Telenovelas

Queer Spaces in the Chicano and Chicana Home

A thesis submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements

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By

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How does *Relaciones Peligrosas* reinforce heteronormativity and how is queer sexuality represented?

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Abstract

Telenovelas
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By
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Master of Arts in Chicano and Chicana Studies

This thesis examines the telenovela Relaciones Peligrosas for its representation of heteronormativity and queer sexuality. Relaciones Peligrosas presents queer sexuality along race/ethnic, class, and gender lines that upholds standardized images of queer lifestyles. The portrayals of queer masculinity are both consistent with and perpetuate social stereotypes about gender and sexuality as presented in the traditional telenovela narrative. Relaciones Peligrosas takes place, and is produced, in the United States, and targets U.S. Spanish speaking Latina/os while addressing current political issues regarding substance abuse, LGBTQ issues, domestic violence, and immigration. This project employs feminist and queer theory to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the discursive and visual representation of queer characters in Relaciones Peligrosas, and contributes to discussions critical of normative narratives about queer Latinos.
Chapter 1: Telenovelas and My Home

Viewing telenovelas (Spanish language serial dramas) was, and continues to be, a nightly ritual for my family and me. For my parents, these programs offer ways of reliving their memories and experiences from Mexico; the settings and portrayals of rural locations and cities relate to their humble and working class upbringing. My parent’s favorite telenovelas usually take place in the Mexican country side in which the rural and pueblo’s pastoral culture further engulfs my parent’s attention as it reflects their lifestyle. *El campo* (the countryside) and a subsistence lifestyle are relatable themes which form part of their lens when viewing telenovelas. Telenovelas as such are enjoyed because the final product, the story, setting, and characters engage our attention by providing entertainment, escapism, and fantasy on nightly bases. Through imagery, the telenovela narrative, setting, and characters not only offers entertainment values, but bridges memories and experiences that, for my parents, surface social and familial standards of living. However, for me, telenovelas additionally help define, appropriate, and exemplify gender roles that disregard queer identities.

While my parents view and relate to the ways telenovelas represent Mexican society, I became familiar with themes in telenovelas under a different light. From my childhood, I recall *Tu o Nadie/You or No one* (1985), *Rosa Salvaje/Savage Rose* (1987), *Yo Compro Esa Mujer/I’ll Buy that Woman* (1990), and *Corazon Salvaje/Savage Heart* (1993), and these productions showed thematic connections between gender roles, romance, and class. The main plot usually follows the trials of a clandestine romance involving a man and woman; *Rosa Salvaje* best demonstrates this plotline. For me, even though these stories took place in Mexico, the portrayal of masculinity, femininity, class,
and romantic storylines paralleled stories, movies, and dramas from U.S. English language television programs and films. Thus, I saw heteronormativity as a pervasive visual and ideological tool.

In recent years, *Rosa Salvaje* was rebroadcasted, and I had a chance to once again observe the tale of a poor young woman’s journey into the aristocracy by means of a young man’s benevolence, wealth, and romance. Unlike my parents who view these programs through lived experiences, relate to the destitution of the protagonist, yet recognize the narrative as fictional, in my account, the place and space were marked with gender signifiers and class differences that had some influence on my identity. For instance, Rosa, the protagonist who was mischievous, adventurous, curious, and always dirty, was transformed, through courtship, into a proper lady worthy of not only representing the upper class, but maintaining the young man’s family prestige. Rosa went from poor and savage-like (as the title implies) to elite and civilized. So, as far as gender norms apply, masculinity was associated with economic power, assertiveness, control, and shrewdness, while femininity was presented as feeble, dependent, obedient, and controllable. I came to understand gender expectations and roles by viewing telenovelas, and other visual media.

As an adult, telenovelas remain part of my daily rituals even though traditional performances of masculinity, femininity, class, and love remain a part of the narrative. However, there are more Spanish language television channels that also show telenovelas, and these telenovelas are diverse in location and setting, while still embracing the predominant themes discussed. *Relaciones Peligrosas/Dangerous Relationships* (2012) and *Talisman* (2012), for instance, use diverse settings and narrative
alterations to portray more real lived experiences. Moreover, while *Tu o Nadie, Rosa Salvaje,* and *Yo Compro esa Mujer,* were produced and took place in Mexico, *Relaciones Peligrosas,* by Telemundo, takes place in the United States, Florida to be precise, and follows several characters’ obstacles in their quest for love. Although traditional in this sense, this production additionally includes a multi-ethnic cast and weaves in current socio-political issues, such as immigration, domestic violence, LGBTQ issues, and substance abuse, into the storyline. However, these elements are secondary to the main plot and romance story. *Relaciones Peligrosas* is produced in the United States and therefore targets U.S. Latina/os. Likewise, *Talisman,* broadcasted by Univision, takes place in Fresno, California. This telenovela centers love and class as the predominant themes in the plot, but has less diversity, values heteronormativity, and disconnects from contemporary socio-political issues. Nevertheless, in both instances, sensationalizing class dichotomies which are linked to race/ethnic tensions and heterosexual romance remain central to the narrative.

Love between a man and a woman, conflicts between the rich and the poor, race and ethnic tensions where working class people are shown with low levels of formal education, uncivil, and less Eurocentric, while male dominance and female subordination embrace all social levels are themes that call my attention because they parallel my family’s dynamics. Being raised in an immigrant working class family with religious fundamental values, the portrayals of working class families in telenovelas was, for me, an important model used to understand, decipher, and subsequently critique and challenge patriarchy and gender politics. For example, my father, the field laborer and bread winner, and my mother, the stay-at-home housewife (not by choice but because of
lack of work, health, and childcare) were regularly portrayed in telenovelas; moreover, the sons and daughters mimicked the parent’s gender roles, thus, providing an image of a functional working class family structure. The commonalities between my family and the televised one gave me a sense of stability: these families remained united in the best and worst circumstances. While this reflected my working class background, love was always between a man and a woman. This was and remains privileged because it expands the family through heterosexual marriage and procreation, as well as strengthens family solidarity. Throughout the numerous telenovelas I’ve seen, few queer characters have been part of the main storyline, are marginally represented, and are continually non-existent in the family unit which made me question my importance in my household.

