Article

The Evolving Landscape of Spanish Language Representation in U.S. Media: From Overt to Covert Discrimination

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Abstract: Despite the continuously expanding presence of Spanish-speaking communities in the United States, media representation of the Spanish language and that of its speakers has remained relatively scarce. At present, however, a growing interest in reaching and cashing in on this influential consumer group is forcing significant changes in the mass media communication landscape. Not only are an increasing number of movies and TV shows working with more diverse casts (ethnically, culturally, linguistically, etc.), but there also seems to be a heightened presence of Latinx characters in leading or supporting roles. This tendency, however, does not necessarily mean that mainstream media is becoming more inclusive and less anglocentric. In fact, a careful look at the storylines of individuals who are perceived to be Spanish speakers will reveal that they mostly portray stereotypical roles and behaviors. When their stories *are* told, they are all too often infused with unwarranted messages that portray Latinxs as lazy, unskilled, unintelligible in speech, hypersexual, or simply too 'foreign' to fit in. Whether overtly or covertly expressed, the negative impact of these persistent transgressions has the potential to shape real-world ideologies, attitudes, and prejudices. This paper adopts a critical raciolinguistic perspective, which underscores the co-naturalization of language and race, to highlight the role of media in reinforcing discrimination against the Spanish language and its speakers. In our analysis of six recently popularized TV shows (i.e., *East Los High*, *Family Guy*, *Gentefied*, *Jane the Virgin*, *One Day at a Time*, and *That '70s Show*), we examine the perpetuation of racialized stereotypes toward Latinx characters' linguistic practices with regard to (i) the environment in which they exist, (ii) their mannerisms, (iii) speech patterns, and (iv) interactions with other characters. We demonstrate how these shows' blending of seemingly harmless linguistic ideologies with stereotypical and sensationalized representations grounded in colonial hierarchies reproduces hegemonic interests, perpetuates social inequalities, and places racialized Spanish speakers at a disadvantage.

Keywords: Spanish in the US; language and media; Latinx representation

1. Introduction

Despite the continuously expanding presence of Spanish-speaking communities in the United States, media representation of the Spanish language and its speakers has remained relatively scarce and, when present, often reinforced negative stereotypes[1] (e.g., Negrón-Muntaner 2014; Sánchez-Muñoz and Retis 2022). When their stories *were* told, they were all too often infused with unwarranted messages that painted an unjust view of Latinxs as lazy, unskilled, unintelligible in speech, hypersexual, or simply too 'foreign' to fit in (e.g., Aldama and González 2019; Scharrer et al. 2022; Sowa 2021; and references therein). Currently, however, a growing interest in reaching and cashing in on this influential consumer group is sparking significant changes in the mass media communication landscape. Since the 1990s, the field of regional and national Spanish-speaking radio stations and TV networks has grown exponentially to levels never seen before (e.g., Castañeda 2008). Within the national mainstream media sector (i.e., English-based), the number of networks and organizations that are featuring content in Spanish (or a combination of

English and Spanish) has also grown significantly (e.g., Castañeda 2008). Recent estimates of Spanish-language TV consumption in the U.S. suggest that 72% of Latinxs endorse watching Spanish-language content at least occasionally (Stoll 2023). Not surprisingly, therefore, more and more movies, commercials, and TV shows are featuring increasingly diverse casts (ethnically, culturally, linguistically, etc.), with a heightened presence of Latinx characters in leading or supporting roles. Although this tendency may be interpreted as a positive development, it does not necessarily mean that it is becoming less anglocentric. In light of this observation, we consider it important to reflect on the role of mainstream U.S. media in shaping public perceptions of and attitudes toward the Spanish language and its speakers. As part of this reflection, we ask ourselves the following guiding questions: How are the Spanish language and its speakers represented in mainstream media, and how has this representation evolved over time? In what ways do Spanish language and Latinx media representation reflect power dynamics that reinforce cultural, racial, and linguistic stereotypes toward the Latinx communities? How do language and race intersect in the media, and what are the implications of such practices? In seeking answers to these questions, we will examine the perpetuation of racialized stereotypes toward Latinx characters' and their linguistic practices in six sitcoms through a critical evaluation of (i) the environments in which they exist, (ii) their mannerisms, (iii) their linguistic practices and speech patterns, and (iv) their interactions with other characters. To be sure, these answers may not be straightforward or easily found, but they are crucial to increasing our understanding of how media shapes the way we hear and see the Spanish language and Spanish-speaking communities in the US.

In our analysis, we follow in the footsteps of previous efforts dedicated to sparking dialogue around media representation of Latinx voices and bodies (e.g., Sánchez-Muñoz and Retis 2022). We adopt a critical raciolinguistic approach (e.g., Alim et al. 2016; Hill 1998, 2001, 2008; Flores and Rosa 2015) to a comparative analysis of contemporary American[2] shows (*East Los High*, *Jane the Virgin*, and *One Day at a Time*) with popular sitcoms from the 1990s (*That '70s Show* and *Family Guy*). The 1990s represent a time of increased Latinx media representation across a variety of genres, with the emergence of familiar titles such as *El Mariachi*, *Mi vida loca*, and *Selena*. This decade also marked an increase in broadcasting companies (e.g., *Univision* and *Telemundo*) that were streaming TV shows and movies in Spanish, giving many U.S. Latinxs access to Spanish-language programs right from their homes. Despite these strides, however, U.S. media continued to be saturated with stories of white protagonists, and the dearth of Latinxs in Hollywood remained a prominent issue (Aldama and González 2019). To be sure, although *That '70s Show*, *Family Guy*, and the newer-age series we examine may differ considerably from each other in terms of style, tone, and thematic content, we posit that the comparison is far from irrelevant, as they all explore universal themes including cultural values, stereotypes, and social issues affecting Latinx communities. As such, examining and comparing the cultural and social contexts in which these shows were produced can provide valuable insights into the prevailing attitudes towards Latinidad in their respective time periods. We also seek to examine how these discriminatory ideologies are reproduced in order to expose and challenge the mechanisms of structural racism that serve to maintain the Spanish language and its speakers in a subordinate position (e.g., Leeman 2023).

