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# La Fiebra Telenovela: Audience Perceptions of Telenovelas and their Representation of Economic Disparity

Brenda Khor

*The College of Wooster*, [bkhor17@wooster.edu](mailto:bkhor17@wooster.edu)

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LA FIEBRA TELENVELA: AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF TELENVELAS AND THEIR  
REPRESENTATION OF ECONOMIC DISPARITY

by  
Brenda Khor

An Independent Study Thesis  
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Advisor: Michelle Johnson, Ph.D.

## **Abstract**

Telenovelas play an important role in communicating Latin American issues. Viewers watch and engage with this popular melodramatic medium on a daily basis. As a result, telenovelas are a valuable ritual for Latin Americans. Telenovelas affect how societies view themselves. They expose viewers to social and political issues with the aim of public discourse (Joyce 49; Pastina 165; Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 2). My research explores audience engagement with contemporary Mexican telenovelas, focusing on their views of economic disparity representation, and how those representations impact their understanding of self and society.

To carry out my study, I conducted ethnographic interviews with 13 Mexican telenovela viewers. Questions covered areas including their demographics and education, telenovela viewing habits, and economic disparity indicators. The interviews were analyzed using concepts from scholarly literature on such topics as the movement from serials to telenovelas series, telenovelas’ characteristics, and the Cultivation Theory. I found that while economic disparity is not directly discussed in telenovelas, participants perceived it through fashion, setting, education, and language. Participants noticed that telenovelas contain fragments of Mexican culture, but these fragments are too obscure to be seen as accurate reflections of reality, or in connection to their identities.

Keywords: Mexican telenovelas, economic disparity, audience perceptions, cultural identity

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I live in a suburban community close to the inner city Atlanta metropolitan area. The residents are mostly low-income families and are predominantly Latino/a, specifically from Mexico. Nearly every day after high school, I went to my friends' houses and they had an authentic 'big family' feel; they would hug me with enthusiasm, have food cooking in the kitchen, and a television show, specifically telenovelas, playing in the living room during dinner time. Telenovelas were a tool for them to foster their culture and convey specific messages about a country. My friends' families absorbed what was being portrayed on telenovelas and had a dialogue at the end of the show. Through these conversations, I gathered that there are social issues embedded in telenovelas, and these social issues dramatize the reality of a country.

Telenovelas are one of many platforms that lead people to have perceptions about particular issues; they carry a strong sociocultural message. In this study, I will look at the audience's responses to the portrayal of economic disparity in the medium of Mexican telenovelas within contemporary Mexican society. In this chapter, I will outline the purpose, the rationales, necessary definitions, and methods that will be utilized in this study.

### **Purpose Statement**

Contemporary Mexican telenovelas, such as *Vino el amor* and *Sueño de amor*, are known for being dramatic; however, they highlight social issues that exist within the current society. One prominent issue is economic disparity. The purpose of my study is to examine how members of Mexican culture who watch telenovelas perceive the way socioeconomic status is portrayed and the impact of that portrayal on their views of self/ identity as Mexicans. To achieve this, I will analyze representation of education, fashion, and setting as indicators of

economic disparity. Studying audience perceptions about economic disparity within Mexican telenovelas will help understand and represent how people see their own country.

### **Rationales**

This study will contribute to the scholarly understanding of how telenovelas present social issues. Mexican telenovelas emphasize premarital sex, gender identity, sexuality, and drug abuse (Pearson 404). Previous scholarship discussed how social issues are presented within telenovelas by analyzing them. Tate chose three Mexican telenovelas to study; these telenovelas confronted the social issue surrounding homophobia, and highlighted how serious homophobia is by the characters' behaviors and roles ("Laughing All" 65). Acosta-Alzuru focused on one Venezuelan telenovela and evaluated the representations of aesthetics, street children, and sexuality (185). Both studies aimed to challenge the norms of their country and promote self-reflection. In my study, I will extend research by looking at economic disparity, and how viewers interpret this portrayal.

Secondly, this study will add to the scholarship by adding a different perspective than has been previously studied, the audience perspective. Previous researchers used telenovelas directly to assess social issues embedded within them. Joyce's research analyzed four Brazilian telenovelas to reflect the portrayals of homosexual love (61). Mayer's study evaluated an entire Mexican telenovela, *María Isabel*, to examine its tension with class, ethnicity, and gender, and how these tensions identify with its audience (479). Joyce and Mayer's studies have closely studied social issues through the medium of telenovelas. With my study looking at social issues from a different standpoint, the audiences lens, it will increase scholarly research surrounding telenovelas and social issues.

Thirdly, telenovelas are important to study because they have large audiences and thus are able to convey their messages broadly. In Latin America, telenovelas are a culturally significant television genre that exerts a great deal of influence on real-life social issues. Telenovelas gratify viewers; they also contain “storylines [that] comment directly on current events, and people are glued to the set across social classes” (Joyce 48). Increasingly popular in Latin America, these cultural texts continue to influence viewers (Castañeda 7; Mayer 492). Therefore, studying telenovelas as a serial form is essential because they have an ability to expose to a large community to important issues.

Lastly, this study will provide practical value for production teams with a greater understanding of the influence of telenovelas on audiences’ perceptions. My passion lies in broadcasting, specifically examining audience’s ratings and reviews after a television show. The television crew exerts continual effort in determining what they choose to capture and portray in their media product (Acosta-Alzuru 187). The production team decides how to present each frame and, thus, holds creative power. However, the audience has power through their consumption and feedback. With my research, I intend to offer beneficial insights to production teams about how audiences’ perceptions of their own culture are impacted by telenovelas.

### **Definitions**

To fully understand this study several terms must first be defined. The word ‘*telenovela*’ is defined as a limited-run serial drama in Latin America (Mayer 479). Additionally, telenovelas are instructive instruments to serve as entertainment and a resource for viewers about social issues (Joyce 48).

Casas Pérez defined *culture* as “a complex and dynamic ecology of people, things, world-views, activities, and settings, an ecology that fundamentally endures but also changes in routine

communication and social interaction” (407). Moynihan described culture as the determinant factor of a successful society (3).

The third term, *social issue* is a “socially constructed way of seeing certain conditions that provides a claim to change through public actions” (Gusfield). Social issues are problematic conditions that create divide and inequality. To evaluate divide and inequality, the focus of my study will be *economic disparity*. Rieger explained economic disparity as “the structures and forces that drive the increasing gap between rich and poor as well as institutionalized greed” (157).

### **Method**

This research employed a qualitative approach; combining ethnographic and cultural studies methods to examine the audience perceptions regarding telenovelas within Mexican society. To further understand the culture, I observed and conducted interviews with telenovela audience members. I immersed myself in a different cultural context and focused on Mexico City, the most globally influential city in Mexico. These interviews involved diverse participants of all ages, within different areas downtown, to avoid bias regarding their opinions on telenovelas and the impact the social issues in the telenovelas have on Mexican society. The interviews included questions regarding their demographics and education, telenovela viewing habits (e.g., how often they watch them, what kinds of telenovelas they watch, and the motivation behind watching telenovelas), and the representation of economic disparity they observe with a specific focus on the indicators of education, fashion, and setting.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose behind this study is to examine audiences’ perceptions, and how they see the impact of Mexican telenovelas in regards to economic disparity. First, this study focused on a

previously unresearched social issue, economic disparity, within Mexican telenovelas. Second, my study added scholarly value because it analyzes social issues from a new approach, audiences' perspectives. Third, my research is essential to study because telenovelas convey widely-received prominent messages, which have the potential to shape a mass amount of media. Lastly, understanding how telenovelas are a useful communication tool for revealing important issues in a country based on audience's perspectives will benefit producers of telenovelas and similar media. The ethnographic and cultural studies research methods, such as ethnographic interviews conducted, offer insights on how viewers depict the efficiency of Mexican telenovelas in relation to economic disparity. Chapter II will examine past research, and implement a foundation of background knowledge on telenovelas and Mexico's culture.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Media messages influence audiences' thoughts and behaviors. In their television consumption choices, some viewers seek knowledge about specific topics, while others simply want entertainment. This is reflected in many genres that focus on just education or just enjoyment. Telenovela is a genre that caters to both qualities (Acosta-Alzuru 189; Mayer 481). This chapter will begin with a broad overview of serial stories and then lead into the specific genre known as telenovela, including its history, global expansion, and characteristics. Telenovelas are widely popular in Latin America, but in order to delve into one culture more fully, I will limit this study to Mexican telenovelas. Focusing on the country of Mexico, I will be able to address Mexico's cultural values and the distinct features of Mexican telenovelas. I will also discuss a heavily influenced social issue in Mexico, economic disparity, and various indicators within telenovelas that can depict the gap. Lastly, I will explain the theory I will be using in my study.

### **Serial Stories**

Serial stories are the foundation of many genres; they are present in both print and television (Hernández-Pérez and Rodríguez 27; Straubhaar 3). Serial stories are segmented published or broadcasted works that consists of new episodes or chapters at regular intervals (Brennan 687; Hayward 135). These stories generally contain a "core of the narrative," which is a sequence of narrative elements included across episodes or chapters (Hernández-Pérez and Rodríguez 26). The unfolding of these stories happens over a series of weeks, which incentivises the audience to return for each new episode in order to learn how the plots develop. People are also drawn in by the historically and socially relevant topics included in the narrative and a

formulaic repetition of structure, which encourages viewers to continue to read comic strips, listen to the radio, and watch television (Hernández-Pérez and Rodríguez 26; Singer 287).

One of the major formats for distributing serial stories is print. A common form of print media is the novel. Novels engage readers with their fictional entertainment and pragmatic information, such as how to behave in certain social situations (Brennan 687; Hayward 29). After novels, comic strips were among the first of many print serials that emerged. Comic strips are serial narratives that began inside newspapers, and are separated into outlined panels (Hayward 85; Singer 273). Once the strips gained an audience, the serials were published six days a week in newspapers (Hayward 92). The artists offered visual and written narratives, where the readers were able to actively interpret the frames (Hayward 86; Singer 273). The viewers were able to form virtual relationships with the artists, connect with the stories, and situate the events of the comics in their own lived experiences (Hayward 86). Comic strips evolved into larger, developed stories, and thus, generated sequels (Hernández-Pérez and Rodríguez 27).

The serial stories proved to be adaptable to different forms of media. As technology advanced, radio garnered support and people listened daily to shows such as soap operas. Television soon came after to replace radio. There was a transition from radio soap operas to television soap operas. Soap operas are a continuous serial, fictional, and melodramatic genre (Mumford 16). They are open-ended text; soaps are designed not to have a definite ending (Czarniawska et al. 269; Hayward 151). Because soap operas do not have a clear-cut ending, each show is crafted to have multiple, concurrent and overlapping storylines. The complexities of the soap opera plots allow audiences to identify with the consistent characters (Czarniawska et al. 268; Slade 19). This gives viewers the ability to engage with the material (Czarniawska et al.

268; Slade 19). Audiences are able to critique the issues displayed on-screen, which leads to viewers connecting with soap operas (Pastina 168).

Viewers are also able to identify with primetime television dramas. Primetime television dramas are televised stories that follow the same segmented structure as soap operas (Czarniawska et al. 269). The content of the segments consist of big dramatic plots and mini subplots, in which audience members can identify with the characters and their stories (Casas Pérez 411; Czarniawska et al. 269). The daily lives and adventures of each character almost always intersect (Czarniawska et al. 268). The qualities displayed in soap operas and primetime television drama resulted in a transition in medium for viewers, the telenovelas (Morrissey 229; Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 3).

### **Telenovelas**

Telenovelas are melodramatic serials that offer entertainment and insights into the history and culture (e.g., social issues) of a country, generally one in Latin America (Acosta-Alzuru 199; Adriaens 176). Telenovelas are highly viewed in Latin American countries, which makes them beneficial as cultural texts (Mayer 481). They are unique because the cultural focus is so strong, deliberately emphasizing the local and cultural contexts that represent a country’s identity while entertaining the viewers (Pastina 163). They have the ability to create meanings that people can relate to the values specific to their country and the Latin American influence (Mayer 481). As a result, the information drawn from telenovelas can educate a society about social issues occurring within their culture (Acosta-Alzuru 199).

The focus on cultural issues is a major reason people enjoy watching telenovelas. People are attracted to them because the stories are effective in depicting the social and political issues people experience on an everyday basis (Mayer 402). The characters, plot, and historical



background act as a frame for the cultural issues and impact how the audience responds. The intimate relationship between the viewers and the telenovelas contributes to the popularity of the genre (Acosta-Alzuru 189; Castañeda 6). To better understand telenovelas, this section will describe their history, global market establishment, and characteristics.

### **History of Telenovelas in Latin America**

Telenovelas evolved from vaudeville theaters whose origins historians trace back to 18th century Europe (Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 5). These vaudeville theaters included performances in singing, dancing, and overdramatic gestures. The performances incorporated horror, mystery, and other effects, which captured the audiences’ attention (Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 5). Soon after, in the 1950s, the features of the vaudeville theaters transitioned into tele-theaters in Europe and Latin America (Tufté, “The Telenovela” 87). The addition of theatrical love scenes, during this period of romanticism, contributed to the rise of tele-theaters (Tufté, “The Telenovela” 87). Additionally, radio soaps were popular during this time. With the development of television as a medium, telenovelas evolved from radio soaps and presented similar dramatic series in this new format (Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 5). Tele-theaters and radio soaps converged to form telenovelas.

After the emergence of telenovelas and the era of romanticism, realism became the dominant artistic style in the 1960s (Tufté, “The Telenovela” 87). This style influenced telenovelas to move away from being simply dramatic to reflecting realistic situations in the country (Merayo 218; Tufté, “The Telenovela” 87). Some depicted experiences included migration, social mobility, and tensions between rural and urban places (Acosta-Alzuru 199; Tufté, “The Telenovela” 87). As a result of the realistic portrayals, viewers identified with the characters and situations they encountered, leading audiences to form strong connections with

these serials (Acosta-Alzuru 197; Clifford 362). Because the salience of situations differs by countries, telenovelas became nationally distinct, aiming to realistically include issues relevant to people in that country.

By the 1960s, Latin American telenovelas began to differentiate themselves by country, creating their own stories to gain and impact particular audiences (Adriaens 174). Writers produced their own cultural narratives which led viewers to connect with and relate to themes in telenovelas such as lust, love, or treason (Pastina et al. "The Centrality" 5). Inventing their own form of entertainment and scripting information specifically about their country, telenovelas became culturally rooted in Latin America (Adriaens 174). The success of telenovelas in Latin American countries attracted television-producers in other parts of the world and added to economic growth in Latin America (Lewkowicz 266). Latin America became more market-driven and export-oriented, which contributed to the expansion of telenovelas into the global media market (Lewkowicz 266).

### **Telenovelas in Global Media Market**

Telenovelas expanded to other countries of the world, aside from countries in Latin America. They are in great demand for their melodrama and the various issues they bring on-screen. Viewers watch telenovelas because they want to be able to identify with their culture, or at least, to some extent, one that closely mirrors it (Slade 16). Telenovelas have become the leaders for portraying sociocultural messages, enabling them to gain a wider audience in both local and global markets (Pastina et al. "The Centrality" 4).

Cuba has had a major impact on this rapid growth. In the 1950s, Cuba became a vital and active exporter of telenovelas because they contributed to both the production and distribution of telenovelas to other regions, particularly Western Europe (Adriaens 174).

Telenovelas thrived in Western Europe due to their low cost and high entertainment value (Adriaens 174; Benavides 2). The effects of telenovelas being low-priced and a pleasure to watch increased the collaboration between nations, such as Italy and Spain (Adriaens 174). These telenovela partnerships led to the telenovelas becoming a “popular art form” because they allow international viewers to learn about other cultures and see their own cultures reflected in them (Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 6). Today, telenovela exportation serves as a successful tool to expose other societies to the cultural influences within the country of origin (Benavides 2; Lewkowicz 266).