The lack of queer male characters and other heteronormative structures were influential in repressing my sexuality. Since I have been consistently interested in following the telenovela narrative, and the ways in which they portray race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality, telenovelas influenced my academic research focus. For this thesis, I have narrowed my analysis to one telenovela, Relaciones Peligrosas, for its portrayal of gay Latino youth. My research question is: how does Relaciones Peligrosas reinforce heteronormativity and how is queerness expressed?

Although the focus of this study is the examination of queer characters, or those who break from conventional gender roles, in Relaciones Peligrosas, it is important to understand the popularity of telenovelas by becoming familiar with the historical changes and evolution of telenovelas. The changes in technology, economy, and narrative enabled telenovelas to reach a wider audience, all the while, maintaining heteronormative representations. Furthermore, I should also note my use of the term queer and gay: I use
queer to describe actions and performances that destabilize heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy, and I use gay when referring to the identity of the characters in *Relaciones Peligrosas* because that is the identifier used in the telenovela’s dialogue.

**Outline of Study**

Current literature using a combination of empirical methodology and content analysis are resourceful to investigate telenovela production methods, narrative structure, and gender portrayals; these analyses are then used to investigate the effects of programming and representation on telenovela consumers in different locations, class levels, age demographics, as well as, gender. For example, Maria de la Luz Casas-Pérez, Marietta Morrissey, and Rosalind Pearson, address the trajectory and changes made to the telenovela narrative; Hugo O. Benavides, and Christina Slade, focus on the history of telenovela production and its cultural significance; Carolina Acosta-Alzuru, Reginald Clifford, Jack Glascock and Thomas E. Ruggiero, Jorge Gonzalez, Dana E. Mastro and Michelle Ortiz, Rocio Rivadeneyra, and Julee Tate centralize race/ethnic, gender, class, and class portrayals. Nevertheless, these discussions intersect. All the works address race/ethnic, class, gender, and sexuality. Additionally, other issues raised involve the presentation of nationality, post-colonialism, and globalization and the ways they intersect with race/ethnic, class, gender, and sexuality in the telenovela format. The discourse in the scholarship reveals the impact telenovelas have in the global market that marks yet another alteration in narrative since some telenovelas apply socio-political issues.
The purpose of this study is to contribute to existing literature about telenovelas by using critical discourse analysis to analyze queer characters, images, and portrayals that perpetuate stereotypes and preserves heteronormativity in Relaciones Peligrosas. Chapter 2, the theoretical framework, explains the ways feminist and queer theory provides tools to examine the heteronormative construction of sexuality. The framework discusses ways I re-interpret Relaciones Peligrosas and articulate meaning as an example of challenging fixed notions of gendered identity and sexuality. Chapter 3, Telenovelas a Review of Literature, shows parallels between the trajectory in the research focusing on telenovela representation of class, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and the growth of the telenovela as a global economic product venturing beyond Latin America. The literature review offers a political, economic, and historical analysis of telenovelas. Then I will review research specifically analyzing the representation of queer characters in telenovelas. Chapter 4 outlines the advantages and disadvantages of using content analysis to analyze queer representation in Relaciones Peligrosas, a telenovela produced by Telemundo. This analysis is significant because it contributes to discourse analyzing Spanish Language television and telenovelas in a United States by concentrating on one production that takes place in the U.S. targeting Latina/os, and therefore differing from the telenovelas from my childhood. Chapter 5, the analysis, centers gay male characters in Relaciones Peligrosas; investigating the representation of queer masculinity in this telenovela is significant because it portrays queer Latino youth’s struggle with gender identity and sexuality, as well as the message sent to Latina/os about queer sexuality. Furthermore, the role of the queer male characters in this telenovela is an example of gay characters queering the cast and narrative, yet their sub-plots remain marginal to
male/female romance and constrained by heteronormativity. Chapter 6 concludes with restating my main argument and main points throughout the theoretical framework and literature review about telenovelas social, political, and economic impact; production methodology and history; as well as the significance of analyzing gay male characters in *Relaciones Peligrosas*, and the message sent to Latina/os about queer identity production and sexuality. It will further provide limitations to the study and opportunities for additional analysis for future studies centering queer characters in telenovelas.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses queer theory because it serves as a critical model to examine the representations of queer characters in *Relaciones Peligrosas*; a queer lens is specific to characters who rupture heteronormativity and who express homoerotic desires (Jagose 3). I follow ongoing debates argued by Alicia Arrizón and Sandra K. Soto about queer and feminist theory’s emphasis on gender and sexuality that never fully grasps ways that race/ethnicity complicates assumptions made about the construction and performance of gender and sexuality. I find that queer-of-color discourse about race/ethnicity’s influence on the performance of gender and sexuality is useful to decipher ways that *Relaciones Peligrosas* portrays queer masculinity, homoerotic desire, and social response to characters who express queer sexuality. I use canonical and queer of color contributions to form my queer Chicana/o feminist framework to analyze the representations of queer characters in *Relaciones Peligrosas*.

Emma Pérez discusses a queer-of-color gaze that “sees, acts, reinterprets, and mocks all at once in order to survive … a world where s/he is not seen by white heteronormative mind” (125). Along with literature that summates queer as critiquing androcentric explanations of gender and sexuality that make women, women-of-color, queer, and queer-of-color’s contribution obsolete (Saldívar-Hull 33), a queer-of-color approach dedicates investigations on race/ethnicity’s impact on performing gender and sexuality. In this chapter, I focus on one main argument consistent throughout the queer Latina/o literature: a critique of postmodernism. This point is further broken down into four themes; first, essentialism and gender. This section looks at canonical feminist texts and the ways feminist theory challenges and renegotiates gender norms. The second
theme looks at the ways queers-of-color identify and reinterpret the ways cultural variables shape gender and sexuality. The third theme looks at how queers-of-color transform cultural texts, and therefore resist commodification and fixed identity portrayed in media. The last theme looks at ways racialized sexuality is an area of opportunity to investigate the complex relationship between race/ethnicity, sexuality, and desire. These themes conceptualize my understanding of telenovelas as cultural texts, but I will further use these themes to explain queer representations in Relaciones Peligrosas.