Of course, we are not the first ones to point out that, at its core, U.S. entertainment media is culturally and racially centered in whiteness and white-dominant practices (e.g., Bernardi 2007; Nygaard and Lagerwey 2020; Vera and Gordon 2003). We are also not the first ones to suggest that media representation is shaped by and intertwined with linguistic ideologies that align with the interests of the dominant social group while simultaneously to the detriment of minoritized groups (e.g., Kircher and Kutlu 2023; Rosa 2016; Sánchez-Muñoz and Retis 2022). While overt discrimination and anti-Latinx biases that were common to U.S. sitcoms in the 1990s have diminished in contemporary media, we will argue that well-disguised attitudes, beliefs, and practices that function to devalue Latinxs and the Spanish language still persist. We will show how, by invoking and blending together

what a priori may be considered harmless and unbiased ideologies with stereotypical and sensationalized representations grounded in colonial hierarchies, mainstream media still reproduces hegemonic interests that place racialized Spanish speakers at a disadvantage. In other words, a careful look at the storylines of individuals who are perceived to be Spanish speakers will reveal that, despite significant progress, stereotypical roles and behaviors remain. What has changed, however, is the subtlety with which these biases are reproduced.

2. Language as a Boundary: *Othering* Spanish Speakers

While the U.S. is a multicultural and multilingual nation, not all languages share the same social status, nor do they occupy the same spaces (e.g., Pavlenko 2002). English, the de facto official language, dominates all areas of life. It is the language of prestige and power and is considered to be an intrinsic part of the American national identity (e.g., Pavlenko 2002). In fact, English monolingualism is not only tolerated; it is considered an acceptable and welcome outcome (e.g., Ellis 2008; Flores and Schissel 2014). Spanish, the second most frequently spoken language, continues to gain ground and strength, mostly due to the rapid growth of the Hispanic population[3]. For some within the dominant group, this changing landscape has resulted in increased awareness and acceptance of other cultures. One would have difficulty arguing against the idea that being bilingual in today's day and age is an asset in most contexts. Evidence of this is the large number of traditional second language learners who, semester after semester, decide to enroll in Spanish courses (e.g., Parma and Bustin 2021). As a result of their academic efforts, they are often celebrated for their emerging bilingualism, even if they cannot always communicate efficiently using that language. Meanwhile, many Latinx bilinguals who have been speaking English and Spanish fluently since childhood are penalized for their lack of literacy skills and for how "informally", "incorrectly" or "inappropriately" they speak[4] (e.g., Flores and Rosa 2015). While it is popularly believed that this disparity simply points out an objective truth about the "inadequacy" of their linguistic practices, the underlying attitudes and motivations of such behavior are neither simple nor linguistic in nature. Rather, they are obscured and driven by misconceptions and stereotypes that highlight the central role that language plays in all domains of our lives, including race (e.g., Flores and Rosa 2015).

The transdisciplinary and intersectional work that examines linguistic and racial considerations falls under the scope of Raciolinguistics (e.g., Alim et al. 2016; Flores and Rosa 2015; Deckard et al. 2020; Lewey 2023). The main premise of this framework is that language and race, which have been argued to be entirely distinct, separate, and independent constructs, are in fact not only interrelated and co-constructed but also intersect with other social markers such as class, gender, sexuality, etc. (e.g., Alim et al. 2016; Flores and Rosa 2015; Rosa 2016).

Although we do not attempt to theorize the nature of this relationship, adopting a raciolinguistic approach can help us examine and highlight the ways language representation shapes our perception of race and vice versa (e.g., Alim et al. 2016). Chief among its concerns is deconstructing the intersection and co-naturalization of colonial history, racial identity, and the perpetuation of linguistic stereotypes in terms of their underlying assumptions and impact on racialized individuals, all of which permeate our everyday practices and behaviors. While these processes of raciolinguistic categorization often go unnoticed in comparison to overt racial bias, their consequences can be equally negative, equally oppressive, and equally unjust.

Drawing on this view, we are particularly interested in understanding how representations of the Spanish language relate to dominant social structures and ideologies. One such example of how covert racism makes its way into everyday discourse practices is through the appropriation and subsequent mockery of the language (e.g., Mock Spanish (Hill 2008)). Though humor may not be considered the most obvious vehicle through which racism is perpetuated, it may in fact be a prime setting for discrimination. Often considered harmless based on the supposedly innocent nature of the interactions, Mock

Spanish relies on stereotypes and generalizations that align with (and are embraced by) a collective's discriminating perception of others (e.g., Hill 2008). As Pascual y Cabo and Rivera-Marín (2021, p. 11) indicated, this practice can take many forms: "sometimes it is simply the addition of the Spanish suffix '-o' to an English word, such as 'no problem-o', or the exaggerated over-pronunciation of Spanish words to inspire mockery or entertainment". Because they conceal their true meaning, these jokes tend to be easily dismissed or framed as irrelevant. Their underlying message, however, evokes the sort of imagery that (re)produces negative attitudes towards those who are perceived as different (i.e., *othering*), which in turn contributes to social tension, inequality, and conflict, regardless of whether this was the intended outcome.

In the context of the U.S., the English language embodies the principles and values assumed to be a core part of the so-called American psyche (e.g., Schildkraut 2003), which has been shaped by and modeled after European colonialism and white Anglo-speakers' attributes (i.e., Europeanness). Because the experiences and perspectives of the dominant group become normalized and expected, individuals who do not speak English (or speak a non-native version of English) often run the risk of being assigned undesirable attributes, behaviors, and identities. This focus on English (monolingualism) is also deeply rooted in raciolinguistic ideologies, which have been created, among other reasons, to preserve boundaries (e.g., Milroy 1999). These boundaries function to separate *us* from *them*, or those who are *in*, from those who are *out*, safeguarding a *status quo* that benefits those at the top of social and linguistic hierarchies. Some of these boundaries are easily identifiable. Others, however, are relatively difficult to detect. This resonates with what Leeman (2023) refers to with the idea that,

> "[...] the construction of Spanish as an essentialized element of Latinx identity, together with dominant ideologies that imagine English (and more specifically, English monolingualism) as a defining characteristic of U.S. national identity, as well as portrayals of "non-standard" and multilingual varieties of English and/or Spanish as deficient, allow for language to function as an under-the-radar tool of racialization". (Leeman 2023, p. xix)

