Lopez*, as I attempted to do, and interview them to analyze the encoding process, instead of writing a textual analysis. This study was qualitative in nature, and so it sought in-depth responses from a small group of individuals. Other research projects might focus on a quantitative approach to yield different results that could triangulate those presented here. Examples would be conducting a content analysis, or using surveys to glean insight from the audience.

Obvious suggestions for future research have to do with altering the audience. For instance, a larger audience might yield more varied or comprehensive results, especially if the audience were to include Mexican-Americans from other states, or males. Additionally, an audience could include those who are second or third generation Mexican-Americans which may perhaps show a difference in adherence to traditional values, and so a difference in the way that audience negotiates the text. Another audience suggestion would be to include women who are past the age of 25, or to do a multi-generational study of Mexican-American women and compare their responses to the text. Using a pan-Latino audience, and not solely Mexican-Americans, could also yield interesting results in finding the differences and similarities in readings.

George Lopez is only one show on television. Future studies might examine gender and family roles in other Latino or strongly Latino shows, such as *Ugly Betty*, or movies like *Real Women Have Curves*. An interesting study might also involve a comparison with an African-American show and its audience, or a mainstream American show and its audience.

I used cultural studies and feminist studies to inform my work in this thesis. However, there are many other theories one might employ to further explore this topical area, as it relates

to Latinas, television, audience studies, and gender roles. A study which employed identity theory might explore how exactly the women in the audience are forming their own identities based on their status as first generation Mexican-Americans, and how a show like *George Lopez* might affect those identities. Similarly, a study might use assimilation theory to understand what sort of an impact *George Lopez* and its portrayals have on assimilating the audience to dominant ideologies. A study which employed social learning theory might try to explain how these women use *George Lopez* as a tool to construct their own social reality, or how character portrayals have affected these viewers.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Santa Monica, California, Maggie McClelland grew up near Los Angeles, California; Keller, Texas; and Tampa, Florida. She is the eldest of three siblings, and an aunt to one niece. Maggie has a BS in public relations and a BA in Spanish, both from the University of Florida. Maggie's love of travel and Latin America inspired her to pursue a master's degree with an international focus. As a graduate student at the University of Florida, Maggie focused on topics relating to Latin America, international communication, and the media. During graduate school, Maggie even had the opportunity to take a journalism course for which students traveled to Belize to write a story. She also had the opportunity to attend the Latin American Studies Association's conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. After she graduates, Maggie plans to pursue a career in international humanitarian aid with a non-profit organization.