Critiques of Postmodernism

In my discussion, debates about postmodernism and gender fall into two points of view. On the one hand, feminist and queer scholars are concerned with the way gender is universalized across racial and cultural landscapes, and this effort for unification led to queer diversity critiquing dominant social movement (Spargo 32-33). On the other hand, feminist and queer feminist-of-color, such as Patricia Hill Collins, Audrey Lorde, Raquel Z. Rivera, Tricia Rose, and Alicia Arrizón, to name a few, express consternation over the homogenization, eroticization, and commodification of race/ethnicity. Both arguments intersect at efforts to reduce gender binaries, and argue for identity fluidity; therefore, I take a constructionist position to facilitate my queer-of-color framework about race/ethnicity’s influence on gender and sexuality (Jagose 8). The following themes are examples of the ways I renegotiate telenovelas heteronormativity, and ways of critiquing the portrayals of queer masculinity in Relaciones Peligrosas.

Essentialism and Gender
First feminist, queer, and queer Latina/o writings question essentialist explanations about gender performance. Beginning with Judith Butler’s “Performative Acts and Gender Construction,” Butler offers a critical explanation against universalizing gender along heteronormative understandings. In this work, empirical explanations of gender norms narrow definitions to universal masculine actions and feminine actions. Butler touches upon verbal theory and action theory as lenses devoted to the investigation of gender performance, but the focus situates the evolution of empirical uses of the phenomenological theory of acts to feminist understandings of that theory.

The phenomenological theory of acts is a contested terrain, and according to Butler, it “seek[s] to explain the mundane way[s] in which social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner symbolic social signs” (900). The phenomenological tradition of acts focuses on the subject and the ways “language, gesture[s], and … social signs” articulate meaning, and convey social reality to the subject in a systemic manner. Traditional implementations of the phenomenological tradition of acts assumes that acts (symbolic social signs), whether verbal or action, have universal meaning, and assist in the interpellation of subjectivity and gender identity. These conservative views goes without considering ways of representing gender, ideologies and its relationship to material conditions of existence, and the subject’s processing interpellation (Althusser 693-695; Fiske “Culture, Ideology, Interpellation” 1269).

Butler draws from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s empirical position, and Simone de Beauvoir’s feminist point of view both of whom regard the human body as a historicized site. As articulated by Butler, Merleau-Ponty gives two definitions of the historicized
body. The first suggests that “the body is a set of possibilities [and] its appearance in the
world, for perception, is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence” (902).
In this explanation, Merleau-Ponty’s views the gendered body by the way cultural
artifacts, symbols, and language (external variables) calls forth gendered identity.
Interpellation is regarded as a linear transaction between object and inactive subject. The
second meaning is “understood as the taking up and rendering specific of a set of
historical possibilities” (902). This point is indicative of empirical explanations that look
at external cultural artifacts as primary variables constructing gendered actions and
identity. In both instances, Butler critiques how culture is essentialized thereby
universalizing gender norms.

Butler’s feminist position sees culture as multiple unstable variables, so cultural
artifacts are free from finite definitions. The cultural and its relation to gender
performance in feminist theory “has sought to understand the way in which systemic or
pervasive political and cultural structures are enacted and reproduced through individual
acts and practices” (Butler 903). The cultural is also defined as “the personal” which
“becomes an expansive category, one which accommodates, if only implicitly, political
structures usually viewed as public” (903); this point values ways subjects’ negotiate
cultural artifacts that challenge empirical understandings about the construction of
meaning. Culture is flexible because it is personal, and the personal “is a category which
expands to include wider political and social structures” (904). The phenomenological
theory of acts is useful because; first, it provides a groundwork for investigations about
gender performativity; second, feminist interrogation of the theory includes culture, and
culture’s influence on gender performance; and third, though a feminist application of the
phenomenological tradition of acts calls for cultural diversity, it presumes that all cultural artifacts (external variables) have universal definitions.

The theatrical is another element that makes culture fluid. It relies on the ways inanimate objects retain ideological influences, but as determined by the subjects’ reinterpretation and performance. Following tradition means that “the act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been rehearsed, much as a script survives on the scene” (906). Performing rehearsed, repetitive, or traditional gender actions are formed by its relationship to script’s ideology, so “a script survives the particular actors who make use of it; but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized, and reproduced as reality once again” (906). These variables show a reciprocal relationship between script (cultural artifact), actor (the individual), and the production of meaning that reproduces ideology, and these forms usually abide by heteronormative standards when viewing telenovelas.

Heteronormativity is one way of conflating gender identity (D. Gonzalez 25). The heteronormative is defined as a “heterosexual-based system of marriage,” which highlights the political significance of gendered subjects: “The heterosexual-based system of marriage … requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gender modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system” (Butler 905). This contract naturalizes gender/sex arrangement, but should not be considered as the only possible arrangement and depends on a system of production. Butler’s explanation about a heterosexual-based system of marriage is an example of empirical and androcentric points of view limiting gender and sexual categories.
According to feminist cultural anthropology, “cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate … production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself” (Butler 905). The market system of production, exchange, and consumption restores social value to heteronormativity (Strassman 73), and to deviate from this “norm” threatens social stability. Anyone who challenges stability “require[s] … punitive regulation of reproduction to effect that end” (Butler 905). The political and economic ties between gender/sex binary and the heterosexual contract make apparent a heteronormative world view. As a system dependant on production, consumption, and reproduction, much like mass production of material goods, the survival of heteronormativity depends on systemic traditions to call into being a gendered identity (Hall 66).

Butler dictates that actions gain normativity as they circulate in gendered cultural texts to form social reality, and feminist theory deconstruct essentialized definitions of culture. Butler provides examples of the ways feminism centers the subject as an active agent in the process of creating meaning thus no longer discounting internal causes that diversify the idea of culture. Butler breaks down culture to three variables: cultural diversity, the personal, and the theatrical. Queer-of-color literature give examples of the ways these variables redefine gender and sexuality as it is affected by race and ethnicity.