With this under-the-radar tool (Leeman 2023), the language practices of minoritized communities can acquire racial meanings, which in turn are extended to a social group and their cultural practices (e.g., Omi and Winant 2011). This perspective may explain, for example, the pervasive nature of deficit ideologies with regards to black and brown children in the U.S. educational environment (e.g., Holtz et al. 2023). Moreover, the narratives that are often applied to individuals who are perceived to speak Spanish will still frame them as not belonging to the American identity, regardless of whether they actually speak Spanish/English or not. In other words, language is used as a justification to degrade or diminish minority groups–marking them as *others* (e.g., Bucholtz 2019). This disembodiment of language is convenient in that it fits into hegemonic narratives that supposedly construe value based solely on discursive practices (e.g., language appropriateness). In reality, it is a mechanism that serves to justify engaging in color-neutral racism (e.g., Bonilla-Silva 2017). To show how dominant linguistic and cultural attitudes towards the Spanish language and its speakers are perpetuated by mainstream U.S. media, we next examine several popular American sitcoms from the 1990s.

3. An Analysis of Popular U.S. Sitcoms from the Late 1990s

In order to critically examine the intersection of language and race in mainstream media and to establish a baseline for exploring how the co-naturalization of the two constructs has evolved over time, we begin with an examination of two popular sitcoms from the late 1990s. While the 1990s saw a relative increase in TV shows and movies featuring Latinx characters, as well as improved access to Spanish-language media, Latinx-centric stories were still few and far-between in U.S. media during this decade (Aldama and González 2019; Gerbner 1993). However, two highly popular series of this time period, *That '70s Show* and *Family Guy*, both feature Latinx characters that are well-known in U.S.

popular culture. As such, their depictions serve as an informative starting point for making raciolinguistic evaluations of Latinx character portrayals with regard to the environments in which they exist, their mannerisms, their speech patterns, and their interactions with other characters. Specifically, we examine inappropriate naming practices of Latinx characters, the *othering* of Latinxs, the white gaze, educational/occupational stereotypes, and linguistic microaggressions (e.g., Mock Spanish).

3.1. That '70s Show

That '70s Show is a fictional American sitcom centered around the lives of 6 teenagers living in the fictional suburb of Point Place, Wisconsin (That '70s Show (TV Series 1998–2006), n.d.). The show famously features staples of American popular culture throughout the late 70s and early 80s[5], including the rise of video game technology (e.g., "pong") and not-so-subtle nods to 'flower child' and hippie lifestyles. The 1970s in the U.S. were a time of political turmoil, with war raging in Vietnam and internal distrust of the government growing among Americans in the post-Watergate era. The 1970s were also a period of civil unrest, fueled by the mourning of Martin Luther King Jr. and anti-immigrant sentiment building as a result of heated international conflicts (e.g., Schulman 2002). The ideas reflected in this sitcom represent more than a few dated viewpoints that were commonplace in the 1970s. Among others, they represent the continued promotion of racist and ethnocentric ideas that continued to present themselves in American media throughout the turn of the millennia.

Within this show, there is a single Latinx character among a cast of all-white American-born characters. He is referred to as Fez and is portrayed as a foreign exchange student with ambiguous cultural origins. From the start, the environment in which Fez exists predisposes his character to being perceived as 'different' by his white peers. His mysterious 'home country' is one of the longest-running jokes throughout the series, and his true origin is never revealed within the show. Several episodes provide viewers with a glimpse into what his home country might be like, and unsurprisingly, these vague descriptions of Fez's birthplace are riddled with tales of colonization, unsanitary and dangerous living conditions for indigenous people, rampant marijuana usage, and even the suggestion that Fez's community lives in the jungle, eating spiders for sustenance. He embodies many stereotypes assigned to Latinx individuals in English-language media and Western society alike, including a pronounced, sometimes unintelligible accent (and likewise, an artificially reduced capacity for speaking and understanding English). Fez is also characterized by an insatiable sexual appetite, reminiscent of the notorious 'Latin Lover' trope and the hypersexualization of Latinxs in the media (e.g., Mandl 2019; Popelková 2015).

The characterization of Fez is a prime example of how media may reflect real-world power dynamics that reinforce stereotypes towards Latinx communities. For example, although Fez is never officially confirmed to be of Latin American origin, his actor, Wilmer Valderrama (originally from Venezuela), reported using a combination of various Latin accents to produce Fez's speech (Kubota 2021). It should be noted, however, that Fez is never featured speaking Spanish in the series. Nonetheless, through his mannerisms, Fez exhibits characteristics associated with numerous Latinx stereotypes in American popular culture; he is often portrayed as uncivilized, primitive, unmotivated, and lazy (e.g., Mandl 2019; Popelková 2015). His perceived "non-conformance" as a non-native English speaker is represented with a caricatured strong accent, which in turn subjects him to treatment that insinuates a reduced value of the English he speaks. The jokes, insults, and transgressions he faces from interacting with other main characters are a key theme throughout the series. For example, consider the following example from season 8, episode 21 (2006), in which one of Fez's friends, Jackie, finds out that one of Fez's hometown friends will be visiting Wisconsin: "Oh great, another mocha-skinned weirdo in tight pants who can make any word sound like boogadaboogadaboogada" (Trainer 2006). This type of comment is frequent throughout the series, serving to 'otherize' Fez from multiple angles, such as his complexion, his 'foreign' sense of style, and his accent.

Even Fez's name deserves a discussion of its own. According to the show's producers, the nickname 'Fez' is actually an acronym for 'foreign exchange student' (F.E.S.), later changed to 'Fez' for stylistic purposes. The moment in which the gang meets Fez for the first time (season 4, episode 20; 2002) is a startling caricature of the indexical bleaching that Latinxs have faced for years (e.g., Squires 2014, 2020; Bucholtz 2016). The scene opens with the other three young white men in the friend group discovering Fez hung by his collar on the hook of the janitor's closet—a result of bullying by some peers. After freeing him, the men introduce themselves. When it is time for Fez to say his name, the school bell rings for an extended period of time, effectively preventing the audience from learning Fez's real name but confirming that it is significantly long. The rest of the group stares at him blankly, and one character remarks, "Yeah, I'm not gonna remember that" (Trainer 2002a). For the remainder of the series, everyone simply refers to him as Fez.