### **Characteristics of Telenovelas**

There are two dominant characteristics within telenovelas. The first is the features exclusive to the telenovelas (e.g., duration of a telenovela series and airtime showings). The second is the mechanisms used to convey the story (e.g., central theme of love and suspense). The following section will go into each characteristic in more detail.

**Features.** One of the features of telenovelas is the duration of a telenovela series. Any one telenovela has “approximately 180-200 episodes” (Adriaens 175) that generally air over an eight to nine month season (Joyce 49; Straubhaar 24). After the completion of one telenovela’s season, a new brand telenovela begins (Joyce 49). Having consecutive series creates a situation where there is no off-season for the network. This is different from traditional television dramas in the United States, which air from fall to summer. Additionally, another feature of the duration of a telenovela season is the airtime showings. Airtime showings are the amount of time a television broadcast is on the air (Porto 57). Individual episodes air for approximately an hour, much like the soap operas and primetime dramas in the United States.

A second feature of telenovelas is that they are aired continuously throughout the day. Telenovelas are predominantly aired during the morning, afternoon, and primetime. Telenovelas are aired in the mornings with the reasoning that television networks want to keep a consistent presence with audience members (Mayer 479). Television networks want to maintain viewership. They do this by making sure they air as frequently as possible, usually with different episodes back-to-back. There are some telenovelas that air during (early) afternoons and primetime hours targeted primarily to women engaging in domestic work and roles (Mayer 479; Merayo 211). Primetime is considered the evening hours, usually the times between 6:00 PM-10:00 PM, when most people are done with work, school, and dinner (Straubhaar 24). Airing telenovelas during primetime is popular and suitable for societies within Latin America because this timeframe reaches a larger demographic (Joyce 48; Pastina et al. "Why Do I" 105). Telenovelas aim to attract both the male and female audience during this time (Huck 290). Along with telenovelas being on-air consistently, they have an established structure.

A third known feature is telenovela's format that consists of a definite beginning, middle, and end (Pearson 403). The format is a closed-text format, where the beginning consists of a civil narrative, followed by a conflict that violates the narrative, and ending with a restoration to maintain a balanced storyline (Pearson 403; Tate, "Laughing All" 60). Then, the middle usually displays more complications within the initial conflict (Tate, "Laughing All" 60). The ending is commonly a positive outcome of these conflicts; the ending is "happy" (Straubhaar 19; Tate, "Laughing All" 60). The "happy ending" occurs when the disruption during the "middle" stage resolves, and the characters are in high-spirits because the conclusion results in the traditional "good" or "worthy" character being rewarded and the "bad" character being defeated (Acosta-Alzuru 188; Pearson 403).

**Mechanisms.** Although telenovelas have many important features, there are often reoccurring mechanisms used to disclose content working together.

One mechanism is that the narrative contains a central theme of romantic love (Acosta-Alzuru 188; Mayer 481; Porto 54). Telenovelas are focused on love and family (Adriaens 177; Porto 48); and the love story is generally a version of a love triangle (Casas Pérez 409). Often, the love triangle encapsulates an instance where love “motivate[s] the protagonist and define[s] who is worthy of domestic bliss or fated to solitude” (Mayer 481). A love triangle usually consists of the protagonists by being pursued by two individuals. The best reward is being chosen in the love triangle by the protagonist and getting to live happily ever after. By choosing who gets a happily ever after, the protagonist is assigned the power to inform the audience on who is “good” enough to receive love (Mayer 481). While love is the catalyst of the plot in most telenovelas, it is not the only important mechanism.

A second mechanism is that emotion is used to build suspense (Pearson 404; Porto 61; Straubhaar 19). To develop suspense in the story, telenovelas emphasize emotion by using techniques like close-ups and other dramatic camera angles (Adriaens 175). Manipulation of viewer emotions results in suspense, which serves to create cliffhangers, encouraging viewers to engage with the episodes and tune in the following day (Adriaens 182; Mayer 484; Merayo 215; Pastina 5). Thus, emotion is used to contribute suspense within the story to fulfill a function of engaging the audience and creating emotional connection to characters.

A third mechanism within telenovelas is that there is a presence of “bipolarity between good and evil” characters (Merayo 412; Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 5). The “good” character, generally the protagonist, is not hard to distinguish from the “bad” characters, as they both represent typical stereotypes (Adriaens 182). An example would be that the “good” character is

poor but beautiful and works hard, and the “evil” character is wealthy, has artificial beauty, and only cares about profit. In many telenovelas, viewers are able to identify the good and the evil based on stereotypes, but viewers are grateful and even more compelled to continue watching telenovelas when the characters are multifaceted and defy their stereotypes (Casas Pérez 411). One way to construct “new” telenovelas is to alter character stereotypes and thus, surprises the audience. Not all characters fall within the good or bad spectrum. There are also characters who are “hybrid, neutral” characters that are more complex in their motivations (Adriaens 182). However, the neutral characters are typically supporting characters, which allows the focus to be on the strong opposition within the contradiction of ideas and traits between the main good and bad characters.

A fourth mechanism is that telenovelas use a polarity of characters to bring attention to social issues by creating characters that personalize controversial social and political issues (Joyce 49; Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 3; Straubhaar 11). Telenovelas consistently portray controversial issues that are occurring or being discussed in that particular country. Some examples include tensions of infidelity, betrayals, drugs, and socioeconomic status (Pearson 402). The tensions of the controversial social and political issues and/or events happen during the plot, and specifically the climax of the telenovela (Adriaens 175). In doing this, telenovelas attempt to initiate social change and bring these issues to the center for public debate (Joyce 49; Pastina 165; Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 2). Telenovelas are more than an entertainment instrument to gain profit; they are creative mediums to express social and political culture within a country (Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 2). They provide information to encourage viewers to reflect about these issues in regards to their own lives and experiences (Mayer 492; Tate,

“Laughing All” 52). By utilizing personalization, telenovelas are drawing attention to social and political issues that are complex and present in real life.

A fifth mechanism telenovelas utilize is colloquial language (Adriaens 175; Pastina 167; Straubhaar 19). An example of colloquial language would be the use of the word, “platicar,” in Mexican colloquialism. “Platicar” is a word that is commonly heard in Mexico, which means “to say, to tell, or to talk.” Other regions in Latin America define “platicar” to be “to talk or chat,” but they mostly use the word, “hablar” (to talk) in conversations. In Mexico, “platicar” is naturally used in an informal manner. Using this type of informal language serves as a mechanism to promote “autochthonous culture” — a way of doing things where indigenous people see it as native to the area (Merayo 215). For example, the telenovela, *Cosita Rica*, had a main character who used colloquial terms to deliver humor to the plot and remain close to the roots of the setting (Acosta-Alzuru 191). This strategy promotes an illusion of intimacy between the characters and the audience.

A sixth mechanism features music, which plays a significant role in telenovelas, connecting them to a specific region (Adriaens 175; Tate, “Laughing All” 58). Music is used to build drama within conflict, support reconciliation between characters, and help drive the storyline by reinforcing characters’ emotions and a sense of place. The music is identifiable to a specific region, and thus creates community and culture. Music facilitates audience identification with specific songs that denote distinct communities and times (Merayo 214). Telenovelas utilize mechanisms of romance, suspense, and emotion to engage the audience, while using colloquial language and music to create a deeper sense of place, time, and culture within the storyline. As such, it is not surprising that telenovelas are popular within their regions of production.

## **Mexico and Telenovelas**

Before discussing Mexican telenovelas specifically, it is important to provide a broad overview of Mexican culture. At its heart, Mexico's culture has four key elements: history, language, religion, and family.

### **Mexican Culture**

History is important to Mexican society because their past has a present influence on their social depictions and how they view themselves (Merayo 214; Neria and Aspinwall 26; Singhal et al. 12). Going all the way back to the pre-Colombian and Spanish colonial period, Mexico is defined by their political transitions and governing (Huck 168). These various political transitions came with conflicts tied to the government. Most conflicts were a result of revolutions fought against an authoritarian government (Huck 169). This gave outsiders the perception that Mexican society was one-dimensional, unstable, and violent (Banjeree and Castillo 344). However, the natives viewed their culture as complex because of its rich historical and political background (Huck 169).

There have been many revolutions, reforms, and transitions within the government, which shaped Mexican identity (Amuchastegui et al. 991; Tate, "Redefining Mexican" 542; Torres 38). Creating a common background for Mexicans gave them a sense of solidarity; their social history influences current societal norms (Tate, "Redefining Mexican" 542). One event that influenced the development of Mexican solidarity occurred during Porfirio Díaz's rule. When dictator Díaz ruled Mexico, there was a heavily ingrained political system that had religion embedded in school settings, favored the elites, and closed off opportunities for those less in power (Huck 76). This shared suffering of the people was alleviated when Díaz was disposed and Cardenas came to power (Huck 99). Cardenas made Mexican society more



egalitarian, granting loans to people in the lower socioeconomic classes and making religion more tolerant (Huck 97). These concessions gave the people a shared victory (Huck 97). The constant political change made the Mexican population stronger as a country because it united the people, thus grounding them in their cultural identity (Huck 257; Silva 481). As a result, Mexicans have strong ties to their background and thus a sense of belonging within their community (Silva 481). History is an important component to Mexico's society because it allows them to understand past narratives and to analyze patterns of how they became the country that they are today (Tuft, "Telenovelas, Culture" 5). This culture includes a common language and the values of religion and a devoted household.

Mexicans value the Spanish language (Huck 341; Silva 481). Though the Spanish language came to Mexico from Spanish forces and colonists, and there are some regions, such as Chiapas, in which the native people do not consider Spanish to be their most frequently used language (Torres 39), Spanish is considered the main language of the country by many people throughout Mexico (Torres 38). Mexico's population includes over 100 million inhabitants, and 92.7% of them speak Spanish only, and 5.7% speak both Spanish and an indigenous language (Central Intelligence Agency). By far, Mexico has the most Spanish-speaking citizens in the world, which adds to Spanish's significance in Mexican society (Huck 341).

Mexican society and culture are also heavily influenced by religion, specifically Catholicism (Huck 262; Silva 482). During the colonial period, Catholicism spread in Mexico due to the arrival of the Spaniards (Huck 42). Hernán Cortés, a Spanish conqueror of the New Spain, and a Roman Catholic clergyman landed in Mexico to spread their Catholic faith to Mexicans. Spreading their faith to Mexicans was challenging at first, but eventually successful (Amuchástegui et al. 989; Torres 38). Catholicism helps Mexicans feel comfort and hope during

mass, gives them values to believe in, and a sense of protection through God (Huck 43). Catholicism has made an essential impact on Mexican society with its set of principles and ethics, which play a role in their everyday lives. One key principle of Catholicism relates to gender roles. Male identities among Catholics are known to be associated around power, masculinity, and authority (Huck 264; Pastina 170). Female identities are wrapped in the notion of being a caretaker in the private sphere, subjected to male authority, and chastity (Huck 264; Pastina 169). Since homosexuality subverts these ideals of male and female identities, Catholicism teaches that homosexuality is morally evil and unacceptable to society (Joyce 49; Sifuentes 978; Tate, "From Girly Men" 103). Once acted upon, homosexuality is seen as sinful and Catholic values indicate that sinful acts lead to an afterlife in hell (Tate, "Laughing All" 57). This enforces the Catholic notion that a family is meant to be between a man and a woman, and anything that goes against that is seen to be morally wrong, an unfit environment for youth, and harmful to society (Joyce 49).

Family is a significant component of Mexican culture (Amuchástegui et al. 989; Tate, "Redefining Mexican" 542). Since the colonial period, a patriarchal family has been the structured form in Mexican society (Amuchástegui et al. 989; Tate, "Redefining Mexican" 542). A patriarchal family consists of the father figure having authority over the wife and children, determining the values followed by this unit. Parents instill these values in their children, and demand a high degree of respect for parental authority (Adriaens 176). Additionally, the mother typically cares for the children on a full-time basis (Huck 259). Mexican families not only look after their immediate family members but also their extended family members such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins (Huck 260). This extensive family involvement occurs

on a day-to-day basis and thus increases the bond among them (Adriaens 176; Huck 260). In Mexican culture, family provides traditions, support, and love (Huck 259).

### **Mexican Telenovelas**

Mexican telenovelas are popular television programming viewed by a large audience in the country (Beard 73; Huck 289). They serve as a medium to portray Mexican values and cultural ideas (Huck 289). One of Mexico's largest media companies, which produces telenovelas, is Televisa (Irwin and Ricalde 434; Piñón 214). Televisa is "Mexico's media powerhouse" (Esparza 62). Televisa produces telenovelas in-house for national viewing, but also exports the telenovelas to many markets in Latin America and Europe (Lozano 470; Mayer 480).

Televisa emphasizes that the audience is part of the telenovela process (Tate, "Laughing All" 54). Televisa offers telenovela viewers a creative position: "The audience exists in the imagination of those who make the telenovelas, as tastes, as experiences, as longings, as values, as behaviors" (Tate, "Laughing All" 54). This means that viewers implicitly have some control in telenovela works; telenovela creators have the audience consciously in mind when making the telenovelas taking into account how viewers see their popular values and culture. Televisa's strategy for ensuring viewers' satisfactions involves having viewers address social issues; viewers are able to comment on telenovelas and express what they feel is contemporarily salient (Tate, "Laughing All" 54). Televisa producers have the final say and alter content based on the viewers' critiques and incorporate reasonable preferences within the storylines as they see fit (Straubhaar 12; Tate, "Redefining Mexican" 546). Mexican telenovelas follow traditional narratives such as love triangles, relationship problems, and rags to riches stories (Casas Pérez 408; Lewkowicz 266; Pearson 400). People gravitate towards telenovelas due to those types of exciting plot lines (Casas Pérez 407). As viewers are watching more telenovelas, they are also

encouraged to be more aware about social issues such as homosexuality, morality, and abortion (Casas Pérez 407). Incorporating Mexican traditional narratives and highlighting specific social issues enables viewers to be engaged, informed, and feel included in the telenovela process.

Producers aim to successfully execute their purpose by maintaining a balance between fantasy and reality within their work (Abad-Izquierdo 93; Casas Pérez 107; Pearson 400). In order to achieve the goal of informing the public about social topics, Miguel Sabido, a Mexican television executive, created a set of techniques (Tate, “Laughing All” 53). Sabido’s techniques are designed to have the content simultaneously contain educational and entertainment values to bring about behavioral and social change (Singhal and Rogers 47; Tate, “Laughing All” 53). Some of his techniques includes thorough formative planning, the use of characters’ roles and their behaviors, and low production value (Singhal and Rogers 70). Sabido’s techniques are able to capture people’s attention and address a range of social issues to influence viewers opinions and behaviors.

**Sabido’s Techniques.** One of Sabido’s technique is the use of over dramatization. Mexican telenovela creators use a more “baroque” approach to address social issues (Straubhaar 26). This approach is associated with the notion of dramaticness and exaggerations so currently Mexican telenovelas have more styles of romance and comedy which utilize exaggerated emotions. The characters employing this style draw the audience into the story because they generate a range of emotions that are easily understood by the audience (Singhal and Rogers 71). Using a baroque approach produces entertainment for the viewers, and thus thrill, which allows the audience to be able to clearly and explicitly see the social topics being implemented (Tate, “Laughing All” 53). This technique results in telenovelas gaining a mass interest for viewership,

and viewers seeing the social problems occurring in their country (Neria and Aspinwall 29; Tate, “Laughing All” 54).

A second technique is related to character archetypes. For example, characters who are not the typical “fairy-tale-like” characters are given more prominence in the current shows (Casas Pérez 410). Fairy-tale-like characters are associated with beauty, wealth, status, and being good or evil (Benavides 14). Sabido’s technique includes characters exhibiting nuanced behaviors. Showing a range of behaviors and depicting realistic consequences that can happen in various situations. Steering away from solely having typical fairy-tale-like characters in the forefront, Mexican telenovelas are introducing more diverse characters with more complicated motivations for their behaviors (Singhal and Rogers 71). For example, battered women, police officers, and in general, female characters have more active roles to expose viewers to a variety of characters who would be typically ignored in fairy-tale-based scenarios (Casas Pérez 410). Telenovelas are showing more “previously ignored subjects [behaviors]” and “flawed” characters to relate to the audience, promote self-reflection, and encourage discussion (Casas Pérez 410; Johnson 1622).