Queers-of-color and Cultural Variables

Queer Latina/o and Chicana/o literature use a queer lens from different positions, but they converge to exemplify how the cultural, personal, and theatrical influence the readings of cultural texts. Queers-of-color strengthen feminist arguments, and address
gaps made by canonical feminist works about the role race and ethnicity have in forming
gender identity. Before evaluating ways the cultural, personal, and the theatrical affect
performance of gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity, I will discuss how the queer
Latina/o and Chicana/o define queer theory.

For Alicia Arrizón, queering means enforcing “feminist theory in rejecting
institutional power” (3), as well as, the “designation postcolonial as a theoretical
framework that allows the ‘rereading’ of mestizaje in a new light” (3). Her work in
*Queering Mestizaje: Transculturación and Performance* places at the forefront Mary
Louise Pratt’s idea of the “contact zone” as a conceptual space that negotiates
subjectivity. Following Pratt, Arrizón posits that the contact zone is “an imaginary site
for racialized, gendered, and sexualized identities” (2); the contact zone houses an
amalgamation of mixed blood peoples exploited for their race/ethnicity, gender, and
sexuality (Anzaldúa 25). In this aspect, the “contact zone” is similar to what José
Esteban Muñoz describes as a “collision of perspectives” and “this collision is precisely
the moment of negotiation when hybrid, racially predicated, and deviantly gendered
identities arrive at representation … the queer and the colored come into perception and
the social order receives a jolt” (Muñoz 6). The “contact zone,” or the “collision of
perspectives” (6), nevertheless, are not areas free from media’s way of limiting identity,
but these spaces allow queers-of-color to challenge representations.

Daniel E. Pérez’s *(Re) Thinking Chicana/o and Latina/o Cultural Studies*
considers Chicana/o and Latina/o presence in Anglo narratives and Chicana/o and
Latina/o narratives in general as queering the predominant Anglo and Eurocentric
cultural landscape. Following the work of Alexander Doty, Pérez utilizes queer theory to
destabilize standardized Anglo images of heteronormativity (1). He notes, “Queers can encompass all aspects of identity that challenge compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity, or any other hegemonic paradigm related to identity, it can include a wide range of sexualized subjects and erotic permutations” (2). Transformation, but most importantly, transforming cultural texts reveals nuance readings about the complex and contradictory nature of Chicana/o cultural production, sexuality, and desire. Pérez exemplifies how media portrayals of Latina/os and Chicana/os can be renegotiated by placing it in “the contact zone” or “a collision of perspectives.”

He additionally proclaims that to queer “demonstrate[s] ways in which Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural texts represent queer identities” (10); for Pérez, the Chicana/o and Latina/o body is queer. Pérez’s application of a queer framework, then, means adopting “a gender, ethnicity, and sexuality lens … to draw out the nonnormative characteristics innately present in them” (1). Pérez reads for hidden transcripts about the performance of gender and sexuality by Chicana/os and Latina/os in literary works of the past and present.

The queer Chicana/o literature rethinks essentialist notions about gender construction, and one fundamental theme is in challenging, rethinking, and transforming cultural texts. This entails interrogating the process of interpellation as a way of queering normative gender structures. Challenging tradition is especially important for Sandra K. Soto who critiques conventional readings of cultural texts. Soto finds problematic the “overinvestment” of mastering canonical texts and perspectives that reduce the integration of marginal voices (Soto 5). Soto’s understanding of queer is best captured by her use of Elizabeth Freeman: “‘To ‘queer’ something is at once to make its most
pleasurable aspects gorgeously excessive, even [or, we might press, especially] to the point of causing its institutional work to fail and to operate against its most oppressive political results’ ”(5). Reading like a queer threatens hegemonic normative order, but especially strives to validate marginal voices excluded by canonical texts.

Soto particularly looks at Antonio Viego to conceptualize the methodology of “de-mastery,” and to describe the consequences conventional readings have in influencing Chican@ racialized sexuality. Viego’s perspective finds inconsistencies in valuing a theoretical point of view dominant over others, nor is it “to master de-master,” which, Soto states, “Would be to discipline, to tame, to reduce, to render intelligible a structure of feeling whose force is precisely in its unintelligibility” (2). Reading like a queer, then, holds the author as well as the reader accountable for perpetuating dichotomies in theories aimed at shifting the center for social equality. Most significantly, Soto uses of “reading like a queer” highlights the fluidity, flexibility, and complexities in Chicana/o subjectivity by examining racialize sexuality.

Soto utilizes queer feminist theory to reinterpret the works of Cherrie Moraga, Ana Castillo, Richard Rodríguez, and Américo Paredes to locate contradictions and complexities of racialized sexuality. To “read like a queer” broadens cultural and identity politics of production, and like Arrizón, addresses claims against Chicana and queer Chicana feminism. She suggests that to read like a queer “dislodge[s] Chicana feminist literature from its role as incipient evidence … and from its register of transparent experiences in order to perform a queer discursive analysis of racialized sexuality as an aperture” (10); the proclamation targets empiricism in Chicano, Feminist, and Queer studies that narrow transformative readings of cultural texts. Her focus on racialized
sexuality is used to interrogate Chicana/o mastered text. Racialized sexuality, she
declares, is “sometimes queer, at other times normative (most often both) representations
of race, desire, and intercultural and intracultural social relations” (10). Racialized
sexuality is one way of embodying “the contact zone” and “collision of perspectives” that
balances ideological and progressive ideas about race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. A
queer lens is used to investigate gender, sexuality, and is also a tool to destabilize
hegemony (Blackewell 27). As an instrument, a queer lens challenges the process of
interpellation, and is a survival strategy for queers and queers of color.