This scene propagates the stereotype that Latinxs tend to have long, complicated, and difficult-to-pronounce names[6] and illustrates how and why Fez is renamed against his will. His supposed-to-be friends refuse to even attempt pronouncing his actual name, and in its place, they assign him an anglicized and reductionist acronym. For Fez, this renaming strips him of any relation to a specific cultural, racial, or ethnic group, which is only furthered by the resistance of the show's creative directors to assign Fez a specific nationality. In the renaming process, Fez's friends propagate the notion that nonconformity to the standardized language ideology is justification for burdening marginalized linguistic groups in order to benefit white speaking subjects (e.g., Bucholtz 2016). Whether it be through mispronunciation, purposeful anglicization, or the deliberate imposition of a new name onto a racialized body, the process of calling someone out of their name severs their ties to the ethnoracial specificity of their identity and, in a way, denies their legitimacy (e.g., Bucholtz 2016).

For someone who has never personally experienced ethnoracial renaming, it may be difficult to understand why this issue is so problematic. However, we must consider that names, rather than merely serving to arbitrarily identify an individual, are indexical forms with significant social and cultural meanings (Bucholtz 2016). In fact, previous research indicates that unconscious bias against non-white-sounding names can have significant and grave implications for individuals in terms of their economic and labor-market prospects, as well as their self-esteem (e.g., Cotton et al. 2008). While this phenomenon has been well studied with regard to typically 'Black-sounding' names, Latinxs individuals are not exempt from similar prejudice (Cotton et al. 2008). For example, the results of a study examining participants' names in the workplace showed those individuals with names that are perceived as Hispanic were more likely to be rated as suitable for low-status occupations when compared to applicants with white-sounding names of the same credentials (King et al. 2006).

The discussion of *white gaze* (e.g., Flores and Rosa 2015) is necessary in evaluating the race relations and harmful raciolinguistic attitudes directed towards ethnic minorities in *That '70s Show*. According to Flores and Rosa (2015), the *white gaze* can be described as the privileged white majority's view of the cultural and linguistic practices of racialized groups. In other words, the *white gaze* represents the hegemonic white standards through which all actions, individuals, and groups are interpreted, especially those stemming from minoritized communities. From a raciolinguistic perspective, we can identify the relationship of the *white gaze* to the white listening subject—those who interpret non-white and non-conforming linguistic practices as deviant based solely on arbitrary racialized positions in society (Flores and Rosa 2015). In the case of *That '70s Show*, Fez acts as the racialized subject whose speech and cultural practices are under constant scrutiny by the white listening subjects with whom he associates. In one scene, an older character, Red, is trying to teach Fez how to pronounce the word "America", but becomes increasingly frustrated as Fez repeats back "A-me-ði-ca". When he tests Fez's pronunciations of similar words, such as "Eric", Fez repeats them back in a way that Red, as the white listening subject, interprets as 'correct'. However, Fez's persisting inability to pronounce "America", like Red, frustrates

him to the point that he begins screaming the word in Fez's face. This scene is a pivotal example of the tendency of the white listening subject to interpret racialized speech as deviant or wrong, despite the lack of concrete suggestions for improvements or the identification of what was actually said 'incorrectly'. Likewise, it further propagates racialized stereotyping towards Latinx characters through criticisms of his linguistic tendencies and speech patterns.

We draw our attention now to the propagation of occupational stereotypes against Latinxs in *That '70s Show*. Let us first consider the stereotyping of Fez as someone suited for low-skill work. For example, in season 5, episode 6 (2002), in which Fez carries a white character (Red's) bag to his car, Red remarks that Fez appears to possess a "natural talent for handling luggage" (Trainer 2002b). In another episode, the character of Jackie tells Fez she has created a new character in *The Wizard of Oz* to represent him since there are no foreigners in the movie (Trainer 2002c). She then reveals that Fez's character is the butler. Both of these examples are indications of the existence of stereotypes surrounding Latinxs as unskilled laborers unworthy of meaningful work or education. Likewise, in season 1, episode 5 (1998), Eric, a white character, beats out Fez for a job at a local fast-food joint after he and the other characters all interview for the position. While Fez's answers suggest that he has no idea how to be successful in a job interview, Eric gives the interviewer all the 'right answers' in an articulate and educated manner (Trainer 1998). This contrast between Eric's achievement and Fez's follies suggests that Fez is merely not destined for occupational success.

3.2. Family Guy

The show *Family Guy* centers around the Griffins, an American family living in the fictional New England town of Quahog, Rhode Island (MacFarlane and Zuckerman 1999–Present). The Griffins are comprised of parents Peter and Lois Griffin, their three children Meg, Chris, and Stewie, and a talking pet dog named Brian. The show has aired since the late 1990s and has endured multiple cultural shifts, including recent efforts to expand the rights and representation of marginalized communities. As we see it, the show's popularity and role as a staple in popular culture important in the context of how stereotypes apply to and affect various characters. This is especially salient when considering that, to date, 22 seasons and more than 400 episodes have been produced. Notably, there are no Latinx main characters in the series, and the Spanish language is not prominently featured in the show's dialogue.

Herein, we focus on the relationship between the Griffins and Consuela De La Morrela, a supporting female Latinx character[7], and how their interactions serve to reinforce harmful cultural, racial, and linguistic stereotypes. Consuela, who serves as the Griffin family's housekeeper, is introduced to the audience in season 6, episode 3. She represents numerous intersecting identities, including being a woman, Mexican, an immigrant, and a domestic worker (Wu et al. 2007). Though specific details are not revealed throughout the series, there are clear references to undocumented migrations across the U.S.-Mexico border. For instance, in season 11, episode 12 (2013), Consuela traverses the southern border, dodging armed border security agents and leaping over a reinforced wall into Mexico to reunite with her husband, Juan (Bowen et al. 2013).