A third technique is showcasing culturally specific issues in themes within diverse frameworks to target audience (Singhal and Rogers 70). The character and issues being presented in the telenovelas influence when they are aired so as to reach the intended or most appropriate audience (Casas Pérez 408; Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 1). In the early afternoon, Mexican telenovelas air for children and teenagers (Casas Pérez 408). During later afternoon, the target audience is housewives, and in the evenings, it is geared towards both men and women (Casas Pérez 408). During this time, women are engaged with telenovelas’ romanticism and are able to relate with the female characters and their roles (Adriaens 179; Pastina 171). However, men

watch telenovelas for the historical and realistic issues being depicted in the plots (Adriaens 179; Pastina 171). A certain time to air telenovelas and having plots unfold specific subjects within that time based on a target audience increases viewership and discourse. Viewers gradually learn the consequences of decisions the characters make around a variety of issues, with which they can resonate.

A fourth technique is low production value. This technique relates to production choices such as shoot locations (Singhal and Rogers 71). A known telenovela producer, Epigmenio Ibarra, believes Mexican telenovelas have to reveal existing issues in the society (Slade 12). For some telenovelas, producers actually film on real-life streets instead of in the studio in order to depict as many authentic political, social, and economic issues as they can (Casas Pérez 410; Slade 12). Real-life shooting gives telenovela productions an advantage to be able to highlight authentic movements, allowing viewers to contextualize the cultural issues of the country (Huck 292). For example, if telenovela production filmed in an agricultural space, the audience will see individuals working the land and also individuals who own the land. This real-life shooting portrays existing social issues of poverty and economic disparity. Jobs are associated with space. In a studio, audience would receive a more contrived perspective. This technique helps create realism and it draws in audience. Filming in the street sparked discourse among viewers (Casas Pérez 410; Singhal and Rogers 71). It can also yield negative reactions. For example, Ibarra filmed several scenes of the Mexican telenovela, *Mirada de Mujer*, on the streets, when the plot entailed a pregnant character deciding to have an abortion, which was illegal at the time (Slade 12). Ibarra challenged the way people viewed abortion. Viewers criticized this concept and vocally responded. As a result, Ibarra changed the plot, and the pregnant character had a

miscarriage instead (Slade 12). Seeing their community both in real-life and through the screen directly impacts how well viewers respond to the story.

### **Economic Disparity**

A major social issue affects countries across the world is economic disparity, which is the divide between the rich and poor (Scott 2). The way institutions in society are set up, often supports people who already have wealth and does not give access to the people who are born or become members of low-income communities (Hicks 434). This situation greatly impacts people's well-being in regards to education, fashion, and setting (Hicks 446). In particular, the poverty-stricken population experiences limited opportunities and access to improve their quality of life (Scott 2). In order to lessen the gap between economic statuses, a rise in public awareness regarding social, economic, and political conditions is essential (Schor 25). Public involvement in favor of economic equality will lead people to potential change (Schor 25). Some scholars have noted that telenovelas are a media source that elevates awareness of featured issues through their storylines within their audience (Cháves 197; Joyce 57).

### **Economic Disparity Indicators in Telenovelas**

Telenovelas generally depict a love story that contains a conflict in economic status (Abad-Izquierdo 106; Adriaens 177). A general theme is that men are upper class while women are lower class (Adriaens 177). Economic status helps create character profiles, which are often associated with communicative behaviors and personality traits (Adriaens 177). For example, men who belong in the higher class of the social hierarchy feel entitled, are egocentric, and dominant (Acosta-Alzuru 188; Mayer 481). As a result, women feel socially oppressed (Acosta-Alzuru 188; Mayer 481). Telenovelas incorporating economic twists to the storylines and the character development allows viewers to distinguish the positive and negative connotations with

being wealthy and being poor (Acosta-Alzuru 188). Therefore, characters without money are seen as the “good” characters, and the characters with money are referred to as the “bad” characters (Acosta-Alzuru 188; Lewkowicz 267).

Even though love is the central element in telenovelas, the perpetual theme of economic inequality causes viewers to connect this fantasy world with real-life situations (Acosta-Alzuru 188; Zdun 52). Hence, the public considers the solutions that are being presented on-screen as a resource they could also use in reality (Acosta-Alzuru 188). Clifford noted that the viewers who are middle to upper class only focus on the characters’ emotions and actions (367). On the other hand, the viewers in the lower class critique the issues being displayed (Clifford 367). However, the study did not look for motivations of the viewers’ actions (Clifford 367). The next section will look at three indicators that are used to highlight the existence of economic disparity in telenovelas: education, fashion, and setting.

**Education.** Education is a good indicator of economic disparity (Adriaens 177; Dabla-Norris et al. 9). Money is heavily influenced by education, access to education, and level of education (Hicks 444). Socially, it is more favorable to receive a higher level of education in order to have a professional career (Hicks 444). Moreover, the portrayal of gaining a high status is dependent on the level of education. Having money allows people to have more education. These concepts regarding education can be seen in telenovelas.

In telenovelas, the type of education indicates the economic status of families; for instance, a character who goes to a prestigious school has a wealthy family (Johnson 1655). *Rebelde*, a Mexican telenovela, is an illustration of this concept. The telenovela is primarily based at an exclusive boarding high school, where the most powerful and richest families send their children to get the highest education they can receive (Lewkowicz 272). The students feel a



sense of pride of their status. Students have an obligation to fulfill their parents' wishes of having a professional career (Lewkowicz 272). A major theme that is highlighted in *Rebelde* is education and professional career, which is the criteria for being elite (Benavides 11). Education leads to a decent job, especially coming from a wealthy family, and results in having a powerful position in society. It is prominent in society to have the criteria mentioned so the lower-class experiences social pressure to earn a better education and move up the professional ladder (Adriaens 188). However, *Rebelde* demonstrates that the lower-class cannot afford private schooling due to other commitments, such as having to work and make ends meet for their family. The upper-class is in control of the dominant cultural standards in society and the chasm of inequality based on education level (Adelman and Ruggi 561). The characters who belong to the lower-class are mistreated based on their jobs and this leads to a restriction for upward mobility (Scott 4). Another indicator of economic status in telenovelas is fashion.

**Fashion.** Fashion is an explicit indicator of economic disparity because it is correlated to a person's lifestyle and wealth (Adriaens 186). The type of clothes people wear is connected to how they identify or want to be perceived within their society (Baker 622). The clothing, specifically the brand of it, is a specific factor people can use to determine the status of someone. For example, Jimmy Choo heels cost an exorbitant amount of money but similar styles can be bought at a much lower price. However, part of what people are buying is the status symbol; showing they have the extra money to spend on fashionable clothing and are not worried about practicality. As a result, fashion became a key way to distinguish between social classes; it is a visual indicator that people use to classify others (Clifford 367). This is highly utilized in media, especially in telenovelas (Adriaens 183).

Characters in these telenovelas tell a story of their own via fashion to show their place in the disparity between rich and poor (Pastina 163). Characters use brands to display comfort in their social groups and status to people they do not know (Rajput et al. 116). Additionally, there are accessories, such as ties and scarves, that can separate social classes. Clothing that the characters wear plus their accessories show a divide between the higher and lower class (Baker 368). For example, in the telenovela, *Sara*, the storyline is a love triangle where Sara is from the lower-class, and both men in the love triangle come from wealthy families (Adriaens 186). Sara wears clothing that looks “cheap and not fashionable,” and the wealthy characters showcase their expensive designer items (Adriaens 186). In this telenovela, fashion is seen to be one of the clearest indicators to show class distinction. A character’s wealth is linked to their material goods (Scott 2). The connection between visual aesthetics and wealth highlights visually the oppression of the lower-class and power dynamics (Baker 638). Fashion is an significant indicator of economic disparity and can be heavily influenced by the setting that the characters are in.

**Setting.** Settings indicate economic disparity, and they play a key role in defining people on a daily basis (Adriaens 183; Clifford 367). The places people consistently go to displays a glimpse of their lifestyle; based on this, people can distinguish another person’s economic status and thus the disparity between individuals (Clifford 367; Hernández-Pérez and Rodríguez 41). This can be based on many factors, such as how elite people tend to seclude themselves in more urban communities, and easily construct segregation from the poor, or how campuses can depict the wealth of the student body (Belle 145). These settings convey status and a degree of authority, which illustrates economic inequality; such as, being in a rural area may signify lower economic status and manual labor, where living in a penthouse apartment in a big city represents

wealth. People often associate their identity with the environment they are surrounded by, which creates a private sphere and a sense of internal satisfaction (Benavides 11). For example, someone from a wealthy family may feel most comfortable in five star restaurants, country clubs, and benefit events. However, someone from a lower socioeconomic class may feel more comfortable going to fast food restaurants, the park, and their neighborhoods. Settings give viewers a message about economic disparity. They take information from physical locations and draw these connections between them. Because viewers associate characters with physical locations, they go to these places to establish or maintain their identity. Telenovelas emphasize the perceptions of economic disparity by displaying characters within specific settings.

Settings range from priority locations such as the characters' homes and their jobs, to more leisure environments such as the golf courses and art museums (Adriaens 187; Scott 2). In these settings, characters encounter their friends or relatives, representing where they belong in the social hierarchy (Morrissey 229). For example, in the telenovela *Sara*, the elite people socialize with their other elite friends, and go to social outings such as attending high society parties and going to fancy restaurants to drink and eat expensive cuisine (e.g., lobster and Champagne) (Adriaens 187). The characters of the lower-class typically take public transportation, such as the bus, to their jobs, pack their lunches, and prepare meals at home (Scott 2). They do not have a wide spectrum for leisure amenities, but they do socialize with similar people in their own economic status (Scott 3). Settings within telenovelas represent a distinction between the upper and lower-class and bring regional-identity into the socio economic identity of characters (Merayo 218; Pastina 175). Telenovelas, especially Mexican telenovelas, assert narrative features, such as settings, to be an indicator of economic disparity because it reinforces norms and behaviors of people within settings in specific regions.

### **Economic Disparity in Mexico.**

Specifically in Mexico, there is a major divide between the very rich and the very poor. Generally, the divide exists between the northern and southern regions of the country (Schatz 110). Mexico's south is filled with rural communities; the population has a bigger proportion of indigenous people (Huck 260). The northern parts are more urban and have more wealthy and elite people, who live better off than the people in the south (Amuchástegui et al. 994). Those who are wealthy hold more global power, which leads to the oppression of Indians who live in the countryside and have limited access to social growth opportunities (Huck 260). As a result, issues regarding economic disparity need to be discussed and not avoided to prevent exclusion from continuing (Zdun 52). Economic issues are the core problem, which leads to more social conflicts (e.g., race, ethnicity, and gender) and a negative perception of the country.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Given all the research about media's daily influence on shaping society's way of thinking, my study applies a theoretical lens of media messages known as the Cultivation Theory. Gerbner introduced the Cultivation Theory to expand the notion of television creating a widespread meaning for people's behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs (Morgan and Shanahan 338; Potter 1016; Quick 41). The Cultivation Theory is a media theory that states that television creates a worldview, whether accurate or not, that becomes the reality because people believe it to be so (Morgan and Shanahan 339; Potter 1016). Media, particularly television, causes conceptions of reality and thus shapes contemporary society to perceive the content depicted on-screen to be true (Griffin et al. 363).

Television dominates other sources of information and ideas about the world and has the ability to attract different groups of people globally (Quick 41). Television is seen as a cultural

storyteller of a society because it cultivates values already present in a society's culture (Griffin et al. 363; Morgan and Shanahan 338). Thus, viewers are exposed to content on television, which resonates differently among them, and those with whom it resonates most strongly (often those who watch the most), will believe it to be more true (Potter 1016; Quick 42). Television viewers' outlooks are shaped by television because of the cumulative effect of heavy viewing (Morgan and Shanahan 338; Quick 41). Thus, the Cultivation Theory posits that circular relationship, where television reflects everyday life and viewers reflect what they see on television. In our contemporary world, access to television is easier and more frequent because of the combination and availability of mobile devices and streaming television, which has led to a rise in importance of the Cultivation Theory. Overall, the Cultivation Theory explains that the more viewers consume television, the more they are consequently influenced long-term (e.g., world understandings and beliefs) by what is on television and thus replicate it in their own perceived reality (Griffin et al. 363; Quick 42). This theory suggests that telenovelas impact how viewers see their identities and reality, and thus, their perceptions of societal values, attitudes, and beliefs.

### **Conclusion**

The literature emphasizes how telenovelas incorporate cultural values (e.g., social issues), and thus, how programs are more country-tailored, which is extremely favored in Latin America. The history of telenovelas in Latin America has evolved since 18th century Europe, and has been influenced by eras such as romanticism and realism. Producers of telenovelas use specific characteristics (e.g., daily airings, having a closed text format, characters' roles, and using colloquial language) to connect to audiences and attempt to send sociocultural messages to a wide audience. More specifically, the cultural elements that Mexicans hold close to their heart

are primarily history, language, religion, and family values. Mexico's history of political tension and rebellion, along with the dominance of Catholicism, influences values, ethics, principles, and the significance of family.

Mexican television network, Televisa, has depicted Mexican values on-screen and has kept audience in mind when deciding how to execute producing telenovelas. Their goal is to highlight social and political issues and entertain viewers. To ensure the goal is fulfilled, telenovela producers use Sabido's techniques (e.g., over dramatization and low production value). These techniques create emotional involvement with the audience while presenting controversial issues on-screen.

My study focused on one of these social issues: economic disparity. Mexican telenovelas portray economic disparity as the significant divide between rich and poor. Three economic indicators that can illustrate the gap are education, fashion, and setting. The level of education can determine a character's income, the clothes characters wear portray how much money they have, and the social settings characters occupy display a character's status. Though economic disparity is a real social issue in Mexico, it is based predominantly on region. Northern regions are wealthier than the Southern agricultural and rural regions. After researching Mexico's economic disparity, I explained that the Cultivation Theory provides a framework for my research. This theory posits the idea that anything shown on television, whether if it is true or not, will influence viewers to see it as reality. The next chapter will outline the methodology of this study.

### CHAPTER III: METHODS

In order to complete my study, I used the qualitative method of ethnographic interviews within the framework of cultural studies to understand how viewers perceive telenovelas' portrayals of social issues. The purpose of my study was to investigate how Mexican audiences perceive economic disparity and its depiction in telenovelas, as well how that depiction in turn influences Mexican culture. While focusing specifically on economic disparity, I examined three visible indicators — education, fashion, and setting — to understand how this social issue is represented in Mexican society. In this chapter, I provide justification for the use of ethnographic interviews, describe the study's participants, and explain the methodological steps of conducting ethnographic interviews.

#### **Justification of Method**

Ethnography, specifically ethnographic interviews, is an appropriate and essential method for my study. Definitionally, ethnography is a research and personal process “of learning about people by learning from them” (Cruz and Higginbottom 37); researchers delve into a particular environment, experience a culture, and interpret its various forms (Weaver 156). An ethnographic method complements cultural studies. Cultural studies is a field of research that examines how culture reconstructs individual experiences, power, and social structure on a daily basis, and derives meaning from it (Law 247; Morley 23). The cultural studies method is “the everyday world of common sense” because the practices, traditions, and beliefs are part of the everyday routine for a particular group in a location (Morley 23). The practice of ethnographic research reflects cultural studies because it includes researchers immersing themselves in a specific culture firsthand and having interactions with the people of that culture. Researchers spend a period of time in the environment they are studying, during which they become a

member of the culture and can explain the participants' social behaviors (Bateman 320; Currey et al. 1444). Through ethnography, particularly by employing ethnographic interviews, I integrated into the community and gained honest insights about Mexican identity through their personal stories in their own words, as linked to telenovelas and the viewers' perceptions on economic disparity. Thus, ethnographic interviews allowed me to transcend cultural barriers and have meaningful conversations.