Queers-of-color and Interpellation

The process of interpellation is crucial to explanations about the
phenomenological theory of acts, but while Butler cautions against universalizing
cultures along heteronormative paradigms, there is less devotion to investigating social
constructions of race/ethnicity and how they structure gender roles, norms, and sexuality.
To critique this position, I turn to José Estaban Muñoz’s *Disidentification: Queers of
Color and the Politics of Performance*. In his introduction, Muñoz raises the concept of
interpellation and its role in media. He questions its linear approach that renders subjects
as non-active participants in the production of meaning and social reality. Instead, he
argues that “identities-in-difference emerge from a failed interpellation within dominant
public sphere. Their emergence is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass
public” (Muñoz 7). By applying a Derridian model, Muñoz uses an “identities-in-
difference” framework to rethink mechanical explanations for the process of
interpellation. Identities-in-difference describes emergent and intersectional spaces
where disidentification surfaces to “contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere”
(7). By acknowledging disidentification, and “failed interpellation” (7), the process of constructing meaning and social reality becomes more complex, diverse, and requires a look at specific cultural variables that form identity. Muñoz’s take on “failed interpellation” is particularly useful for my research since telenovelas harbor heteronormativity. For that matter, portrayals of queer Latinos in Relaciones Peligrosas reveals additional problems; first, what telenovelas tell queer Latina/os about queer sexuality; and second, the commodification and fixed identities of Latina/os.

Disidentification exemplifies modes used to break hegemonic powers. Although Muñoz has many definitions for disidentification, the one I value the most calls into play interpellation, or rather, “failed interpellation.” He explains, “Disidentification resists the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus. It is a reformatting of self within the social. It is a third term that resists the binary of identification and counteridentification” (97). Resisting ideological subjectivity breaks static explanations of identity formation, and views the subject as an active agent. Disidentification is then “modalities of performing the self … and passing,” all of which are “strategies of survival” (108). This concept is important to my research because it explains my understanding and interpretations of telenovelas as a cultural text, but further the need to critically view Relaciones Peligrosas as a cultural text complying with standardized stereotypes and notions about queer sexuality, desire, and masculinity.

Muñoz’s analysis of queer performance artists in Disidentification provides examples of the ways queer hybrids renegotiate media cultural texts. Muñoz approaches hybridity and queerness with caution. He first explains that “it would be dangerous to collapse the different modalities of hybridity we encounter in the First World and its
neocolonial territories, and in the various diasporas to which the diversity of ethnically marked people belong” (79); a critical approach begins with locating specific sites and instances that enables the practice of disidentification. One must approach disidentification with caution to prevent reifying essentialism. However, he also proclaims, “I take the risk of melding them when discussing the work of cultural producers … because hybridity helps one understand how queer lives are fragmented into various bits,” and continues, “some of them adjacent, some of them complementary, and some of them antagonistic” (79). Muñoz recognizes a vast, but fragmented population impossible to homogenize along race/ethnicity, culture, class, gender and sexuality. Telenovelas, like Relaciones Peligrosas, provide examples of ways hybridity in “First World” and “neocolonial sites” portray a universal outlook on Latina/o culture and cultural production. Disidentification, as a third space, is one method of challenging media constructions.

Another explanation to the commodification of Latina/os examines the colonization process. Disidentification is used by Arrizón to investigate ways queer mestizas redefine gendered portrayals of mestiza sexuality through artistic endeavors. The art produced by queer mestizas confront global expressions about Latinas as colonized subjects. “In theory,” she states, “Disidentification captures the ambiguities intrinsic in the process of identification through which subjectivity can be determined” (Arrizón 161). Disidentification forms my queer lens because it allows for nuance readings by exploring other possible perspectives that resist commodified representations of queer sexuality.
These images are reflected by current impressions about Latinas, and how Latina/o identity is constructed. Arrizón reminds us that “mestizaje raises questions about historical transformations and cultural memory across Spanish post-colonial sites and thus recognizes the effects of certain kinds of ‘encounters’ as significant to its subject matter” (3). Arrizón centralizes Spanish colonization, but regards Spanish colonization as a diverse process with distinct methods used to structure power and dominance. Regardless of these differences, the commodification of mestizas rests in the exploitation of women’s sexuality both symbolically and physically. “Failed interpellation” is exemplified by Arrizón’s intent of identifying queer Chicana art to destabilize the colonial construction of mestiza body, gender, and sexuality.

*Queering Mestizaje* summates that U.S. imperialism and the global economy is a product of colonialism, and mestizaje (as an ingredient to structuring popular Latina/o images) has been an important part of shaping modernity and power (Quijano 223-224). Arrizón argues that locating mestiza consciousness resists modernity’s romanticized Latina/o heteronormative and gendered images. She explains, “It is important to also consider the concepts of ‘modernity’ and ‘coloniality,’ both of which have been used to explain the cultural/historical legacy of Spanish colonization in Latin America and its relationship to the process of modernity” (Arrizón 17). The commodification of mestizaje developed Latina/o cultural signifiers, and “these signifiers suggest that although colonialism ‘ended’ with national independence movements in the nineteenth century, coloniality did not” (17). The term colonialism suggests the process of structuring power, but coloniality refers to ways power is upheld. Nationalism is scrutinized to further critique ways that the construction of Latina/o identity fostered
racial/ethnic, gender hierarchy, and exploitation of women (Mendoza 938). She continues, “Globalization and imperialism have further marked forms of ‘colonialism,’ recreating the new phase of neocolonization or (post) modernization” (Arrizón 17). If the “national independence movements of the nineteenth century” reflects Latina/o mestizaje as a product of modernity, then Arrizón perceives globalization as a subsequent phase in modernity threatening women’s sexuality.

Arrizón claims that “to think of cultural mestizaje as an intercultural project, dichotomies such as indigenous/mestiza or suppressed/oppressor can be seen as the context that validates hybridization within a larger framework that imagines race” (30). Exchanges between or among groups is associated within national endeavors, and nationalist interest to embrace mestizaje as an emblem of modernity. Cultural exchanges also include directions of expanding, challenging, and altering tradition. Arrizón views mestizaje as a conceptual product of the colonial imagination, and, she reiterates, “this imaginative frame of reference incorporates the different dimensions of collective social and cultural experiences” (30). Expanding the concept of mestizaje beyond the intercultural interests values multiple subject formations, even when they risk commodifying mestizaje.