While some of Consuela's identities are depicted by her physical appearance, other aspects, many of which are stereotypical in nature, are presented through her behavior and attributes, which index raciolinguistic ideologies. We see this through her portrayal as a housekeeper who wears a pink dress and yellow cleaning gloves, morphing her identity into a job that is generally viewed as low-level and low-salary. Her dialogue and physical comedy often involve the items she uses for cleaning (e.g., requesting Lemon Pledge for Christmas and cleaning the glass at the prison in which her son is incarcerated). These depictions function to perpetuate the inaccurate stereotype that all Latinxs are uneducated immigrants suited for manual labor.

As was the case with Fez, Consuela's linguistic skills are consistently depicted in ways that hinder her. Through instances of mispronunciation and miscommunication, this portrayal of her speech patterns evokes raciolinguistic critiques of how society views the (bilingual) linguistic practices of racialized individuals. Even when she engages in linguistic practices that are considered normative or innovative when otherwise produced by privileged, non-racialized subjects, they are perceived as linguistically deviant (Flores and Rosa 2015).

Consuela's attributes are consistently (ab)used throughout the show to make a caricature of her. For example, in a clip from season 7, episode 7 (2009), Consuela appears on a game TV show entitled "Are You Smarter Than a Hispanic Maid?". The show features Consuela and a white man standing on either side of the host. The host asks the man, "Ok, Larry, how does a Hispanic maid address her employer if his name is John Sullivan? Is it a) John or b) Mr. Sullivan?" to which the man replies, "uhh, I'm going to go with Mr. Sullivan." The host informs the man that this was a trick question before turning to Consuela and asking for her opinion. Consuela replies, "Umm, Mr. John?" with a pronunciation that creates a sound similar to "meester" in place of "mister". The host asks Consuela a "bonus question", "Is Mr. John home?", to which she appears confused before answering, "Uh, no, mister, no Mr. John no home", (Holmquist et al. 2009).

Another form of bias represented in *Family Guy* is the consistent mockery of the Spanish language through linguistic microaggressions, including Mock Spanish (e.g., Schwartz 2019; Hill 2008). In season 15, episode 19 (2016), Consuela engages in a conversation with Lois and Peter Griffin. The scene unfolds with Lois answering the door to greet Consuela, presuming she's there to pick up the children under Christopher Griffin's care. Christopher, Lois's son, is watching over the children of Consuela's niece, Isabella. Isabella is another supporting Latinx character who has been deported back to Mexico. Consuela brings "good news" and "ay ay ay news" to Lois, prompting Lois to inquire about the latter first. Consuela reveals that Isabella is stuck in Mexico, leaving the babies in their care (Langford et al. 2017). This interaction between Lois and Consuela is but one example of how the Spanish language is consistently ridiculed for comedic effect. By extension, this acts as a way to demean and discredit Spanish speakers, effectively writing them off from the dominant U.S. culture. This form of language manipulation relies on indirect indexicality to convey humor, tapping into existing perceptions of Latinx stereotypes. As Hill (1998, 2001, 2008) suggests, such linguistic devices operate through what can be considered racist discourse, as they are clearly used to reinforce prejudices against Spanish speakers. The phrase "ay ay ay", for instance, is employed by Consuela, not as a genuine expression but as a parody of the language, suggesting undesirable traits associated with Spanish speakers. This kind of behavior (i.e., mock Spanish), as Hill (2001) elucidates, disparages the Spanish language (and, by extension, its speakers), underscoring a perceived superiority of Anglo speakers, which serves to perpetuate the subordinate social position of Latinxs relative to the white dominant group.

Much like Fez in *That '70s Show*, Consuela's name represents another area in which raciolinguistic evaluations can be made. "Consuela" is a modified version of the traditional Spanish name, Consuelo. The alteration of the last letter from "o" to "a" could be perceived as a form of Mock Spanish in that it meets the white listening subject's expectations or misconceptions that since this name is used to refer to a female, it must end in "a" (e.g., Hill 2001, 2008). Additionally, the traditional name "Consuelo", which translates to "consolation" or "comfort", can be thought to tie directly to the character's supporting role as a housekeeper. Within the context of the show, her name is also used as a form of humor, as most interactions with the Griffin family consist of her questioning orders, engaging in counterproductive behavior, or serving as a general nuisance, juxtaposing her role as a "comforter", indicated by her character's name. Given these examples, Consuela's name can be interpreted as another vehicle through which racial and cultural stereotypes and misrepresentations are disseminated.

4. A Raciolinguistically Informed Analysis of the Spanish Language and Latinx Representation in Modern U.S Media

As a central element of our analysis, we seek to answer the question of how media representation of the Spanish language and its speakers has evolved over time. In doing so, we reflect on the intersection of language and race and how Latinx and Spanish language representation in newer series may still reinforce cultural, racial, and linguistic stereotypes towards Latinx communities. In comparison to the 90s sitcoms discussed previously, in which negative ideologies were overt, we argue that in contemporary media, the perpetuation of stereotypes and stigma against Latinxs has become more covert. In the older sitcoms from the 1990s, there is sense that Latinx characters never truly 'fit in' with the rest of the group. Through emphasizing their cultural and linguistic differences from the Anglo homogeneity that surrounds them, they always end up being viewed as foreigners, trying again and again to blend in with little success. They are consistently penalized for their lack of assimilation and are often devalued due to another character's inability (or refusal) to understand their speech. In modern series, that negative and parodic image has given way to what appears to be a more inclusive and equitable representation of Spanish speakers. Although this observation may be true to some extent, upon further examination, we believe that the environments in which Latinx characters exist, along with their mannerisms, speech patterns, and interactions with other characters, still contribute to the distribution of prejudicial discourse within social structures, albeit less obviously. Next, we examine behavior and linguistic practices, depictions of social, cultural, and linguistic dynamics, depictions of stereotypical gender behavior, and occupational stereotypes of four recent television shows that feature Latinx stories: *One Day at a Time (ODAAT)*, *Jane the Virgin*, *East Los High (ELH)*, and *Gentefied*.