Using ethnographic interviews was beneficial to my study because it permitted flexibility for both interviewer and interviewees. Following ethnographic techniques, asking open-ended questions allowed participants to steer the interviews and direct the conversation toward topics and issues that were important to them. Participants were able to be thorough in their responses and I was able to ask follow-up questions that were relevant to my study (Bateman 320). This technique is designed to prompt my participants to give in-depth responses describing their perceptions about specific subject matters (Cruz and Higginbottom 37; McEachern 259). Applying ethnographic interviews from a cultural studies perspective provided me with a better understanding of Mexican telenovela viewers' perceptions of economic disparity in telenovelas.

### **Participants**

In this study, I performed ethnographic interviews with 13 participants in three different parks located in Mexico City, Mexico. By interviewing in three different spaces, I avoided potential locational bias related to their opinions and experiences regarding telenovelas. The participants, all adults between the ages of 18 to 47, included both natives and non-natives who lived in Mexico for at least five years. Interviewing locals was vital to my study because it provided me with a more precise understanding of how they perceive economic disparity in telenovelas and in their society.



### **Specific Methodological Steps**

There are several key steps when conducting ethnographic interviews. For this study, I first conducted observations early in the morning on the first day I arrived in Mexico, which included approaching people who were relaxing at the parks in the downtown area. The first was Parque México, a small park. The second location was a bigger park, called Parque España. The last park was Bosque de Chapultepec. In Mexico City, people go to parks all the time and stay for hours, watching their pets, conversing with their friends, or simply reading. Going to parks allowed me to deeply integrate in Mexican culture, gave me insight into a holistic routine of many Mexican individuals, and access individuals who had time available for interviews. The afternoon/mid-day consisted of me asking people to be participants for my study, and explaining my research project, its purpose, the interview format, and the confidentiality agreements to them. I formulated an English and Spanish consent form to be given to the participants who were willing to participate in my study. For both versions, please see Appendix A.

Once the participants were selected, the second step was to choose the place of the interview location. My participants had the option to pick a place to do the interview where they felt comfortable and safe, so long as it was public (e.g., park, shopping center) and familiar to me: three participants chose to relocate to bookstores; all of the participants agreed to do the interviews at the time they were initially asked. Picking an environment suitable and comfortable for my participants enabled them to share their opinions and be honest.

The third step was to conduct individual ethnographic interviews with each participant. Interviews lasted between one and two hours and were audio and video recorded. Of the 13 participants, six agreed only to be audio recorded. To accommodate my participants' comfort in communication, interview questions were written in English and Spanish. These questions are

both direct and open-ended, which provided me with an accurate background of my participants as well as rich and in-depth responses to my study.

My direct interview questions focused on their demographics, education level, and other background information. Open-ended questions focused on telenovela viewing habits such as the consumption of telenovelas, series they follow, and the reasons behind watching telenovelas. Additionally, interviewees were asked open-ended questions, specifically relating to this study. These questions included personal perceptions of economic disparity in telenovelas, particularly focused on the indicators of education, fashion, and setting. For the list of questions, please see Appendix B.

The fourth step, once the interviews were completed, was to transcribe these interviews to be able to identify themes. My high school friend who is a native Spanish speaker assisted me in making sure I transcribed my interviews correctly to avoid any mistakes. After I came back from Mexico City, Mexico, we met face-to-face to translate interviews for about five hours. We transcribed the interviews sentence by sentence. Additional translation consultations were done through Skype. As my translator was privy to the data and the identification of the participants, she signed a confidentiality agreement form. For the confidentiality form, please see Appendix C.

The fifth step was to follow the direction of Cruz and Higginbottom (37) and find and analyze patterns shared by my participants. I looked for recurring statements and themes that were significant to my research. By collecting data from a variety of members in the target group, I was able to identify subgroups and patterns of those subgroups (Johnson 104; McEachern 259). The identified themes and subgroups provided detail for my analysis.

## CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

I chose to observe individuals in various parks in Mexico City. This allowed me to participate in many cultural activities such as eating tacos at street stands, walking around the park, and watching telenovelas in a coffee shop. I did the majority of these activities in one day, but for many Mexicans, these are a part of their daily routines and their culture. In my study, my focus was on Mexican telenovelas, and I investigated how economic disparity is represented in telenovelas, if telenovelas were a reflection of their society and culture, and if participants identify with the characters and plots of Mexican telenovelas. Before getting into economic disparity, I will provide general descriptions of the show.

Mexican telenovelas are melodramatic series that typically involve a storyline where a woman falls in love with a man, but they endure obstacles based on extreme socioeconomic statuses: the wealthy and the poor. Characters are easily identified by which class they belong to, which can also reveal their personality. Characters who belong to the lower class are often seen as kind, whereas the characters who are in the higher class are arrogant. Some obstacles they go through involve rejection from their family and friends, jealousy, money, or social issues occurring in the country. However, love between the poor woman and the rich man generally prevails over all, and they live happily ever after.

The purpose of my research was to examine how Mexican telenovela watchers perceive the way socioeconomic status is portrayed and whether their perceptions of economic disparity impacted their Mexican identity and influenced their society. The previous chapter discussed the methods, justification of methods, and specific methodological steps of the research project. The first portion of this chapter consists of a background of all my participants. Following this portion of this chapter will be an analysis of the interview participants' responses.

### **Background of Participants**

Prior to interpreting the themes that came out of my research, it is important to describe the participants and where the interviews took place. The interviews took place in central locations in Mexico City, where the participants and I met. These locations were comfortable for the participants, which enabled them to feel at ease and encouraged them to answer my questions as honestly as possible. Places that were appropriate and safe for both the participants and I were parks and bookstores.

While each participant shares a common identity associated with watching telenovelas, each interviewee has attributes that are unique to their identity. These unique attributes shaped their responses when asked the interview questions. Thus, in order to understand and interpret this research project in its entirety, information of my participants should first be acknowledged.

“Rhonda Lloyd” is a female in her senior year of college. She is twenty-one years old.

Rhonda watches telenovelas with her parents and brother in the living room for an hour, during the evening, Monday through Friday.

“Tommy Pickles” is a male in his senior year of college. He is twenty-one years old.

Tommy watches telenovelas every time they are on television, but is primarily attentive when he watches his favorite shows. He watches current and reruns of telenovelas with his family in the living room during the evening time for an hour, specifically a time between 6-8 PM.

“Lucy Carmichael” is a female in her senior of college. She is twenty-two years old.

Lucy watches telenovelas for about thirty minutes to an hour, twice a week with her parents in their room. She generally prefers watching live romantic telenovelas during the evening hours around 8-9 PM. Throughout the interview, she smiled. When answering

questions that may have been difficult for her, she used vocal fillers and looked around the park.

“Chuckie Finster” is a male who has a Masters in mechanical engineering. He is thirty-seven years old. Chuckie watches telenovelas with his friends and relatives at his home, in cafes, or on the bus to work. He usually watches them for about thirty minutes to an hour. During his interview, he smiled and laughed. At times, there were vocal fillers as a form of thinking, and he then felt comfortable with his responses.

“Sheila Swann” is a female studying Physics in college. She is twenty-one years old. Sheila watches telenovelas two to three times a week, and prefers reruns. She watches them by herself in her room or in her living room. Towards the beginning of her interview, she hesitated a bit and looked around the park. As the interview continued, Sheila felt more confident and relaxed.

“Harold Frumpkin” is a male college student. He is twenty-two years old. Harold watches telenovelas two to three times a week for about one to two hours. He watches them live in the living room with his grandma. He stays with his grandma, who watches telenovelas all the time.

“Samantha Shane” is a female who completed high school. She is forty-seven years old. Samantha watches telenovelas whenever she has time, but she aims to watch them everyday. She watches telenovelas by herself or with her family at home, for an hour each night. After a telenovela ends, Samantha sometimes has conversations with her family. Throughout her interview, she often smiled and laughed.

“Todd McNulty” is a male high school graduate. He is twenty-two years old. Todd watches live telenovelas with his family in the living room. At times, he watches them

with his friends, and converses with his mother, brother, or friends after a telenovela episode ends.

“Lila Sawyer” is a female a high school graduate. She is nineteen years old. Lila watches telenovelas whenever her grandmother watches them. In Lila’s childhood, she watched telenovelas with her grandparents and mother, but now she watches them with only her grandmother in their living room. Her grandmother loves to have telenovelas on all day. Towards the end of her interview, she looked slightly uncomfortable as we went into more personal questions, but used vocal fillers to maintain her composure.

“Dwayne Tickerbacker” is a male high school student. He is nineteen years old. Dwayne watches telenovelas three times a week with his family during the evening hours, typically at dinner. Dwayne watches them at home, and dialogues with his family after a telenovela episode ends.

“Phoebe Heyerdahl” is a female college student. She is twenty-one years old. Phoebe watches telenovelas two days out of the week for an hour in her mother’s room or in the living room. She avoids watching the classical telenovelas and prefers medieval telenovelas that have an emphasis on Mexican history. After a telenovela episode ends, she has conversations with her sister, mother, or boyfriend. Phoebe used vocal fillers to think about a response and at times, she looked at the ground.

“Rocko Ramone” is a male high school student. He is nineteen years old. Rocko watches telenovelas once a week, and does not follow any particular series. He watches telenovelas for an hour during dinner time, mostly by himself but sometimes with his grandmother and brother. Rocko sometimes has dialogue with them after a telenovela episode ends, but most of the time, he does not have a conversation with them.

“Helga Pataki” is a female who has a high school level education. She is thirty-four years old. Helga watches telenovelas two days a week for about thirty minutes to an hour each. She watches them with her sister and daughter, and has conversations with them after a telenovela episode ends. Throughout her interview, she smiled. Helga did not smile when the subject changed to matters that she found to be more serious and critical.

### **Analysis of Ethnographic Interviews**

In this section, my participants’ responses will be analyzed (see Appendix B), and participants’ perceptions of economic disparity within Mexican telenovelas and the connection between telenovelas and Mexico’s society and culture will be brought to surface. I focused in three areas: economic disparity representation, overall reflection within telenovelas of participants’ lived experiences, and gender roles, a primary aspect of Mexican culture. My findings under economic disparity representation were observational. There were concrete patterns that I discerned in messages about socioeconomic class. The other areas were more perceptive; my participants’ responses included their interpretations of telenovelas and how they see them reflecting their culture and themselves. However, before discussing economic disparity in telenovelas, and their representation of reality, I will explain why my participants continue to tune in and watch telenovelas.

### **Why watch telenovelas?**

Telenovelas have been airing on television for years, and my participants watch this genre for various reasons. Some participants are drawn by the fantasy entertainment values in telenovelas, while others continue to watch them because of the social connection values.

Telenovelas depict fantasy narrative elements. Examples of fantasy representations include showing beautiful landscapes of Mexico to create a sense of national pride from the

viewers, and finding love and hope to get that “happy ending.” For example, Tommy and Lila expressed that they enjoy feeling the essence of Mexico on-screen. Tommy stated, “It’s really nice to see your background and your culture and you feel like you are at a place where like you can actually see it.” Additionally, Lila stated, “I feel like Mexico is such a beautiful country and in some, they do portray that it is beautiful and that they do have beautiful land and beautiful people.” Their statements demonstrate that physical scenery and infrastructure create a sense of patriotism. Showing the positive aspects of Mexico remind them why they love their country. Thus, telenovelas illustrate their country, encouraging them to be proud to identify as Mexicans.

Additionally, telenovelas consistently have “love” and “hope” storylines, which connect with my participants’ lives. Chuckie and Todd discussed that love is one quality that they want in their own lives. Todd stated, “[I look for the] finding love type of situations ... [telenovelas] are always like you find love and you make it work and you get married happily ever after and that type of thing ...” The ability to find love is a quality that Mexicans want and try to connect to because family is a main value for Mexicans. Mexicans care for their immediate and extended family members, which enhances the close bond that they have with one another (Adriaens 176; Huck 260). Todd’s statement indicates that having a significant partner would potentially result in a family, and thus be in line with Mexican norms and culture.

While love is great to have, telenovelas incorporate a realistic aspect in that there is problems within relationships. Chuckie described that people watch them because they involve romances that have “messy tanglement [in] the love story.” The “messy tanglement” consists of infidelity, and causes stirred reactions for viewers. This goes against Catholic values, in which marital infidelity is a traumatic experience for not only the partner but the family as a whole (Adriaens 176). However, infidelity is typically the climax, or the conflict that happens in the



middle of the plot, so this is usually resolved to generate a “happy ending” (Straubhaar 19; Tate, “Laughing All” 60). The “happy ending” could be that the couple works on their marriage and the lover goes away, or the marriage is broken and they become single parents. Getting a divorce can be empowering in that both partners become comfortable with their individuality and thus their fortitude. However, regardless of the outcome, there will always be a “happy ending,” reinforcing the importance of either love or strength, and giving viewers such as Chuckie a reason to continue watching telenovelas.

Telenovelas show that there are characters, typically poor characters, who face difficult obstacles in their lives. They are able to overcome these obstacles through hope, which shows viewers that hard work does pay off, a theme that resonates with some participants. Samantha personally said that she can relate to this type of character that is portrayed on-screen because she, too, longs for a better future. Samantha stated, “I can identify with the poor woman because she works hard to get to where she wants to go ... and I am doing the same. I have the same hope she has ... they give me some type of hope to live luxurious but I am also satisfied with everything that I have.” This indicates that Samantha comes from a low socioeconomic status, and can identify with the poor woman because she can see a representation of herself on-screen. Samantha understands what the poor woman does on a daily basis (e.g., working long hours at work) because she does the same. She wants upward mobility to have a more promising future. If the poor character can have this type of hard working human quality and not give up, then Samantha can also persevere and expect a better outcome as well. Watching telenovelas gives viewers aspiration because telenovelas consist of characters, usually the poor ones, overcoming their situation, and so the viewers too feel like they can triumph over their own problems. The poor character, usually the protagonist, generally has a deep connection with the rich main

character; the poor character moves up the social ladder because of her human attributes and values, such as kindness and hope (Acosta-Alzuru 188; Pearson 403).

Although telenovelas integrate fantasy elements, various landscapes of Mexico, and the love and hope depicted in the “happy ending,” telenovelas also serve to bring people together, specifically younger and older people. Telenovelas are a tool to engage them in social conversations. 12 out of the 13 participants watch telenovelas with a family member, and seven of them said they discussed the show with their families after the episodes ended. Based on the younger participants’ testimonies, older relatives view telenovelas more frequently than the younger generation. The younger relatives likely use telenovelas to connect with their older family members.

Younger participants, such as Dwayne, Lila, Harold, and Rocko, mentioned that they watch telenovelas because they want to be able to spend time with their older relatives. Dwayne emphasized the importance of interacting with family members. Lila and Harold explained that they not only watched telenovelas to maintain their relationship with their elders, but both generations wanted to educate each other about current trends happening within their society. Harold emphasized he likes watching telenovelas because he “tries to teach [his grandmother].” For example, a specific episode that Harold and his grandmother watched involved the characters using social media “like a weapon.” This caused Harold’s grandmother to negatively perceive how people use social media. As a result, after the episode ended, Harold attempted to explain to his grandma that social media, specifically Facebook, will not kill people. He wanted to explain present mediums and newer access to technology. In Rocko’s interview, he said he watches telenovelas with his grandmother as a way to interact with her through her daily routine. They watch them weekly, using it as “their time” to converse about a common topic. He stated, “I

want to spend time with my grandma because she always watches it so we would gossip and talk about what just happened in an episode.” This illustrates that Rocko is engaging in a cultural activity that his grandmother does on a daily basis in order to sustain their close relationship.

Fantasy elements and social discourse between generations are some of the reasons why my participants watch telenovelas. In turn, telenovela creators use these aspects to showcase social issues such as economic disparity. Now, I will discuss how my participants perceived economic disparity within telenovelas.