From Arrizón’s point of view, feminist theory, queer feminist theory, and more significantly queer women-of-color feminists, “have helped Muñoz expand and uphold a politics of disidentification” (161). She asserts that “[Muñoz] adapts this politics not only to empower the specificities of minority subjectivities, but also to suggest that the coercive body of marginality produces a new sense of reality” (161). Disidentification locates the active agent while also recognizing its collective power that aids in the
production of culture and constructing meaning. As a third space, disidentification “articulates an uncanny truth about the dominant culture” (161). Queers-of-color who apply disidentification to performative acts illustrate the way the phenomenological theory of acts uses cultural texts to construct meanings, even when oppositional.

Still, Arrizón provides another opinion for disidentification that concerns oppositional discourse. She asserts that “Muñoz’s argument about dominant versus marginal is often contradictory, but … puts forward the conditions of the performative and the twin problems of agency and subjectivity” (161). While Arrizón recognizes dominant/marginal polemics, contradictions in locating the active and critical agent is a predominant theme throughout all queer Chicana/o and Latina/o texts used to form my framework. Disidentification offers ways to avoid reifying binaries.

While Arrizón strives to recover a mestiza consciousness through art and interrogates eroticized mestiza images, Pérez looks at the visual representation of Chicano and Latino masculinity as queering Western Anglo aesthetics in U.S. films, television, and other media forms. Though the texts, as for the ones being analyzed by Pérez remain textually unaltered, the social, economic, historical, and political context have changed and influence distinct readings (Hall “Deconstructing ‘The Popular’” 69); thus, showing that cultural artifacts remain open to interpretations and reflect fluid cultural landscape. He states, “I show that queer Chicana/o and Latina/o identities are much more prevalent in our cultural production than most people think” (D. Pérez 7). Pérez argues that “such texts represent multifaceted queer identity as they record the ways Chicana/os and Latina/os respond to multiple forms of oppression” (2-3), and with these forms of oppression, views about gender, sexuality, and race make more complex
hybrid and queer identities. This point of view echoes Soto’s urgency of reviewing texts that have been romanticized and made examples of authentic Chicano, Chicana feminism, and queer Chicana feminist works. Re-examining conventional images of Latino masculinity offers ways of applying disidentification, or “failed interpellation,” and “de-mastery.” Pérez’s rearticulation of queer Latino masculinity facilitates my analysis and will be subsequently discussed in the analysis chapter.

Towards Racialized Sexuality

The last theme looks towards racialized sexuality as the site evoking “the contact zone” and the “collision of perspectives.” Racialized sexuality considers ways the subject negotiates race/ethnicity, sexuality, desire, and for Soto employs “reading like a queer” as a methodology intended to liberate constrained identities. Racialized sexuality remains ambiguous throughout Soto’s text, but is best described as “efforts toward de-romanticizing intracultural love and sexual desire …which continue to be portrayed as natural markers of authenticity and loyalty in Chican@ activism, literature, and popular discourse” (Soto 122). Soto challenges romanticized notions about mestizaje and mestizaje’s heteronormative contract used to formulate assumptions about Chicana/o authenticity and citizenship.

I begin with Soto because she challenges essentialist, romanticized, and nationalistic constructions of race and the gendered body. She explains that an “investment in ‘de-master’ extends to the ethnic/racial signifier [used] in the book’s title and, where appropriate, within the book itself” (2). The first step to liberating identity is to alter the gendered meaning in “Chicana/o.” “Chicana/o” is viewed as a social symbol
and an “ethnic signifier,” but one which houses gendered and androcentric history. Therefore, “Chicana/o” omits discourse, experiences, and testimonies by queer individuals. Language is challenged at the semiotic level to neutralize gender, and used to deconstruct how canonical Chicana/o texts treat race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and desire.

Soto’s “de-mastering” strategies include multiple but coexisting points of view, and a determination to not see cultural texts as finite. Abolishing gender specific language is one way to allow for transformative readings that challenge conventional dogma. Soto’s action is performative and “signals a conscientious departure from certainty, mastery, and wholeness, while still announcing a political collectivity” (2). Soto views the “@” symbol as a performative strategy that argues for a paradigm shift, and that also addresses charges against feminist theory by Chicanos (10). She argues, “I like the way nonalphabetic symbol for ‘at’ disrupts our desire for intelligibility, our desire for a quick and certain visual register of a gendered body the split second we see or hear them” (2-3). “@” embraces cohesive understanding, yet permits constant renegotiations: it provides a fissure, a gap, and space for constant transformativity and negotiations to confront heteropatriarchy and gendered readings of Chican@ text.

Soto associates racialized sexuality as another component to queer Chicana/os fragmented identity. She employs “de-mastery” to rethink canonical Chicana/o texts to illustrate identity fluidity. Her focus on “de-mastering” canonical texts and conventional readings of these text do not disregard the dialectical contributions to the discipline, or the context from which cultural texts originate, but builds from those discussions by exercising a queer lens to extrapolate buried meanings. Nevertheless, she claims that
“what the key terms used to mark racialized difference as inherently transgressive have in common is their indelible dependence on what can only be a fantasy of normative centers” (3); Soto’s assertion is concentrated on the colonial imaginary that echoes Arrizón’s claims about the commodification of mestizaje. Social imaginaries are found in nation building and nationalist rhetoric reflected in canonical Chicana/o text (Rodríguez 19).

The “fantasy” is “inhabited by homogenous, static, racially pure, stagnant, uninteresting, and simple sovereign subjects” (Soto 3). Contesting Latina/o homogenization, in the global economic context, addresses the same concerns that Arrizón and Pérez raise in their analysis of Latina/o and Chicana/o cultural texts. Soto’s concern additionally complements Arrizón’s argument that the commodification of Latina/o people essentializes experience, but further become markers of authenticity. I read Soto’s conception of racialized sexuality and “de-mastery” as paralleling Muñoz’s interpretation of hybridity and “collision of perspectives,” as well as, Arrizón’s understanding of mestizaje and “contact zone”: these perspectives are cultural, personal, and theatrical variables that complicate the performance of gender and sexuality.