4.1. Behavior and Linguistic Practices

We continue our analysis by examining the ways Latinx characters' behavior and linguistic practices are represented in the series *One Day at a Time* (*ODAAT*), which aired from 2017 to 2020. This show, a reboot of a program by the same name, which ran for nine seasons from 1975 to 1984, focuses on a multigenerational Cuban-American family living in Los Angeles (Cooper 1975; Fryman 2017). The 1975 version of *ODAAT* follows a Caucasian family, the Coopers, as they navigate a parallel storyline to the 2017 remake. The remake centers on Penélope Alvarez, a recently divorced single mother and Army veteran, her two children, Elena and Alex, and her mother, Lydia. The plot follows Penélope and the Alvarez family as they navigate dating, jobs, mental health, and family as Cuban-Americans living in a multigenerational household. Despite the fact that the 1975 version was relatively progressive for the time (i.e., featuring a single mother as the central protagonist), the issues presented in the modern version, including topics such as mental health difficulties, discussions of race and ethnicity, and multi-generational family dynamics, represent a clear attempt to 'modernize' the series.

Unlike *That '70s Show* and *Family Guy*, which did not centralize the Spanish language in their portrayals of Latinx characters, *ODAAT* prominently features Spanish dialogue. Rather than resorting to overtly degrading representations of the Spanish language and its speakers, there is a clear attempt to depict how different generations of Spanish speakers within a family unit navigate their everyday bilingual practices. For example, Lydia, the grandmother figure and a Cuban-born immigrant, retains Spanish as her dominant language but uses both languages with her daughter and grandchildren. Meanwhile, second-generation Latinxs (Elena, Alex) are portrayed with mixed bilingual abilities in English and Spanish. These varied linguistic practices may be interpreted as an effort to portray Latinx characters and Spanish speakers with greater authenticity. Additionally, certain linguistic practices in *ODAAT* (e.g., verbalized cultural references to Latinx music, artists, and traditions, as well as the use of monolingual English to reach bicultural Latinxs in the U.S.) contribute to the establishment of a 'Latino Ethnic Consciousness' (Attig and Derrick 2021). In other words, these practices communicate a sense of solidarity and

allegiance to the Latinx culture, which stands in stark contrast to the ridiculing portrayals in *That '70s Show* and *Family Guy*.

Another modern television series with nuanced depictions of the behavior and linguistic practices of Spanish-speaking communities is *Jane the Virgin*[8]. This show, which aired from 2014 to 2019, tells the story of Jane Villanueva, a young Venezuelan-American woman living in Miami (Silberling 2014). The series centers on Jane's relationships with her family and friends, including her mother, Xiomara, and maternal grandmother, Alba, who are English-dominant and Spanish-dominant, respectively. As was the case in *ODAAT*, the Spanish language is featured prominently in a manner that does not ridicule the language or place it in a subordinate position. That said, although all Latinx characters are portrayed as bilingual, their bilingualism seems to be simplified or controlled to better fit a traditional understanding of what "real" or "true" bilingualism (e.g., no mixing languages) is supposed to be like (e.g., Melgarejo and Bucholtz 2020). In a way, this highlights what linguistic sacrifices are made in order to promote more realistic and positive representations of Latinx characters that still fall within the realm of what is socially acceptable or deemed "successful".

Earlier, we underscored how some 90s sitcoms depicted forced renaming of Latinx characters as an appeal to white audiences or created inauthentic Spanish-sounding names for Latinx characters. In our review of contemporary shows, we have noticed a significant normalization of traditional Latinx names, such as Rogelio, Xiomara, and Mateo in *Jane the Virgin* and Elena, Carmen, and Victor in *ODAAT*, to name a few. This offers a clear contrast from the Latinx characters presented in *Family Guy* and *That '70s Show*, whose non-traditional names derived from their Latinx identity may represent another way of *othering* these minority characters from their white-sounding named counterparts. Perhaps this constitutes a point of progress in the authentic representation of Latinxs in modern media. However, there are still several areas of growth in which contemporary television shows might improve their depictions of Latinx and Spanish-speaking communities.

4.2. Depictions of Social, Cultural, and Linguistic Dynamics

Evaluations of modern television shows featuring Latinxs and Spanish speakers should also be evaluated with regard to the social, cultural, and linguistic dynamics they establish. In the aforementioned series, *ODAAT*, the dynamic between the main character's two children, Alex and Elena, serves as a prime example of how language and race intersect. Elena and Alex are both second-generation Cuban-American immigrants who communicate using both Spanish and English in their daily lives. Elena, who is of a lighter complexion, is portrayed as being less comfortable speaking Spanish compared to her younger brother, Alex. Alex has a darker complexion and speaks Spanish more proficiently, despite being the younger sibling. We cannot help but notice a potential underlying message here—that Latinxs who speak Spanish and appear closer to the stereotypical 'look' of a Latinx person (i.e., brown hair, brown eyes, and a darker complexion) are more highly racialized.

Another contemporary series showcasing realistic and complex social and linguistic dynamics within Latinx communities is *Gentefied*. The show, which premiered in 2020, focuses on three cousins trying to save their grandfather's taqueria amidst the gentrification of their Los Angeles neighborhood. Regarding its creation, it is apparent that writers and producers have given consideration to the literal and symbolic meaning of language. For instance, instead of serving as mere parodic entertainment for the white dominant group, as was the case in the 1990s sitcoms, Spanish-speaking characters and their use of the Spanish language are presented as a means of adding cultural significance to the show, including an appreciation of the dynamic complexities that surround bilingualism and bilinguals. For example, *Gentefied* often relies on the use of English, Spanish, and Spanglish. Words like "*abuelita, taqueria, mosca, comadres*", can be heard throughout the show in what otherwise are English conversations. Interestingly, the use of these Spanish words is untranslated in the captions, maintaining their Spanish significance and pronunciation. The fluid nature

of these interactions contributes to the legitimacy of the portrayed Latinx experiences and provides a more realistic depiction of bilingualism.

The Anglo characters in this show, however, do employ some linguistic practices that can be perceived as subtle forms of resistance to such a process of legitimation or normalization. This is evident in season 1, episode 5 (2020), in which an English-dominant and a Spanish-dominant speaker are arguing with one another. The English-dominant character makes remarks such as, "Why are not you speaking in English, Ofelia?" and "I cannot understand you" (Cunningham 2020; DuBord 2022). With these statements, the Anglo character seeks to reinforce their position of power, establishing English as the only legitimate language and demanding linguistic accommodation (DuBord 2022).