### **Economic Disparity Representation**

With my study, I wanted to examine how members of the Mexican community viewed economic disparity within the telenovela series that they watch. After interviewing 13 Mexican telenovela viewers and analyzing each interview, four themes were relevant to this case: fashion, setting, education, and language.

#### **Fashion**

The biggest indicator of economic status, of those discussed in the interviews, was fashion. Samantha explicitly stated that economic disparity exists in Mexican telenovelas when there are “two opposite types of clothing for two opposite types of people.” Rocko also said, “You can tell who belongs to what class based on how they dress.” Rocko’s statement supports Adriaens’ research in that there is representation of economic disparity within telenovelas as it pertains to a character’s wealth or style of living (186). All of the participants noted some aspect of fashion that could be used to distinguish the wealthy from the poor. Nine of the 13 participants gave detailed descriptions about both the rich and poor characters, in terms of fashion. The descriptors of fashion revolved around the type of clothing, including brand names and clothing formality, as well as accessories, including hair.

Viewers are able to differentiate wealth groups in telenovelas since rich characters wear formal brand name products. The participants explained that rich male characters always have on suits and shiny shoes. At times, they wear a collared shirt and long business pants when relaxing. Rich female characters wear dresses, usually flashy ones, and high heels. These formal clothes mostly consist of brand names. Chuckie stated, “Fashion and their brands is a way to tell economic disparity. Rich people like brand names ...” These characters have a preference for brand names because they are a more formal and distinct way to show their socioeconomic class.

Rich characters in telenovelas also display their wealth through quality of clothing, accessories, makeup, and hairstyle. Their formal appearance indicates that rich characters are well-kept, presented nicely, and have a fresh and clean look. With this type of style, Lila, Chuckie, Phoebe, and Rocko explained that rich characters accentuate their outfits with gold accessories, such as watches, jewelry, and purses. Rocko stated, “[rich characters wear] jewelry, watches, [and] gold ...” Additionally, rich female characters wear scarves and extravagant makeup, even when they sleep. Hairstyles were either over-the-top for women or always styled for men. Chuckie stated, “The hair would be [*swishing motion with his hand through his hair*] very smooth;” Lila mentioned that “The hair is always really nicely done ... It’s almost insane” and Todd expressed, “I think the hairstyle also ... the rich tend to have more well-kept ... very nice and fashionable ...” Accessories and styles reflect characters’ wealth to viewers.

On the other hand, poor characters are perceived to be less extravagant in their clothing. Phoebe explained the clothing style of poor characters: “It’s not flashy and does not have brand names.” Wearing no brand names is associated with a more informal clothing style, generally simple clothing. Rocko explained, the clothes were “work,” “labor,” or “street” clothes. They

wear jeans, simple t-shirts, and regular shoes such as tennis shoes. Poor female characters wear loose clothing and sometimes wear their work clothes as their only outfit in the episode.

Another feature that indicates informality of clothing is the more indigenous look. Phoebe and Todd were able to identify women characters who were poor if they wore indigenous clothing. Todd stated:

and the poor class, they tend to wear more ... portray them to wear more traditional Mexican ... maybe like those colorful long skirts, or a blouse that's really colorful or kind of make them more indigenous looking because like they tend to be more poor so they tend to give them a more indigenous look.

Indigenous clothing represents perceptions of poor socioeconomic class, as does how well used the clothing looks. Poor characters have more of a washed out and wrinkly look in their clothing. Dwayne expressed, "The poor have bad conditions of clothing like broken-down pants, ripped shirts, worn down, simple." Todd also said that "the lower class tend to have their hair in a bun ... very simple." These characters showcase simplicity in their fashion, from their non brand clothes to their effortless hairstyles.

Participants and previous researchers saw fashion as a way to objectively determine a character's class. Having brand names supports the literature in that brands are used as a status symbol (Adriaens 186; Clifford 367) and a comfort mechanism (Rajput, et. al 116). Rich characters find it reassuring that they are financially secure by having concrete items. Their reassurance is an example of how characters' fashion portrays their social identities, such as their socioeconomic status (Pastina 163). Additionally, the indigenous clothing correlates with lower socioeconomic status. This reinforces the research that suggests that indigenous clothing is reflective of where they live and the socioeconomic background of the area (Schatz 110). Hence,

fashion is a useful tool to represent economic disparity because humans tend to first judge and identify class visually.

The type of clothing is considered the bulk of fashion, but accessories also determine a character's status. Items, such as watches and scarves, are nonessential to have, but are desirable for people who can afford them. Baker's research supports that accessories help identify social class (368). Additionally, rich characters have "over-the-top" hairstyles, while poor characters have a more "simple" look. This illustrates that the type of look relates to the amount of time available to characters. Rich characters have more time to do their hair, while the poor characters have other obligations such as multiple jobs. The participants' statements provide their perceptions of the social meanings of these items; therefore, my participants differentiated between the characters in telenovelas through fashion.

Despite the dramatic differences of clothing among characters, participants did not feel fashion in telenovelas was reflective of society. Telenovelas show rich characters wearing many flashy artifacts and poor people wearing raggedy material (Pastina 163). Tommy, Harold, and Samantha disagreed with how telenovelas present fashion. Samantha stated, "Ummm ... I think clothes can tell but it doesn't really show ... [in society,] we all blend in so there is no major difference ... and the poor do not wear [the] torn-up clothing that is exaggerated in telenovelas ..." Thus, fashion in telenovelas does not accurately reflect Mexican society. Harold described this erroneous portrayal by saying:

No I don't think that you can wear the clothes that you want and it's not gonna affect your representation of class status ... because I am wearing this t-shirt and jeans and it doesn't affect who I am because I can wear a suit and I can be a different person right now so I don't think it represents class ...

Clearly, telenovelas delineate fashion differently than how my participants see their society. People in Mexico wear whatever clothing they want to wear. Others can make assumptions based on how they dress, but clothing does not necessarily equate to class. People in Mexico are more subtle and sophisticated with what they wear, because physically displaying wealth can lead to negative consequences. Tommy stated:

it's also a matter of how they dress for the most part ... it's a little too flashy... in my opinion, in the telenovelas but it is ... it is ... a matter for people to get at 'Oh, he's rich' so that's good but at the same time, in Mexico that's not really easy to tell who's rich and who's not ... especially in D.F. because everybody dresses alike and similar because I guess rich people don't wanna be brought out because it's dangerous ... if you get flashed out, you're gonna get looked at and robbed or something which is sad but at the same time, that's how it is ...

People in Mexico conceal their material wealth in order to prevent outcomes such as robberies and to protect their socioeconomic status. The elite wear clothes that are not too “flashy” to “blend in” with their culture and surroundings, making it difficult for others to identify who is rich. As a result, clothing in telenovelas cannot definitively portray economic disparity within Mexican society.

### **Setting**

The second theme that distinguishes economic disparity is setting. Particularly in telenovelas, setting indicates a character's lifestyle, including socioeconomic status (Clifford 367; Hernández-Pérez and Rodríguez 41). Viewers can tell the difference between the characters by looking at their diverse economic circumstances within the setting. Rhonda stated, “[Telenovela creators] make the differences very very obvious,” allowing viewers to see the

economic gap between characters through setting. Ten participants provided me with a spectrum of responses indicating that social settings and the size of the household depict socioeconomic class.

Social settings encompass the locations of leisure activities. Research in Adriaens', Morrissey's, and Scott's studies all noted that leisure time activity choice is an important way to distinguish between socioeconomic groups (187; 229; 2). In Dwayne, Chuckie, Samantha, and Sheila's responses, they gave examples of leisure activities that the rich characters participate in. Samantha clearly stated, "[rich characters] go to places like the shopping centers to buy expensive clothes, hotels, plazas, cafes," and Chuckie said that "They go to places that are very exquisite and very exclusive ..." Additional places rich characters go include charity events, eating at high end restaurants, and traveling to other zones or countries.

Rich characters have the ability to do what they want and go where they want without money being a factor in the decision. For example, Dwayne stated, "Well ... if [a character has] a lot of money, [the character] can definitely go out to a lot of places to pass by time and hang out with [their] friends." Dwayne also said, "[Rich characters] have fancy cars to drive in or they have people driving them, expensive food to eat at restaurants ..." He and Samantha explained that rich characters have paid people around them who they do not see as equal because of their socioeconomic status.

Economic disparity is also visible in the regional social locations between which characters move daily. Sheila stated, "where they go in the city or little towns can tell if they are poor or rich. Like if a telenovela, the character is going to Mexico City or La Condesa or La Rosa, they have money ..." Sheila expressed that the regional locations (zone, city, country) a character visits imply the economic status of that character.



Along with social settings, characters' houses and their surrounding conditions were noted in my participants' responses. The rich characters' houses were seen as lavish and urban. Tommy stated, "[The rich] have their own little world so they don't have to go out and really venture off into other towns because it's so dirty and nasty." Furthermore, Rhonda said, "the rich people would live in a mansion." Rhonda and Lucy both mentioned that rich characters generally live in the city. Lucy said that if the rich characters live in another type of community, "they still have the nicest houses ever." Tommy described these mansions, saying, "their house is a like a town of its own."

These spaces stand in contrast with the places that poor characters visit, such as parks and local markets, and eating at home. Helga discussed that "[poor characters] attend parks, villages, and local dance places." Dwayne stated, "and the poor, they really do not go out much ... they just stay at home, hang out with their neighbors, go to free places like the park ... eat food like beans at home or from street stands ..."

The locations of these social settings reflect the regional spaces that characters visit. Sheila expressed, "[there are] zones [that] are not really safe and are considered dangerous so they must not have that much money." Poor characters who live in such areas do not have the resources to visit or live in safer environments.

The type of homes and the conditions physically surrounding their living environment contribute to recognizing socioeconomic status. Poor characters are seen to be in the more rural areas, usually the outskirts of the city. Rhonda said, "the poor would live in a shack" and Lucy stated, "The poor people have more of the umm ... earthy setting. They are usually in a little hut somewhere in the woods." Tommy further explained that the roads to the houses where the poor characters lived had "no sense of infrastructure" and a "very muddy looking environment."

Setting used in telenovelas is a clear economic indicator that shows disparity. Specifically, the social settings and their zones, and characters' homes and their surrounding conditions, play a big role in how my participants perceived rich and poor characters. Rich characters leisurely go to more luxurious and "exclusive" places, and sometimes have people driving them. Characters, such as chauffeurs and other paid help, do not function as characters individually but more as an indicator of the setting — having paid help indicates wealth. Poor characters prefer to visit places that are affordable to them or "free." Attending social settings that are "exclusive" reinforces that the elite characters prefer to isolate themselves from others and hence, create their own private sphere (Belle 145; Benavides 11). Moreover, using keywords, such as "free," describes the amount of wealth required to go to specific social places. Scott noted in his research that characters go to physical places that they are comfortable with and identify with based on similar socioeconomic status (3). Through leisure time activity choice, viewers are able to distinguish the socioeconomic status of characters.

The research conducted by Adriaens and Clifford found that characters' daily routine patterns and the locations that they take place in, especially if viewers are familiar with them, help solidify an established socioeconomic status to viewers (183; 367). Within Mexico City and the Mexican zones that Sheila listed, "La Condesa" and "La Rosa" are the wealthier districts of Mexico, which she perceives to be more safe and pleasant. Because of her experience and knowledge of these zones, mentioning them by name can help people perceive characters' wealth groups in telenovelas. This illustrates a low production value technique that telenovela creators employ because, stylistically, it is an efficient way to communicate socioeconomic status (Singhal and Rogers 71).

The homes and the setting surrounding the homes show clear differences between the wealthy and the poor. The wealthy live in “mansions” in “gated communities,” and in more urban zones. The poor live in shacks, and the more rural, “indigenous” parts of Mexico with bad road conditions. Additionally, words such as “dirty” and “nasty” [environment] signify belonging to a lower socioeconomic status. This demonstrates that rich characters seclude themselves from the poor characters based on setting and infrastructure. Telenovelas create a distinct way to tell the characters’ classes apart, and thus, are constructing a divide between the two wealth groups and maintaining an economic identity (Belle 145; Clifford 367; Hernández-Pérez and Rodríguez 41).

Setting is an economic disparity determinant in telenovelas. Participants were able to observe social and home settings, but when asked about whether setting was an indicator for Mexican society, the responses were split. Some saw telenovelas accurately portraying their culture, while others saw them as heavily dramatized.

Settings depicted in telenovelas reflect how three of my participants saw Mexico. Tommy, Harold, and Dwayne expressed that rich people who live in Mexico are more centered in Mexico City, and the people who are low-income live on its outskirts. Specifically, Tommy stated:

Mexico has a really big economic disparity as far as Central Mexico D.F. is really really populative and stuff like that and I’m not gonna say it’s rich because there are some places where it is poor but at the same time, that’s where most of our wealth is going to be located at ... but if you further out more, you’re gonna see houses that are made up of bricks, stones, moss ... leaves growing out of them ... stuff like that ... dirt roads most of the time ... but you go back to Mexico City, there is paved roads again and there is

people walking on sidewalks, malls, and everything ... it's a really big differentiation ... it's just very different everywhere.

Therefore, telenovelas do in fact depict an accurate representation of how many Mexicans live. Space equates to power because the elite can afford it, which is supported in the research of Merayo and Pastina, who claim a character's setting is a social cue of material wealth (218; 175). Telenovelas portray Tommy's description of the housing material and environment surrounding each socioeconomic status. "Dirt roads," are connotated around low-income, and "paved roads" refer to more urban people, typically those who belong to high-income communities.

Dwayne and Harold further established how telenovelas reflect Mexico's society by describing Mexico's districts. Harold depicted:

Well based on zones so here in La Condesa and El Polanco, I know that in telenovelas and in real life, they are really rich areas because everything is expensive so if they are living or eating here, they are rich people ... because they are in these places like if they are working or in a meeting or something like that but when I see other colonies or zones that I don't know, I think they are middle class or poor people.

Wealthier people live in the city, while the less wealthy live in other zones or villages, which establishes how telenovelas depict economic disparity. Schatz, whose research examined the divide between northern and southern regions of Mexico, reinforces that the disparity between the two wealth groups is regional (110). Additionally, Harold's phrasing, "in telenovelas and in real life," points out that reality and telenovelas are in sync. Contemporary Mexican society parallels telenovelas in terms of how settings expose wealth groups.

For most of my participants, settings are a clear visual indicator of economic disparity, but Chuckie only agreed to a certain extent. He expressed that people in Mexican society think

that “[He or she is] rich and [he or she is] poor, and [they] make it clear.’ And it’s kind of recognized and accepted so yes it does represent Mexico but it’s very exaggerated in a telenovela ... So telenovelas are not wrong ... they are just caricatures and very exaggerated ...” Chuckie explained that telenovelas show material wealth, specifically setting, more aggressively than how it appears in real life.

On the other hand, Lila did not see settings to be an accurate representation of Mexican society. She described telenovelas and Mexico City differently. She explained that not all settings accurately depict status. Lila described:

For the rich, it would be big mansions ... and I’m like ‘why can’t we live in a house like that? We are Mexicans too ... you know why don’t we live in that big ol’ mansion’ ... and for the poor, it would be small, little townhouses or maybe not even a house at all..it could be just like a shed ... it’s not really realistic either because my family has townhouses, even though we aren’t the richest over here, we do have a good amount of material and life.

Defining who is rich and who is poor is difficult at times. As a result, telenovelas can conflict with how Mexicans see their society; people who belong to the lower economic status can have a place that is not a shack or shed. Lila used a personal experience to show that Mexico is not the same as telenovelas depict it. Thus, while settings depict economic disparity in telenovelas, they do not reflect the complex reality of Mexican society.

### **Education**

The third factor that illustrates economic disparity is education. Tommy explicitly stated, “The educational level of the characters, it’s a very big gap ...” Particularly, the type of education is heavily illustrated in Mexican telenovelas by the characters going to private schools or not

being able to receive an education. Seven of my participants fully gave in-depth responses regarding education and economic disparity.