Queering mestizaje expresses racialized sexuality, and Arrizón claims that women-of-color and queer women-of-color expand perspectives about gender and sexuality that are “almost always at the expense of the queer of color critiques” (Arrizón 177). The first problem area in dominant feminist and queer text is the assumption that gender and sexuality remain constant cultural variables (Zinn 201). Without that recognition, Arrizón is concerned with canonical text that “imply issues about racialized bodies (women of color and queer women of color in particular) [as] secondary,
threatening coalition building in the process” (Arrizón 177). Women-of-color and queer women-of-color have transformed and queered ways desire is conveyed through art (L. Pérez, *Chicana Art*, 9). For instance, Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Alarcón, and Cherrie Moraga, and artist such as Judith Baca, Ester Hernandez, and Alma López, as recognized by Arrizón, show mestizaje as a complex process of hybridization, and desire is fluid that evolves differently depending on space and place. Arrizón sees art as performance that queers traditional images of women and sexuality, but similarly to Soto, regards transformative possibilities in the construction of meaning that art facilitates.

Arrizón echoes the urgency to resurrect mestiza consciousness in order to rethink sexuality and desire. She suggests that “a queer lesbian body becomes a viable alliance that, acknowledging an ideological space between what it means to be at once queer and lesbian, revisits the genderless presupposed in the generic epistemology of queer” (Arrizón 181). For queers-of-color, the gay/lesbian signifier becomes a site resisting and reinterpreting normative social standards. One limitation I see in the “queer-lesbian” framework is limited to the lesbian identifier that reduces bridging the complex nature of racialized sexuality in the mestiza subject. Arrizón offers another framework that uses language to validate queer mestiza consciousness. Based on “an epistemology of hyphenation” that rethinks the symbolic value of language, this perspective suggests that “the queer-mestiza provides the basis for cultural identification that imagines the sites of race and sexuality, challenging the hierarchies of representation” (181). Arrizón’s epistemology of hyphenation, like the “non-alphabetical @,” is a site for identity transformation like disidentification offers.
Chapter 3: Telenovelas a Review of Literature

Literature about telenovelas cover two main areas; the first, is history, and second, themes and narratives. In the first section, history of production, I concentrate on what the research reveals about the role modernity, globalization, and U.S. audiences have in influencing changes in telenovela production. This section also evaluates strategies used to engage audience participation. The second area, themes and narratives, highlights popular formulas used to develop a common telenovela narrative. This section describes a narrative contingent upon heteronormative plots and racial/ethnic stereotypes, and the second area reviews research analyzing gender performance as well as queer character portrayals.

Although much scholarship in telenovelas has been written about gender and class representation, few have focused on sexuality. Because Relaciones Peligrosas is an example of a cultural and postmodern text, the inclusion of queer sexuality in the narrative deserves analysis. The goal for this chapter is to show that telenovelas are legitimate cultural artifacts, and require an interrogation of the representation of gender, sexuality, and what they tell Latina/os about queer sexuality. This is followed by discussions about Relaciones Peligrosas.

History of Production

Since the 1960s, telenovelas have been a consistent part of Latin American narrative tradition; they help periodize historical, political, industrial, and economic changes (Slade 53). The literature shows that the development of telenovelas has a complex history in its relationship to audience, social construction, and the appropriation
of Latina/o images. I use current literature to contextualize *Relaciones Peligrosas* as a cultural postmodern text that employs new models of production to reflect a postmodern and globalized Latina/o audience. Understanding the history of production shows telenovelas’ ideological influence.

In his book *Drugs, Thugs and Divas: Telenovelas and Narco-Dramas in Latin America*, Hugo Benavides recounts the existing novela market and its place in textual and radio media. He states, “The [television] market explosion … was prefigured in radio-novels (radio soap operas) and *folletines* (pamphlet like novels) from several decades before” (1). Technological advancements, such as television, are also noted by Christina Slade in “Telenovelas and Soap Operas: Negotiating Reality from the Periphery.” Slade highlights an interview between Rosalind Pearson and “leading Televisa producer Gabriel Vazquez.” In this interview, Vazquez clarifies that “telenovelas are based on the same stories that were in *folletines* years ago in the 1930s and 1940s … called ‘telenovelas de folletin’ ” (qtd. in Slade 52). The transition from print to visual performance “fused … one incredible powerful medium of Latin American popular culture” (Benavides 2). Rosalind C. Pearson notes that “the advent of television, traditional radionovelas, and the taste for melodrama awakened by the films of the Epoca de Oro period in the 1940s in Mexico gave the first telenovelas a highly successful style and format” (400). Industrialization and modernity had an important role in shaping the media industry, but also in developing successful production styles.

The 1960s also saw the creation of television networks and political influence involved in the production of telenovelas in Mexico. Slade chronicles the development of Televisa and the growth of Mexican television networks. She notes that the Garza
Sade family company and Grupo Alfa de Monterey became rivals when President Diaz Ordaz, in 1968, “opened the television market” (Slade 53). Initially, the government had more power over media before shifting to commercial opportunities. The development of *La Ley Federal de Radio y Television* (Federal Law of Radio and Television) mandated a “public service role of television and distinguished between commercial and non-profit channels” (53); the state controlled production along with images being projected. By 1973, under President Echeverria, the state “approved content and allowed commercials on state and non-profit television … [and] government censors sat in through the filming of telenovelas” (53). Although not all homes initially adopted television, the ability to mass project telenovelas was a significant change in entertainment and in the representation of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality.

In 1972, Emilio Azcarraga Milmo purchased Grupo Alfa and renamed the company Televisa (Slade 53). Production of telenovelas remained influenced by its history with government intervention. The predominant storylines of the 1960s became essential to Televisa’s success (53). By the mid 1960s, Slade explains, “twenty telenovelas were produced a year with some 17 studios, 250 actors, and 100 musicians on the permanent television staff” (54). Slade highlights an interview with Milmo where he asserts that “Mexico is a country with a large class of people who are screwed” (Qtd. In Slade 54). Since Televisa’s development, the goal was to provide entertainment and fantasy while abiding by politically conservative ideals. State regulations structured telenovela’s criteria and a narrative that remains central to contemporary storylines.