The series *East Los High* (*ELH*), which ran from 2013 to 2017, is another example of linguistic representation in media that boasts both real-world authenticity and subtle linguistic microaggressions. The series follows a young group of Latinx students as they navigate their experiences at a fictional local high school in Los Angeles (Portugal 2013). According to Giménez-Eguíbar and de los Heros (2016), the dialogue and mixed linguistic practices featured in this show demonstrate high linguistic realism when compared to the actual linguistic tendencies of Latinx youth. The frequent use of Spanish-English code-switching in the series has a two-fold positive effect in the sense that it creates a sense of connectedness and social identity among the fictional characters themselves and promotes a feeling of solidarity with its intended audience: the actual Latinx community of East LA (Giménez-Eguíbar and de los Heros 2016). With that said, throughout our review of *ELH*, we noticed a relation between linguistic tendencies and socioeconomic status among the characters; those who spoke Spanish at higher frequencies seemed to be portrayed as having a lower socioeconomic status, working as unskilled laborers, or being depicted as being involved in criminal activities (e.g., gang involvement, substance use, and delinquency). This pattern may inadvertently function to reproduce stereotypical beliefs of Spanish-speakers as poor, lazy, and even dangerous.

4.3. Depictions of Stereotypical Gender Behavior

Despite the significant steps that have been taken towards modernizing portrayals of Latinx characters in contemporary television shows, examples of mannerisms and interactions that perpetuate racialized gender stereotypes towards Latinx individuals can still be found. For instance, in the series *ODAAT*, Lydia (the grandmother character) is portrayed with a high degree of sexuality, perhaps inadvertently reinforcing the stereotype of Latinas as hypersexual beings (Molina-Guzmán 2010). She is often seen wearing a full face of makeup to bed and even states (in season 1, episode 8) "I came out of the womb wearing stilettos." (Del Rosario Rodriguez 2021). This strategic use of word choice and tonal inflection to hypersexualize Lydia is not isolated to *ODAAT*. It can also be evidenced in other recent sitcoms like *Modern Family*, which aired on ABC from 2009 to 2020 (Casillas et al. 2018). Within the show, which focuses on three blended American families, Gloria Delgado-Pritchett, played by Sofia Vergara, is a Colombian woman who also employs similar linguistic tendencies. The authors note that Gloria's entire vocal body, which encompasses "all aspects of a person's speech, such as perceived accent(s), intonation, speaking volume, and word choice", is used as a means of hypersexualizing her Latinx character rather than vocabulary alone (Casillas et al. 2018). Moreover, the opposition between Jane and her mother, Xiomara, in the show *Jane the Virgin* highlights a deeply entrenched notion about the false dichotomy of Latina womanhood. Xiomara's character is depicted as promiscuous, flirtatious, and typically favoring tight and revealing clothing, drawing a sharp contrast to that of Jane, who fiercely upholds her purity. This contrast is portrayed in a manner reminiscent of the virgin/whore dichotomy; that is, the stereotypical portrayal of Latina women as either completely innocent and pure or over-the-top hypersexual tempests (Molina-Guzmán 2010; Galarza and Leon-Boys 2023).

In a similar vein, the female Latinx characters of *ELH* are highly sexualized through the use of costumes, makeup, and two separate storylines of unplanned teenage pregnancy

involving the main female characters (Coleman and Campbell 2019). Interestingly, after one of the female characters, Ceci, had her baby, her style of dress became notably more conservative and modest. This costuming choice strongly evokes the aforementioned cultural value of Latina women as either sexually alluring and promiscuous, or self-sacrificing, virginal mothers (e.g., Molina-Guzmán 2010; Galarza and Leon-Boys 2023). Once again, while it should be noted that *ELH* has been highly endorsed for its challenge to the hegemony of Latinx representation in Hollywood, and that audience reviews demonstrated positive reactions to its representation of Latinx culture and language (Wang et al. 2019) there still exist questionable stereotypes in the series that maintain conventional views of Latina women as either sexually promiscuous or pure and virtuous. The stereotype reinforcement in ELH, however, seems to exhibit a greater subtlety when compared to the conspicuous stereotyping in the sitcoms analyzed previously.

4.4. Occupational Stereotypes

In contrast to the occupational stereotypes perpetuated by the 1990s sitcoms analyzed earlier, contemporary television series would seem to have made significant strides in portraying Latinx characters in a diverse array of career roles. This does not mean, however, that modern shows are devoid of stereotypic representations of Latinx careers. This is exemplified in shows like the aforementioned *ELH*, in which the adult characters occupy myriad professional roles, including restaurant owners, fashion designers, and television show hosts. Yet, a careful look at these otherwise favorable depictions reveals a number of subtle but potentially harmful cues (i.e., stereotypes and generalizations). For example, although the father of one of the main characters, Jacob, owns a taqueria, an arguably impressive accomplishment, a central theme throughout the first season involves Jacob and his friend Maya's efforts to rescue his struggling restaurant. Although the representation of Latinxs as business owners marks a powerful shift from reductionist occupational stereotypes present in older television shows, Jacob's father's status as a struggling entrepreneur unduly maintains the assertion that Latinxs encounter more difficulties finding success in the workforce, almost as if there were a need to establish the limits or conditions of their success.

The series *Jane the Virgin* further exemplifies these positive representational shifts, with the main character, Jane, actively pursuing a career as a fiction writer throughout the series while simultaneously working a part-time job in hospitality. Although we interpret this as a testament to Jane's ability to thrive in society, her dual occupational roles also serve as a stirring representation of how, like Jane, many Latinx individuals must often juggle multiple roles and responsibilities to make ends meet. On one hand, this showcases Latinxs' accomplishments, diverse skill sets, and resilience. On the other hand, however, it hints at the stereotypical notion that Latinx individuals are not capable of success in highly lucrative careers without some caveat or shortcoming that undercuts their achievements. For example, in *Jane the Virgin*, one of the main characters, Luisa, initially appears as a successful gynecologist. However, her storyline takes a turn when she later loses her medical license due to her committing a grave medical mistake, perhaps inadvertently propagating deleterious stereotypes about the outcomes of Latinxs in high-status occupations. Undoubtedly, these modern representations of Latinxs in the workforce highlight major changes in Latinx representation in media, standing in contrast to outdated and reductionist portrayals of Latinx career opportunities in U.S. media. However, more work is needed to produce dignified representations of Latinxs individuals as who are able to both obtain high-level careers and perform well in their industries.