Most of my participants summed up that in telenovelas, rich characters noted that most often, characters' families pay for them to go to private institutions. Additionally, my participants expressed that poor people do not receive an education due to monetary costs. Samantha explained that education costs money. The rich characters have tons of wealth, so their kids attend the best private schools. Lucy stated, "Well the rich one ... they usually always say 'Oh, he can study in America' ... like they always express that or they always say 'Oh he had the best private education.'" Chuckie further said, "while the rich family in the novelas have the ability to travel to the United States ... rich people can afford to go to good schools and then go to the United States to a university and have a good paying job than the lower class ..."

Education is important for getting jobs, but there are rich characters do not even have to get an education to get a decent job. Helga, Sheila, and Chuckie summarized that the families of the rich characters have connections, resources, and their own companies to pass down. Helga stated:

Hmm ... the rich men are more educated and there is a lot that goes under the boy of the heir. They go to private schools to get a degree and then they follow in father's company or they become a businessman for another company ... and the girls are not really supported to go to school, especially the ones in the lower class ... they are just seen to be future or current house maids ... they sometimes go to school but there really is not a force ... but if they do and they work very hard then they can talk very smart and maybe make more money than what they do like be a secretary or something.

Opposite to rich characters, poor characters do not have the same type of education. Samantha depicted:

The poor people really don't have an education but in some of them, they attend public education. The rich people always go to the private schools because they have money ... they wouldn't dare to be in public schools ... the rich family do not want that for their kids.

Chuckie further stated:

the lower class are seen as stupid or dumb and they really don't know anything outside of their village or home ... they don't have the opportunity to travel to the United States, or outside of the city, or outside of their village ... As far as the lower class in a telenovela, it's public schooling but in telenovelas, most of them don't even finish secondary school.

There are telenovelas that show poor characters going to public schools, if fortunate with money to cover the costs. Some characters, however, end up dropping out or not getting a decent job after graduation.

The type of education characters hold or do not hold reflects the kind of jobs they can receive. Dwayne described poor characters educational level to be: "Well ... it's very bad ... Some people, mostly the poor, cannot study because they cannot afford it." Tommy furthered described by stating:

As far as the poor people go, most of them are depicted as workers, low-educated, and really good with their hands so like they are ... really helpful with the rich people houses. They usually work at the rich people houses but they are not well-educated and are told off and sometimes get outsmarted altogether ...

While there are objective economic indicators in telenovelas, such as fashion and setting, education is more subjective. Determining if a character attends private or public school is less concrete; however, some participants were able to differentiate characters' socioeconomic status in telenovelas through education. Lucy expressed, "Oh [this character] had the best private education." Additionally, Chuckie stated, "rich people can afford to go to ... the United States to a university." These statements illustrate that rich characters have limitless opportunities to learn and gain knowledge, which plays a role in how they separate themselves from the poor characters. This supports Hick's research regarding how higher levels of education result in better careers (144), and Adelman and Ruggi's assertion that one's education often correlates to the job and socioeconomic status that they are able to achieve (561).

Sometimes, rich families take care of their own regardless of receiving an education or not, demonstrating the disparity between the two wealth groups. Participants described that it is usually the rich male characters who have jobs as business owners, but the rich women characters are taken care of as well. The poor characters, men or women, typically have to work hard no matter the obstacle because they still have "labor jobs" such as working on the farms or being a housemaid, which reinforces Johnson's research on how money is vital to receive an education (1655). This also speaks to Adriaens' research in that characters who belong to the lower socioeconomic status have a social pressure to move up the economic ladder (188). Based on my participants' responses, there is explicit and unfair economic treatment of the rich and poor characters in telenovelas often denoted through education.

Poor characters within telenovelas, whether educated or not, have labor jobs that consist of working hard for little pay. This reinforces Scott's study, in that characters who come from a low-income background are restricted from moving up the social ladder and also have to prove



themselves worthy enough of the rich characters (2). They are negatively perceived by the rich characters and the rich characters treat them as less, demonstrating that there is an economic gap between the two classes.

Telenovelas generally represent well-educated people with power. Tommy and Lucy expressed that a character's background can be understood from their education. Lucy stated, "It's very hard to educate yourself without the money." The kind of education is a factor telenovelas assign to certain characters to suggest their class. Participants managed to understand that private institutions are associated with high income characters and public schools meant low income characters. This generalization of the characters' schooling demonstrates that education matters, which seems to carry over in Mexican society.

Education is a distinctive economic determinant in telenovelas as well as in Mexican society. My participants disclosed that the representation of economic disparity primarily comes from the belief that, because education is not free in Mexico, only the wealthy can afford to be educated. Specifically, Chuckie said:

as far as education, rich people can afford to go to good schools and then go to the United States to a university and have a good paying job than the lower class ... the rich people goes to primary school, secondary school, and high school ... mostly private ... and then to college in the United States.

In other words, Mexican culture relies heavily on wealth, and those who can pay for education create an exclusive upper class. Telenovelas may exploit this by amplifying the disparity between the two wealth groups. However, this disparity is also indicated in Mexican society. Dwayne further stated, "[Rich people] are able to afford [the education] and they take it for granted," illustrating that rich people create a sense of entitlement, and the poor population

places a distinction between the “haves” and “can dos,” and the “have nots.” Poor people experience limited access while rich people do not recognize it. Among these perspectives, education functions as an accurate reflection of reality.

### **Language**

Language is the fourth theme that is an economic disparity indicator within Mexican telenovelas. Language helps characterize what socioeconomic class people come from. According to research conducted by Ferraro, Pfeffer, and Sutton, language is heavily influential in many countries, including western ones (10). Language affects how individuals see each other and the society, and how people create meaning through linguistics (Ferraro et al. 9). After analyzing participants’ responses, six discussed two clear ways language differentiates socioeconomic status: sophistication and slang.

Language impacts how my participants perceive characters in telenovelas. Dwayne and Todd explained that they were able to differentiate the wealth of the characters based on language and vocabulary use. Dwayne described that rich characters speak more formally than the poor characters. Samantha also described that “Society knows that if a character comes from a rich family, they ... speak good and intellectual.” Lila explained that “rich characters feel ‘more outspoken,’” while “the poor characters ... have a limited vocabulary use.” Essentially, rich characters feel a degree of pride and power because of their high language status (Lewkowicz 272), and because poor characters speak slang, that reflects back to their low socioeconomic status. Thus, the language gap between the characters reverts back to economic disparity.

Todd further disclosed that rich and poor characters associate themselves with other people who talk like them, such as their family. He stated:

[The rich characters] are more sophisticated in the way they speak. Umm ... the poor class have more of a slang ... like I would say ghetto type of language while the rich class has the more sophisticated type of Spanish ... and it could just be caused by where you come from.

This illustrates that characters' language reflects the environment in which they have grown up. Language is more subjective; economic disparity generates characters' profiles through their behaviors and personality (Adriaens 177). Rich characters see themselves as higher in terms of intelligence compared to the poor characters. Hence, language is a verbal indicator of establishing wealth groups.

While my participants saw language as a verbal economic indicator in telenovelas, they did not see the language divide in reality. Telenovelas use language as a tool to distinguish class, but majority did not address language when discussing whether they saw it as an accurate reflection of their personal experiences. Tommy expressed that in society, language, specifically the way a person speaks, does not always determine status. He stated:

the poor people would be ... talking slang and mostly use language like that ... just like I don't wanna say saying slang is a bad thing or uneducated but that's how they portray them in telenovelas ... and like when [the characters] are using [slang], ... my parents be like 'Oh [*smacks his mouth*] [this characters] or [that character] is uneducated' or whatever and I'm like 'Everybody uses slang. I use slang and I'm not uneducated' ... I talk slang with my friends and can talk formally with my professors ...

This is a clear description of how Tommy perceived language used to distinguish rich and poor. Additionally, he added that his parents were also able to see rich characters contrasted with the poor. However, Tommy does not see language as a reflection on reality. While Tommy grew up

learning slang, he is not uneducated. Instead, he understands how to navigate different groups within his social class, using slang to talk to his peers and formal language to talk with his parents, teachers, and people in positions of power. Tommy is the only one that commented on language portrayal, so by lack of discussion of language, this implies that other participants did not make connections between language and representation of society. Thus, although telenovelas clearly capture the association between language and class in Mexican society, they do not capture the nuance of this association, specifically in terms of economic differences in Mexican culture.

In relation to Mexican society, telenovelas clearly do few things to distinguish rich and poor. There are four factors that show economic disparity within telenovelas, but in real life, these are rarely accurate. My participants said that telenovelas present false perceptions of this social issue, but there are prominent aspects of this genre that depict a thin line of true representation of Mexican culture. The next section will address ideas of overall representation of reality within telenovelas.

### **Overall Reflection of Reality**

Coming into this study, I sought information about economic disparity. However, my participants included discussions of larger issues. There is a bigger sense of how people perceive telenovelas and whether or not they mirror reality; the participants said that they do not. Telenovelas are false representations and any aspects that hint toward reality are so thin, that one cannot consider them reflections of reality.

### **Reality of Socioeconomic Status**

The following section will elaborate on how telenovelas mirror Mexico's society and culture in relation to socioeconomic status. Certainly, telenovelas show a clear distinction

between rich characters and poor characters. However, after interviewing my participants, I found that they essentially do not see that disparity within their own community; instead, there is exclusively a middle class existence.

Within telenovelas, there is an apparent power difference between class groups: the rich and the poor. Sheila and Lucy pointed out that in any situation, the best position to be in is among the rich. Lucy explained that poor characters always need help because “[the poor characters] can’t do it by [themselves],” indicating that the rich characters are necessary to solve their problems. Sheila then stated, “The rich people have a great impact on the society. Rich people tend to have power and thus, make decisions for everyone.” Samantha also said, “the [characters] who have money think they have all this power and can do anything and they are insensible to the poor.” Chuckie said rich characters “have all the power in the world.” These statements illustrate that the characters who are in the higher socioeconomic class have dominance and influence on certain matters, which they usually exert to gain something for themselves. The statements of Sheila and Lucy reinforced Huck’s research in that people who are born wealthy always get their way in telenovelas, not giving a chance for anyone who falls below that status group to advance (434). As a result, the poor characters are oppressed by the hegemonic society and do not have a voice to speak for themselves or others like them.

Telenovelas dichotomize economic status, but in reality, there is a middle class in Mexico. This middle class contradicts this binary, presented as the norm of telenovelas. Telenovelas tend to perpetuate the notion that characters must be either rich or poor. Thus, participants explained that telenovelas do not portray the middle class. In fact, Chuckie said, “[the] majority [of people in Mexico are] middle class and that is not shown in telenovelas.” Sheila also stated, “there is a lot of people in Mexico who are middle class but telenovelas do not

really show that.” These quotations display that Mexico City consists of middle class citizens. Participants, such as Rocko, never understood why telenovelas did not show the middle class. He stated, “most of us are middle class.” Considering that people who watch telenovelas are part of the Mexican middle class community, there is no clear explanation as to why telenovela producers intentionally created a false depiction of socioeconomic status instead of reflecting society accurately.

### **Presentation of Social Issues**

The participants recognized that telenovela storylines do, at times, revolve around social issues, but noted that these issues are not addressed in depth and do not include anything heavy, controversial, or of central importance to daily living in Mexico.

All the participants described how social issues exist both within telenovelas and in Mexican society. However, not all social issues are parallel between these two realms; according to participants’ responses, telenovelas do not portray the social issues that are most prominent in Mexican society. Samantha said that these contemporary concerns such as, “Problems like transportation, politics and corruption,” “aren’t really shown in telenovelas but are in reality.” Some social issues that are mainstream in telenovelas pertain to gender identity, sexuality, drugs, alcohol, teen problems, and violence. While these are real issues, there are other issues more relevant in contemporary society.

Telenovela creators avoid these kinds of issues, and are not as upfront about them because they can cause an uproar from the viewers; everyone is influenced by government decisions. Helga said:

and the petroleum ... that is a big problem right now. The government raised gas about 20 percent ... that’s a lot and now there is a lot of protests ... this is the type of problem

that needs to be on telenovelas if they want to really depict issues happening in our country ... instead, it's about love ... how is love helping to depict our country? I don't know ...

Helga explains that petroleum is an important social issue that impacts most Mexicans on a daily basis, but this social issue is not explored due to its connection to politics and government.

Additionally, Rocko stated, “the surface of the telenovelas is too dramatic ... [which makes impossible] for people to dig deeper and actually discuss social problems ...” Both Helga and Rocko's testimonies illustrate that social issues shown in telenovelas are superficial, and thus, are not accurate reflections of society, in that reality is complex.

Telenovelas do hit topics that viewers experience, but these social commentaries are lost due to the use of an obsolete structure. Participants do not see the important issues of the day because of the recycled systematic format. Using a “beginning, middle, and happy ending” format can cause hesitation for some viewers in that they see this traditional narrative structure as antiquated, and alienating. Sheila stated:

Economic disparity is a problem in Mexico ... but there needs to be more ways to talk about this problem ... because telenovelas are constant storyline so people do not see it as a social issue ... Mexico is changing and so should the way telenovelas are too so people can actually learn.

Due to this formulaic nature, viewers do not see these social issues, such as economic disparity, as prominent in society or worthy of discussion. They see this, and other social issues portrayed in telenovelas, as normal. Collective elements of Mexican culture are not represented, though natives, like my participants, can see bits and pieces of Mexico's culture in telenovelas. The idea that telenovelas depict a compilation of cultural ideals and values is supported by Huck's

research (289), but this compilation lacks meaning. Hence, viewers simply recognize telenovelas as formulaic mindless entertainment.

The whole of telenovela programming is superficial at best. Telenovelas address social issues, but there is no depth. This shows that telenovelas are false reflections of society. Real life is complicated, involving many social and political issues simultaneously affecting people's daily life in Mexico. However, due to the repetitive storyline structure, telenovelas do not directly focus on issues of real importance.

### **Generational Divide**

Due to the unrealistic, overly-dramatized surface level portrayal of characters and issues, viewers, at least younger ones, do not self-identify with telenovelas. They do not find anything relatable in the programming at all. Younger viewership see telenovelas' depictions as false. However, there is evidence in my participants' responses that the perceived accuracy of these portrayals differs by generations. While young participants saw telenovelas as inaccurate presentations of Mexican society, they indicated that their elders (e.g., parents and grandmothers) saw them as realistic.

The telenovela genre is seen as fake because there are many exaggerative elements that prevent younger participants, like Harold, Phoebe, and Rocko, from viewing them as real life. On the other hand, Phoebe explained that even though she does not relate to telenovelas, her mother does. She stated, "It's fake to me, my mom would disagree ... maybe she misses how famous telenovelas were back then or how her life use to be ..." Additionally, Rocko said, "Telenovelas were the only television that my grandma watched ..." These participants indicated that older generations watch telenovelas due to a sense of nostalgia. In the lives of Phoebe's mother and Rocko's grandmother, telenovelas were, and still are, a very popular medium.



Moreover, telenovelas, in fact, impact how people in older generations view social issues in real life. An example Harold provided described a dialogue he had with his grandmother after a telenovela episode ended. He stated:

They have one like Pokemon Go but it's called Monster Go and they have it like they lure people and they kidnap people in the telenovelas to show it ... they show like the Pikachu in there and people trying to get kidnapped ... and I'm like "Come on ... take it easy ... And my grandma is like "You play Pokemon ... stop playing that ... blah blah blah" ...

Some telenovela viewers, such as Harold's grandmother, do in fact view telenovelas as an accurate depiction of Mexican culture. For example, "Pokemon Go," the inspiration for "Monster Go" in telenovelas, is an online reality game that is currently trending and represented in telenovelas. However, Harold's comment of "Come on ... take it easy ..." emphasizes there is a difference in perspectives and experiences between generation groups, and that the inclusion of the small elements borrowed from society do not make up for the inaccuracy of the context and mannered in which they are presented.

Even though younger participants see telenovelas as inaccurate, they use telenovelas as a teaching tool for their older relatives. Harold said, "I tell her that it's not true ... so I try to teach her." Harold uses telenovelas as a relationship builder activity to connect with his grandmother, explains to her the flaws of telenovelas, and emphasizes how telenovelas are trying to attract a younger audience by incorporating contemporary references. To be reciprocal, older generations watch telenovelas to understand how to deal with the younger generation. Harold stated, "[My grandma] is so intense about telenovelas as if they can hear her ... She screams at telenovelas like 'why did you do that' ..." Additionally, Lila said, "It makes [my grandmother] more

comfortable to see others going through the same thing.” These quotes exemplify that the grandmothers use telenovelas as a way to talk about issues more easily, and interpret how the younger generation views certain topics. Both generations are interchangeably trying to connect with the other, and attempting to learn something new about how the other generation thinks. However, telenovelas are cultivating inaccurate views of reality in my older viewer participants.

In contrast to the Cultivation Theory, younger viewers do not see telenovelas as reality. The reality portrayed in telenovelas is so different from their own, that telenovelas do not shape how they think or view the world to be true (Morgan and Shanahan 338; Porter 1016; Quick 41). On the other hand, according to my participants’ responses, older generations interpret telenovelas as a reflection of society. This could perhaps be due to them being exposed to these programs much longer, allowing their views to be largely shaped and influenced by the embedded messages. The overall reflection of reality is mostly seen to be false, but a primary aspect of this programming that participants saw to be a reality for them is gender roles.

### **Gender Roles**

The focus of this study was on economic disparity, but I found that another aspect of Mexican culture was more accurately represented in telenovelas. Gender roles within telenovelas hold true to participants’ lived experiences.

Gender roles are influenced by telenovelas and the Mexican household. Gender roles are social constructions, in which the roles are embraced by a specific culture (Goodall 160). In a Mexican household, men are known to be machismos; men of the household demonstrate a strong masculine pride and the household is run by a patriarchal system (Huck 264; Pastina 170). Mentioned in my literature, the patriarchy is a system of power relations, where women’s interests are subordinate to those of men (Amuchastegui et al. 991; Tate, “Redefining Mexican”

542). Thus, men are empowered to be in charge and in control, which plays a vital role in Mexican culture and how that is reinforced in the mainstream media, telenovelas. Through the conversations with each participant, six participants discussed how telenovelas show the roles of men and women, and answered if that is depictive of contemporary Mexican society.

In general, participants' responses clearly saw the stereotypical gender roles portrayed on-screen. Male characters are depicted to be machismos. When answering the question about their least favorite and favorite characters, Helga, Tommy, Lucy, and Dwayne provided information about machismos. Tommy stated, "There is a lot of machista ... like I don't like the machista way of being represented like 'I'm a man so I get my way kind of thing' ...". This illustrates that male characters have more power and capability than women characters. Lucy further disclosed that there are two types of women's behaviors that are presented in telenovelas:

women ... they are always very very ... either overly sweet and innocent or like badass but cruel and ... how they're always subservient even then to the men in the telenovelas cause Mexican women are always taught you know, cater to your man. They are always sexist ... very much machismo ... and they always need saving ... always ...

Traditionally in Mexico, many women were encouraged to focus on the home and on domestic concerns. When Lucy stated, "They're always subservient," regardless of how women are "supposed" to be, their overall role is to provide for the man and to demonstrate roles confined to the household. Male characters strive to exert control over women. Additionally, "They are always sexist," could mean that they sexually objectify women, dehumanize their intelligences and capabilities and use sadomasochistic tactics to make women feel inferior. These gender roles are supported by the literature in Pastina's research on the gender representation in telenovelas (170). Additionally, Lucy mentioned that women "always need saving," which Rhonda also

discussed in her response: “And the rich men, the knight and shining armors, and the poor women are the damsels in distress that need to be saved by this rich man.” Clearly, this illustrates the gender stereotypes of active/ passive (Goodall 160). Men are portrayed as active, strong, and rational. Women, on the other hand, are submissive and need to be saved because they are helpless.

Following the roles of gender stereotypes, men are known to be in the public, where women are confined to the private sphere. Women characters have jobs that relate to tasks they do inside the household such as being a maid or a nanny. Dwayne also disclosed that men maintain jobs that relate to the outside world and are known to be the breadwinner. Lucy stated:

Servants ... if they're women, they are usually maids like housekeepers ... the nanny.

Women kind of fall into ... kind of like what they are expected to do in their real lives and they translate that into their work ... like women are expected to be cooks and housekeepers and care for their kids ... that's the type of jobs they do.

This reinforces the status quo that Mexican women should have domestic roles that deal with cleaning, cooking, and being a provider for the kids, which is supported in Huck's research (259). Furthermore, Dwayne discussed that his mother still sees gender roles occurring in Mexican's society, “where the men make the money and the women have to clean and cook for the household and care for the children.” The characters' roles embedded in telenovelas are carried out in how contemporary society sees Mexican women and how they “should” act as well as machismo continuing to be a problem.

Lucy provided an example of machismo in telenovelas still being reflected in her role as a woman in today's society. She stated:

novelas currently illustrate what Mexican culture is but they hyper showcase it if that makes sense so for example masculinity versus femininity in like real life ... like when family is visiting, I still am expected to standby and make sure that they have everything they need while my brother can do whatever he wants so it's very indicative how women should be treated versus how men I guess ...

Feminine roles that are depicted in telenovelas are still being enforced in Mexican culture. Lucy has no choice but to embrace her feminine roles: quiet, passive, and follow the people in power. Hence, Mexican women feel tremendous pressure to do the bulk of the housework, reflecting the influence of the past on the present. There is a societal norm that is enforced, and telenovelas reinforce this type of standard for all Mexicans to perform.

In contrast to these other participants, Tommy sees telenovelas slowly changing to reflect society more. He decided to explain that Mexican culture certainly sees machismo as a societal norm, but continued to discuss that “machismo is dying down ... well should be dying down,” as more contemporary telenovelas have more women being the main characters and acting as heroes, displaying that there are “no boundaries” or any “type of conformity.” This is reinforced in both Casas Pérez and Johnson’s research in that navigating towards a more diverse cast increased audience viewership (410; 1622). Additionally, having less fairy-tale-like characters indicates that telenovelas are being more open to changing how gender roles are portrayed in order to fit how society sees itself, which is working to overcome these historical legacies.

Unlike men, who do not need to establish power because of the ingrained Mexican culture, women must work harder to gain recognition. Beauty is one tool women use. Telenovelas emphasized the physical appearance and beauty of the characters, which resonated with Lucy and Lila’s expectations on how women are supposed to appear. Men wear suits and

are mostly covered, showing that they do not need to bare any skin to show power, control, dominance, or status. Women characters, on the other hand, are seen two ways. Lucy explained that there are women characters who cover up to portray their “innocence” as well as other characters who are more provocative. Telenovelas portray that women characters have to be sexually objectified to demand power and respect. Lucy disclosed, “Half of those women are like naked half the time... like they dress as if they are going to strip basically ... and that’s like always in your face ...” Lila explained that as a child, she thought wearing makeup while sleeping was a norm for women who constantly needed to portray beauty. This kind of beauty representation is supported in Benavides’ research on fairy-tale-like characters and their role in telenovelas (14). However, based on Lila’s tone and discussions with her grandmother, as she grew older, she saw that the underlying nature of beauty and the ideal woman is not the same as telenovela’s portrayals of normal. Lila’s experience indicated that the impact on the attitudes about feminine beauty in telenovelas are not reflected in all Mexican culture; in fact, some women defy these ideas about beauty. However, the majority of my respondents reinforced that telenovelas reflect Mexican patriarchal society.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, many of these themes surrounding the portrayals of economic disparity on-screen and the reflection of telenovelas on Mexican society are told through the lens of the younger generation. My participants, of all ages, recognized economic disparity in telenovelas through visual indicators, as well as verbal indicators such as language. These indicators were recognized in telenovelas, but the only accurate portrayals in society when determining economic disparity are education and at times, setting. Noting similar indicators of economic disparity, my participants also felt there are similar trends in the overall reflection of reality.

Participants disclosed they perceived telenovelas as false representations of reality in Mexico. Telenovelas repetitively show specific social problems more than issues that are currently prevalent in people's lives. Participants felt there was a lack of representation of current issues, such as political corruption and the cost of natural resources, on-screen. The social issues that do exist within telenovelas are discussed at surface level, as there is no depth within them. Some participants mentioned that they do not like the formulaic format; telenovelas keep to the same technique, which not only shows the inaccuracy of prominent social issues depicted on-screen, but illustrates that other issues that affect most Mexicans on a daily basis, had been left out. Telenovelas' format allowed younger participants not to identify with them; however, through their testimonies, their older relatives depicted what they saw on-screen to be true to society.

Even though most participants pointed out that telenovelas predominantly have a misleading representation of reality, there is one aspect which younger participants saw to be appropriate. Traditional gender roles are displayed both in telenovelas and in society. While gender roles continue to be based on patriarchal society, some younger participants are challenging these norms. Overall, telenovelas have clear indicators of economic disparity, but these indicators are not exactly representative of actual Mexican society.

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of my study was to explore how Mexican telenovela viewers perceive the way economic disparity is portrayed and how those portrayals impact their views of self and society. To analyze the representation of economic disparity, I used specific indicators: education, fashion, and setting. After conducting and analyzing the interviews, I collected enough information to draw conclusions on how members in Mexican society discern socioeconomic status in telenovelas, and telenovelas influenced how they see themselves and contemporary society. Ultimately, the findings from the 13 participants generated similar responses. Within telenovelas, participants distinguished characters' socioeconomic classes by visible and nonvisible indicators. In regards to the overall representation of Mexico, most participants saw telenovelas to be false and inconsistent with reality. In this chapter, I will elaborate on these conclusions, explain the implications of my research findings, discuss the limitations of my study, provide recommendations for future research, and express final thoughts on this study.

### **Major Conclusions**

In conducting this research, I found three significant conclusions. The first conclusion surrounds how participants were able to perceive socioeconomic class in telenovelas through fashion, setting, education, and language. Fashion is shown through clothes, the presentation of the clothing, and accessories. Rich characters wore expensive, high quality branded clothing, and accessorized themselves. On the other hand, poor characters wore simple clothing, and wore little to no jewelry. As far as settings, the social places and the types of houses distinguished classes. Rich characters would attend social settings that are exclusive, and live in big houses, whereas visiting local places, and living in indigenous shacks are affiliated with poor characters.



Additionally, education is seen through private and public institutions. Rich characters attend private and poor characters go to public schools or do not have the means to go to school at all. Language is seen more subjective in terms of identifying economic disparity. Rich characters use more sophisticated vocabularies, while poor characters speak more “slang.” Two indicators, fashion, and language, in telenovelas are not accurately portraying of society. Education and setting are, however, can depict economic disparity in reality, considering schooling costs money in both telenovelas and real life, and the zones that characters and people go can indicate one’s socioeconomic status.

The second conclusion involves the overall representation of reality, where telenovelas are seen as false. Telenovelas portray socioeconomic status as two extremes, the rich and the poor. However, in Mexican society, there is a middle class. Additionally, telenovelas depict social issues, but they are addressed at ground level; there is no richness to the social issues. Participants also noted that telenovelas have a reused format, so these social issues discussed on-screen are not the issues of real importance. Thirdly, telenovelas target audience of all ages, but younger participants did not identify with them. They did not connect due to the exaggeration and dramatization elements of telenovelas, but older generations identified with telenovelas because they saw the narrative to be real, and thus, reinforce the Cultivation Theory. Older relatives have watched telenovelas longer, and so they seem to see everything on-screen to be true which impacts their behaviors and worldviews; however, younger participants do not cultivate with them and see everything on there as imprecise to how reality is.

The last conclusion regards a prominent issue to hold true in telenovelas and reality. Telenovelas portray stereotypical gender roles to still exist in society. Men are the machismos, or the dominant person of the household, whereas women are the caretakers of the household.

Younger participants explained that their older relatives expect them to act and be a certain way based on these traditional roles, which is reinforced in telenovelas. There is some accuracy in terms of the depiction of gender roles in telenovelas, and how these roles are carried over from Mexican society. However, this aspect is not as enforced as it was in past generations.

### **Implications of Research Findings**

The major themes and conclusions of my study provided several implications. First, this study suggests that telenovela creators should dive into more current issues and allow equal opportunities for all social issues to be depicted on-screen. Participants expressed that there are social and political issues that affect Mexican society on an everyday basis, specifically political corruption. However, viewers are not able to go beyond the surface level of even the issues that are presented; telenovelas are dramatized and do not deeply explore these issues. As a result, my participants do not use telenovelas as a mode of social change. Instead, people's conversations revolve around entertainment. Thus, my findings encourage production teams to seek methods to find an equilibrium between drama and the representation of social issues, in the hopes that viewers engage in more social dialogues.

Second, my research indicates that media serves a social and relationship-building function. The relationship-building function is an intergenerational dialogue, which helps families connect. Specifically, telenovelas generate a broad and open range of interpretations for viewers, including my participants. The audience of telenovelas is not one homogenous group. My younger participants do not identify with telenovelas, but connect with them as a relationship-building activity with their elders. Older participants, on the other hand, see telenovelas as realistic and like to discuss social issues represented on-screen with their younger family members. My research findings suggest that older and younger generations do not see

telenovelas in the same way or in the same context. Telenovelas engage Mexican people for different reasons, but they also bring people together.

Lastly, my study implies that media messages are not shaping the ways viewers interpret reality. When examining aspects of Mexico as a whole (e.g., socioeconomic status and social issues), my participants were not buying into how telenovelas portray society. Some of my younger participants expressed beliefs that their elders perceive some aspects of telenovelas as true. However, my older participants did not mention that they viewed telenovelas as realistic. Hence, my findings indicate that Mexican telenovelas are not cultivating views of reality for Mexicans.

### **Limitations**

Although my research project ran smoothly, there were several limitations to my study. First, the sample was limited. I could have chosen several locations and different participants in terms of age and socioeconomic status to conduct my study. I did an ethnographic study in Mexico City, Mexico at public parks, which specified a particular population: young, middle class individuals. Having a specific age group within a particular location did not accurately represent how Mexicans perceive telenovelas. Choosing people similar in age to me could result in having a collection of one dimensional related-responses, but immersing myself in various communities and cities, such as Villahermosa, Oaxaca, and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, would have given more of a broad range of participants and captured more of Mexico as a whole country.

The second limitation to my study is the choice of programming I decided to research, telenovelas. Telenovelas are one type of programming that are highly viewed in Latin American countries. However, there are many more serial stories specific to the Mexican culture. I focused only on telenovelas.

The third limitation to my research project is the social issue that I chose to focus on, economic disparity. I decided to see how people in Mexico view economic disparity but there are more contemporary media messages that are more relevant, such as politics and government. Politics and government are two issues that heavily impact society on a day-to-day basis. Limiting my study to just socioeconomic status could be less prevalent for the society at this time, and should be put more in the background. There are other issues that should be primarily discussed during this time in Mexican society.

The final limitation to my study is that interviews were mainly in Spanish. Spanish is my second language so there is a possibility that participants did not quite understand the interview questions, as well as I did not understand them at certain points. There could have been confusion and uncertainty from both parties. Additionally, most participants were visually recorded. Participants could have felt uncomfortable and not been completely honest. They might not have wanted to disclose how much they buy into telenovelas. If I had used an anonymous survey, the results could be different, and participants would not be nervous.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several changes that should be implemented for future research. My recommendations stemmed from limitations involved in my study. First, the expansion for future research will add scholarship to the diversity of audience perceptions about telenovelas. My research project consisted of participants with a diverse age range, but most were young adults that come from middle-class in a wealthy city, Mexico City. Future research should involve participants from Mexico in terms of a diverse range of locations and age groups. Having younger and older participants from different parts of Mexico (the northern and southern

regions) could enrich the study by gaining new perspectives and offering a better depiction of the portrayal of economic disparity in telenovelas and in Mexican society.