5. Conclusions

In this essay, we have set out to examine how evolving[9] Latinx and Spanish language representation in mainstream U.S. media contributes to shaping public perceptions of the Spanish language and its speakers. The stereotypes embodied by portraits of Latinx and Spanish-speaking characters in the 1990s sitcoms we analyzed (i.e., *That '70s Show* and

Family Guy) are compelling examples of overt anti-Latinx cultural, racial, and linguistic attitudes in action. Undoubtedly, the modernization of these media depictions has made significant strides in terms of portraying Latinxs with greater dignity, cultural sensitivity, and linguistic authenticity. However, informed by a critical raciolingistic lens, we find evidence of power dynamics that fuel stigma and reinforce stereotypes against Latinx communities, reflected in even modernized portrayals of Latinidad. We ultimately argue that the continued propagation of biased representations of Latinxs in U.S. media perpetuates racial and ethnic injustice, which in turn can negatively impact the self-worth and self-esteem of Latinxs (e.g., Tukachinsky et al. 2017).

In the 1990s sitcoms we initially examined, Latinx representation was scarce, often placing Latinx characters on the receiving end of jokes about their speech patterns, names, and behavior (often depicted to be aligned with reductionist cultural stereotypes). The environments in which they existed were often white-dominated, their mannerisms and linguistic practices exaggerated, and their interactions with others fraught with ridicule. This ridiculing of Latinx characters was inflated by exaggerated accents, endorsements of potentially harmful stereotypes (e.g., Fez's insatiable sex drive), and parodic attempts to 'fit in' with white society, all of which contributed to the creation of a safe space for whiteness. By centering the perceived social and cultural differences between Latinx characters and their white counterparts, whiteness is established as the acceptable norm from which non-conformers are considered anomalous. As a result, their alienation as a social punishment for their non-conformity to white standards may be interpreted by viewers as justifiable (e.g., Chandler and Wiborg 2021).

In contemporary television series such as *ODAAT*, *Jane the Virgin*, *ELH*, and *Gentefied*, the portrayals of Latinx characters and Spanish speakers showed marked improvements. Common themes we observed in the newer series included (i) a significant increase in the number of Latinx characters in the fictional environments; (ii) mannerisms that less explicitly promoted anti-Latinx stigma and stereotypes; (iii) linguistic practices and speech patterns that were depicted with greater authenticity; and (iv) more dignified and affirming interactions between Latinx characters and others. These noteworthy developments, however, do not imply that anti-Latinx biases and raciolinguistic ideologies (e.g., the racializing of Latinxs who prefer speaking Spanish) are not reproduced in other ways. In fact, we have shown how a number of contemporary television shows still reflect power dynamics that fuel anti-Latinx stigma and stereotyping (e.g., negative occupational and gender stereotypes, racializing Latinxs who are darker-skinned and have greater proximity to Spanish). In the examples discussed, explicit discrimination tends to be substituted with more subtle, covert practices that still embody hegemonic interests and perpetuate social inequalities.

Of course, we must acknowledge the advances that have been made in Latinx and Spanish-language media representation over the last few decades. It is difficult to argue that changes in public attitudes towards Spanish and Spanish speakers have not been reflected by US media. From the modern media examples in our analysis, greater conscientiousness towards racial and ethnic justice is certainly apparent. Yet, even as overt discriminatory practices are becoming less acceptable in today's public discourse, deep-rooted covert prejudice still contributes to shaping our relationships and everyday interactions. The reproduction of subtle raciolinguistic ideologies in various aspects of our lives (e.g., linguistic interactions, employment, education, etc.), is just one example of covert discriminatory practices (e.g., Flores and Rosa 2015). Because this kind of bias often goes unnoticed, it is less likely to be challenged, and may therefore continue to be inadvertently reinforced. Without recognizing and critically reflecting on these biases, we run the risk of reifying the racialization and devaluation of marginalized racial and ethnic groups in the US. Hence, in this paper, we have sought to identify, deconstruct, and challenge some of the mechanisms through which US media may propagate raciolinguistic ideologies and allow structural racism to become more deeply entrenched in society. This, we believe, is a critical and significant step in redefining and transforming the lens through which racialized communities are perceived. Whether overtly or covertly expressed, the negative impact of

prejudicial attitudes towards the Spanish language and its speakers in the media demands public attention.

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Notes

[1] Early on, Latinx characters in Hollywood films were often depicted as criminals or gang members. "West Side Story" (1961) and "Scarface" (1983) are two representative examples of this trend that portrayed Puerto Rican and Cuban characters in a negative light.

[2] Herein we use the term "America" and "American" to refer to the United States of America.

[3] According to recent reports, Hispanic and Latinx people accounted for 19.1% of the total US population in 2022.

[4] Similar observations are often made with regard to African Americans' linguistic practices (e.g., Alim et al. 2016).

[5] Despite its name and the show's fictional timeline—running from 1976 to 1979—it is important to recognize that the show actually ran from 1998 to 2006 (*That '70s Show* 1998).

[6] This convention is nothing unique to *That '70s Show*; in actuality, this Latinx stereotype is one of many that have existed in American media for decades (Mandl 2019; Popelková 2015).

[7] Another aspect of note is that the character is voiced by Michael Henry, a white man, rather than a woman—let alone a woman of Mexican descent. This choice by the show's creative directors, among others, is indicative of the lack of motivation to represent this character in an authentic or dignified manner.

[8] This show was influenced by a 2002 Venezuelan telenovela titled "Juana la Virgen".

[9] To be sure, while it can be argued that American sitcoms from the 1990s cannot be reasonably compared with the multi-genre contemporary series outlined in this analysis, we maintain that both television eras offer insights into societal attitudes and beliefs towards the Latinx community, providing valuable lenses through which to analyze the evolution of media portrayals of Latinxs.

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