Second, to expand my study, future researchers could include a new method, a focus group. I conducted individual ethnographic interviews, which could have prevented participants from disclosing socioeconomic status, as it is a sensitive topic to discuss, when asked whether they personally felt telenovelas accurately depict this social issue in Mexican society. Focus groups provide an opportunity for disclosure among similar others in a setting where participants are validated, as they encounter similar experiences. Using focus groups would be advantageous as it is a method that incorporates a give-and-take relationship between the participants (Magill 105). The researcher would observe and guide this discourse, while allowing the participants to interact with each other and share their perceptions, opinions, and experiences more freely. Thus, this method makes participants more comfortable to disclose personal information, such as socioeconomic status or telenovela viewing habits.

The third recommendation for future studies is to extend the scholarship about social issues. I chose to focus on economic disparity because this social issue is very prominent in both telenovelas and current society. Through my interviews, some of the participants mentioned that telenovelas do not densely discuss or represent politics, but the government system heavily influences contemporary Mexican communities. Future researchers should examine how telenovela viewers perceive Mexico's political system. By examining audience perceptions with an emphasis on political corruption, there would be contribution to a new social issue discussed in the telenovela realm.

The final recommendation for future research is to expand telenovela scholarship in two ways. First, I solely focused on Mexican telenovelas, which allowed me to understand audience

perceptions of the social and political issues occurring only in this country. However, many countries produce their own telenovelas (Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 6). Hence, similar studies could be run there to access the representation of social issues. Second, telenovelas are globally exported and are prominently viewed in other parts of the world, such as Western Europe and Latin America (e.g., Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia) (Adriaens 174; Pastina et al. “The Centrality” 4). Telenovelas aim to expose the cultural, social, and political influences of the country of origin (Benavides 2; Lewkowicz 266). Thus, investigating how viewers in other countries interpret these issues could help future scholars understand telenovelas and their impact better and from a broader standpoint.

### **Final Thoughts**

Overall, I am pleased with my study. I knew coming into my research project that I wanted to do a study that had to deal with something that I hold close to my heart: my community back home in Buford Highway, Atlanta. Living off of Buford Highway for most of my life exposed me to the Mexican culture. Additionally, I wanted to incorporate a combination of my two passions: media and language. With many weeks of brainstorming, I knew the perfect topic that fit all my criteria was Mexican telenovelas.

As a senior in high school, I watched telenovelas, Latin American television serials, with my peers and their families. Throughout and at the end of an episode, we would have meaningful dialogues. The dialogues would include our feelings about the characters, the plot, the drama, and the presented social issues. This painted a picture for my perception of Mexican culture. So, I knew my Senior Independent Study topic had to deal with Mexican telenovelas and audience perceptions in regards to a relevant social issue (economic disparity), and whether it impacts their identity as Mexicans.

Thanks to Copeland Funding, I had the opportunity to integrate myself in Mexico City. I brought with me my understanding of Mexico, and experienced the nuances of Mexican cultural traditions. After interviewing my participants, I learned that economic disparity is portrayed through visible (e.g., fashion and setting) and nonvisible (e.g., education and language) indicators in telenovelas. Those portrayals impact my participants' understandings of identity as Mexicans by allowing them to become more reflective of self and their society. Based on their responses, younger generations do not identify with telenovelas as much as older generations do. Younger participants do not connect with telenovelas due to the amount of exaggeration embedded within them, as well as the false representations of reality. On the other hand, older participants cannot let go of this genre that they have been watching for years; they see realism through such programs, allowing them to shape their perceptions. Nevertheless, telenovelas continue to be a tool for both age groups to learn about one another and foster intimacy.

I hope I made my Buford Highway community proud in doing this study. In just five days of exploring Mexico City and interviewing my participants, I was able to glimpse firsthand my peers' culture. I learned more about them and their families, as well as myself, and became very appreciative of the diversity of my community. What a rewarding and valuable opportunity to self-reflect.

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## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORMS

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY AT THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

La Fiebra Telenovela: Audience Perceptions of Telenovelas and their Representation of Economic Disparity

Principal Investigator: Brenda Khor/ Communication Studies Major

#### **Purpose**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. We hope to learn more about your perceptions of telenovelas and their impact on society. We are specifically interested in understanding how telenovela viewers observe the representation of economic disparity within telenovelas versus their country.

#### **Procedures**

If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will be audio and video recorded. You will be asked to answer a number of questions about yourself, and your viewing of telenovelas. Each interview will take approximately 1-2 hours to complete.

#### **Risks**

There are no risks involved in this study.

#### **Benefit**

You may benefit from this study by better understanding the influence of media, which may impact more people to take interest in the social issues presented in telenovelas.

#### **Storage of Data**

The interview recordings will be downloaded from the camera and stored on a password-protected laptop. I will delete the recordings off my video camera after they have been downloaded to the computer. Recordings downloaded to the computer will be transcribed with the aid of a translator who has signed a confidentiality agreement form (a copy of that form is available upon request). Excerpts of the recordings will be used to create a 5 to 15-minute documentary on how members of Mexican culture who watch telenovelas perceive the way socioeconomic status is portrayed and the impact of that portrayal on their views of self as Mexicans and their views of Mexican culture. The documentary will be shown on The College of Wooster campus as part of Senior Independent Study Symposium Day. The documentary will also be posted to social media. Once my study is complete, the electronic versions of the transcripts (word documents) will be deleted, the paper copies of the transcripts will be shredded, and the original recordings of the interviews will be deleted.

### **Confidentiality**

Your responses to the interview questions will be held confidential. The only time your actual identity will be revealed is in the analyzing of my data. At that time, my advisor, translator, and I will be the only ones to have access to this information. In my study, I will use pseudonyms to refer to you, people, and places that would identify you. However, if you consent to allow me to use excerpts from your interviews in the above described documentary, you may be recognized by people who view the documentary. As with the written document, pseudonyms will be used in the documentary.

### **Costs**

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure described above.

### **Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

You may refuse to participate in the study. If you decide to participate, you may change your mind about being in the study and withdraw at any point during the interview.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions, please ask me. If you have additional questions later, you can contact me by email at [bkhor17@wooster.edu](mailto:bkhor17@wooster.edu). You may also contact my advisor, Michelle Johnson, at [mjohnson@wooster.edu](mailto:mjohnson@wooster.edu).

### **Consent**

Your signature below will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant, that you have read, understand, and agree to the information provided above, that you are at least 18 years of age, and that you consent to allow me use excerpts in the documentary.

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You will be provided a copy of this form upon request.

### **Consent**

Your signature below will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant, that you have read, understand, and agree to the information provided above, that you are at least 18 years of age, but that you do not consent to having excerpts of your recorded interview used in the documentary.

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You will be provided a copy of this form upon request.

## CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN UN ESTUDIO DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN EN THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

La Fiebra Telenovela: Audience Perceptions of Telenovelas and their Representation of Economic Disparity

Investigador Principal: Brenda Khor/ Los estudios de comunicaciones

### **Propósito**

Se le está pidiendo a participar en un estudio de investigación. Esperamos aprender más acerca de sus percepciones de las telenovelas y su impacto en la sociedad. Estamos especialmente interesados en la comprensión de cómo los espectadores de telenovelas observan la representación de la disparidad económica dentro de las telenovelas en comparación con su país.

### **Procedimientos**

Si decide ser voluntario, se le pedirá a participar en una entrevista que será de audio y vídeo grabado. Se le pedirá que responde a una serie de preguntas acerca de sí mismo, y su visión de las telenovelas. Cada entrevista tendrá una duración aproximada de 1-2 horas para completar.

### **Riesgos**

No hay riesgos involucrados en este estudio.

### **Beneficios**

Puede beneficiarse de este estudio realizado por una mejor comprensión de la influencia de los medios de comunicación, lo cual podría afectar a más personas a tomar interés en los temas sociales que se presentan en las telenovelas.

### **Almacenamiento de Datos**

Las grabaciones de la entrevista serán descargados de la cámara y se almacenan en un ordenador portátil protegido por contraseña. Voy a borrar las grabaciones de mi cámara de vídeo después de que hayan sido descargados al ordenador. Grabaciones descargado en el ordenador se transcribirán con la ayuda de un traductor que ha firmado un acuerdo de confidencialidad forma (una copia de ese formulario está disponible bajo petición). Extractos de las grabaciones se pueden utilizar para crear un documental de 5 a 15 minutos sobre cómo los miembros de la cultura mexicana que ven telenovelas perciben la forma en que se retrata el estatus socioeconómico y el impacto de que la representación en sus puntos de vista de uno mismo como mexicanos y sus puntos de vista de México cultura. El documental se mostrará en el campus de The College of Wooster como parte del Día del Simposio por "Senior Independent Study." El documental también se publicará en las redes sociales. Una vez que mi estudio se ha completado, se eliminarán las versiones electrónicas de las transcripciones (documentos de texto), serán triturados las copias en papel de las transcripciones, y se eliminarán las grabaciones de la entrevista.

## **Confidencialidad**

Sus respuestas a las preguntas de la entrevista se llevará a cabo confidencial. La única vez que se dará a conocer su identidad real se encuentra en el análisis de mis datos. En ese momento, mi asesor, traductor, y serán los únicos que tienen acceso a esta información. En mi estudio, voy a utilizar seudónimos para referirse a usted, la gente y los lugares que lo identifique. Sin embargo, si acepta permitirme usar extractos de sus entrevistas en el documental arriba descrito, puede ser reconocido por personas que ven el documental. Al igual que en el documento escrito, se utilizarán seudónimos en el documental.

## **Costos**

No hay ningún costo para más allá del tiempo y el esfuerzo necesarios para completar el procedimiento descrito anteriormente.

## **Derecho a denegar o retirar**

Puede negarse a participar en el estudio. Si decide participar, puede cambiar de opinión acerca de estar en el estudio y retirarse en cualquier momento durante la entrevista.

## **Preguntas**

Si tiene algunas preguntas, por favor pregúntame. Si tiene preguntas adicionales más adelante, puede ponerse en contacto conmigo por correo electrónico a [bkhor17@wooster.edu](mailto:bkhor17@wooster.edu). También puede ponerse en contacto con mi asesor, Michelle Johnson a [mjohnson@wooster.edu](mailto:mjohnson@wooster.edu).

## **Consentimiento**

Su firma a continuación indicará que ha decidido ser voluntario como participante de la investigación, que ha leído, comprendido y aceptado la información proporcionada anteriormente, que tiene por lo menos 18 años de edad y que acepta permitirme usar extractos en el documental.

Firma del participante \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

Se le proporcionará una copia de este formulario a petición.

## **Consentimiento**

Su firma indicará que usted ha decidido voluntariamente como participante en la investigación, que ha leído, entendido y aceptado que la información proporcionada anteriormente, y que son por lo menos 18 años de edad, pero que no da su consentimiento para tener extractos de su entrevista grabada utilizados en el documental.

Firma del participante \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

Se le proporcionará una copia de este formulario a petición.

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What is your name?
- Demographics
  - How old are you?
- Education
  - What educational background do you have?
- Telenovelas
  - How often do you watch telenovelas?
  - What shows/ serials do you follow? For how long? With whom? Where?
  - What motivates you to watch telenovelas?
  - Why do you watch telenovelas?
  - Are there any specific networks you watch these telenovelas on?
  - Do you watch it live or recorded?
  - Do you dialogue with other people after a telenovela episode?
  - What does economic disparity mean to you?
- Background/ Demographics of Telenovelas
  - In your opinion, who are your main, favorite, least favorite characters in a telenovela?
  - What do you like/ dislike about them?
  - What makes you like/ dislike about them?
  - Tell me about the characters' class? What indicators do you see there?
- Education
  - What do you think about the education level of the characters? How is that being portrayed?
  - What do you think about the characters' jobs? How do you see them being conveyed?
- Fashion
  - What is your initial assumption when you see a character in a telenovela based on how they dress?
  - How is clothing used either in its presentation or condition to convey economic disparity?
- Setting
  - How is economic disparity typically shown in the location that characters are interacting in? What does it look like? Where?
  - What ways do settings illustrate the class system? Or do they contradict it? How?
- Telenovela representation
  - Do you think telenovelas discuss social status? How?
  - What are the visible indicators of class in telenovelas?
  - What do you think signifies a rich character versus a poor character in telenovelas?

- Do telenovelas influence your everyday life? If so, how?
- Do you feel that you identify with Mexican telenovelas? How so or why not?
- Do telenovelas have an accurate representation of wealth?
- Are these indicators (education, fashion, and setting) a general/ overall representation of class status in Mexico? How do you feel about that?
- How do you view class? Is this an accurate representation or parallel of Mexico's class system? Why/ why not? What does that look like?
- Is there anything else that you think is important in understanding economic disparity in telenovelas?

### Preguntas de entrevista

- ¿Cómo te llamas?
- Demografía
  - ¿Cuántos años tienes?
- Educación
  - ¿Cual es tu formación académica?
- Telenovelas
  - ¿Con qué frecuencia miras telenovelas?
  - ¿Qué programas/ seriales sigues? ¿Por cuanto tiempo? ¿Con quien? ¿Dónde?
  - ¿Lo que motiva a ver telenovelas?
  - ¿Por qué miras telenovelas?
  - ¿Existen redes específicas que se pueden ver estas telenovelas?
  - ¿Lo haces en vivo o grabada?
  - ¿Eres el diálogo con otras personas después de un episodio de telenovela?
  - ¿Qué es la disparidad económica?
- Fondo/ Demografía de telenovelas
  - ¿En tu opinión, que son sus principales personajes favoritos, menos favoritos en una telenovela?
  - ¿Qué te gusta/ disgusta acerca de ellos?
  - ¿Lo que haces que te gusta/ disgusta acerca de ellos?
  - Háblame de la clase de los personajes. ¿Qué indicadores ves ahí?
- Educación
  - ¿Qué opinas sobre el nivel de educación de los personajes? ¿Cómo es que al ser retratados?
  - ¿Qué opinas acerca de los trabajos de los personajes? ¿Cómo te ves siendo transportados?
- Moda
  - ¿Cuál es tu hipótesis inicial cuando se ve a un personaje en una telenovela basada en su forma de vestir?
  - ¿Cómo se usa la ropa ni en su presentación o de condiciones de transmitir la disparidad económica?
- Marco
  - ¿Cómo se disparidad económica normalmente se muestra en la ubicación que los personajes están interactuando en? Cómo se ve? ¿Dónde?
  - ¿De qué manera la configuración ilustran el sistema de clases? ¿O es que se contradicen? ¿Cómo?
- Representación telenovela
  - ¿Crees que las telenovelas discuten la situación social? ¿Cómo?
  - ¿Cuáles son los indicadores visibles de la clase en las telenovelas?



- ¿Qué opinas significa un carácter ricos contra un personaje pobres en las telenovelas?
- ¿Los telenovelas influyen en su vida cotidiana? ¿Si es así, cómo?
- ¿Sientes que se identifica con la telenovela mexicana? ¿Cómo es eso o por qué no?
- ¿Los telenovelas tienen una representación exacta de la riqueza?
- ¿Son estos indicadores (educación, la moda y el marco) una representación general de clases en México? ¿Cómo te sientes sobre eso?
- ¿Qué opinas de la clase? ¿Es esta una representación exacta o paralelo del sistema de clases de México? ¿Por qué o por qué no? Lo que te ves eso?
- ¿Hay algo más que piensas que es importante en la comprensión de la desigualdad económica en las telenovelas?

**APPENDIX C: TRANSCRIPTIONIST'S CONFIDENTIALITY FORM****Confidentiality Agreement****Transcriptionist**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to the identity of participants named in all audiotapes and documentations received from Brenda Khor related to her research study titled La Fiebra Telenovela: Audience Perceptions of Telenovelas and their Representation of Economic Disparity. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any materials related to the above identified research unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Brenda Khor.
3. To delete any electronic files I receive containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_