While the 1960s and 70s saw growth of television networks in which telenovelas became an industrial product, the 1980s and 1990s introduced Mexican serial dramas to
the global market. Televisa began to expand beyond national boundaries, into the United States, South American and Europe; in the U.S., Televisa and Spanish Interntntional Network acquired 240 channels by 1983 (Slade 53). However, as a result of Milmo’s monopoly in the U.S., “in 1986 the FCC ruled … as he was not a U.S. citizen, he was forced to divest himself of the company” (53). Nonetheless, Milmo’s media empire grew, for example, in 1988 he purchased Galavision International, 49% of Megavision in Chile, and Red in Bolivia in 1993 becoming the largest Spanish Language Network (53). Milmo’s exclusion in the U.S. market did not deter Mexican and Latin American media influence; the global economy would become significant to exporting and maintaining telenovelas in the United States.

Maria de la Luz Casas Pérez provides an account of how the trading of telenovelas gave way to exchanges of ideas, images, literary styles and representations about social realities that form part of the narrative. In “Cultural Identity: Between Reality and Fiction: A Transformation of Genre and Roles in the Mexican Telenovelas,” she explains regional and national endeavors in telenovelas and questions their impact on identity. Casas Pérez reports that “in Brazil, telenovelas helped the government spread a changing image of nation from rural regional to urban national … [and] in Venezuela, telenovelas are a way of expressing female domination within the family” (104); yet, these national text are not limited to specific geopolitical sites, and eventually have the potential to influence a broader demographic. Telenovelas are cultural products that exemplify messages concerning modernity, politics, and identity (Fiske, “Popular Discrimination” 218).
The 1990s marked a decline in Televisa’s empire with the growing impact of other Latin American mass media. By 1998, Clarin, Argentina’s network became the largest earning company (Slade 53). Televisa’s demotion as leader of Spanish language television saw further competition when Televisión Azteca formed in 1993: “The government under President Salinas sold two of its stations to Televisión Azteca, drawing on independent production company, ARGOS, challenged … Televisa by producing startling relevance” (Slade 54). With the arrival of TV Azteca, Televisa’s dominance in Mexico became threatened by new directions in telenovela productions, representations, and genres. With less government intervention in Mexico, new strategies became available for the success of telenovelas in a local and the global market. Reginald Clifford also recognizes a shift in telenovela production, and concurs that TV Azteca introduced a new perspective with realist characteristics which expanded away from Televisa’s traditional “Cinderella” storyline (Clifford 95). Along with changes in communication technology, the evolution of telenovela production introduced to the audience different interpretations of lived experiences.

The introduction of TV Azteca indicated liberation from state mandates and growth into representations that contrasted with Televisa’s romantic standards (Casas Pérez 105). Production changes and the transnational exchanges “described what was happening in the country” (Slade 54). While state regulations indicated that, as Slade notes, “no smoking, no poverty, no politicians, no one of Indian descent except as maids or labourers” (54), with TV Azteca’s, Ricardo Salinas Pliego and Epigmenicio Ibarra, head of Argos Production, “took plots outside the studio onto the streets … [and] …made extreme changes in camera movements, dialogue, and themes. Also, characters were less
fairy-tale-like and more like real flawed people” (Casa Pérez 106). South American productions, along with TV Azteca, indicated a change in production and narrative to reflect a global market. Regardless of network competition, change in setting, and themes, the success of telenovelas depends on audiences identifying with real life circumstances.

By viewing telenovelas as an industrial and national product, telenovelas then hold ideological significance to consumers. Jorge Gonzalez’s article, “Understanding telenovelas as a Cultural Front: A Complex Analysis of a Complex Reality,” argues that narratives are projected as universal, but the audience’s reception of telenovelas vary between location and regional context. He defines telenovelas as “produced by large and complex media corporations like Televisa (Mexico), TeleGlobo (Brazil), Venevision (Venezuela), Caracol (Colombia), and more recently TV Azteca (Mexico)” (J. Gonzalez 69). These corporations represent larger political, economic, and ideological influences, and telenovelas are representative of regional social politics. Yet, Gonzalez’s description of the mechanical production of telenovelas introduces a focus on narratives made to engage audiences. This point of view also offers opportunities for critiquing the themes and narratives in telenovelas.

Audience

Production methods aside, Rosalind C. Pearson notes a multigenerational tradition partaking in telenovela consumption. She proclaims, “[Today], Mexican young and old carry with this sixty-year-old tradition, demanding an … investment on the part of the television companies to provide for the steadily growing consumption of telenovelas”
Gonzalez additionally articulates four myths accompanying the production of telenovelas, and these myths reveal complex narratives representative of complex audiences (J. Gonzalez 68). First, telenovelas interpret a “socio centric” society revealing one dominant social class; second, they are “ethno centric” and only value Eurocentric cultures; third, they are “youth centric,” and therefore devalue the traditions of elderly; and fourth, telenovelas are “androcentric” (J. Gonzalez 75).

Gonzalez sees telenovelas as commercial products, and he demystifies the idea of the telenovela consumer by explaining that transnational exchanges of telenovelas create “cultural fronts.” Cultural fronts describe subject’s social and ideological position and “are subject to an infinite game of interactions and retroactions, instead of changes in a unique variable” (71). Class, gender, sexuality, religion, political ideology, and nationality are few of the many elements that form audience perspectives (cultural fronts). These perspectives influence interpretations that deconstruct the plotlines and narratives not representative of a universal experience (the single variable). This strongly reflects Arrizón’s understanding of “translocal identities” which “refers to a change in the relationship among territory, identity, and political affiliation” (18). As a method of production, a universal appeal provides narrative stability for viewers, yet the diverse consumers offer varying interpretations.

Casas Pérez’s understanding of cultural identity is focused on programming; timing is critical to gaining specific viewer loyalty. She proclaims, “Early afternoon telenovelas would be directed at children and young adults, late afternoon ones at housewives, and late night telenovelas would be directed at adults, both male and female” (Casas Pérez 106). Her research illustrates a consistently available demographic, and for
telenovelas offer specific niches. Yet, Clifford discusses a different place for investigating audience participation: the home.

In his article, “Engaging the Audience: The Social Imaginary of the Novela” Reginald Clifford further acknowledges audience diversity and the home. Though his analysis focuses on TV Azteca’s telenovelas, which have been described as more realistic, Clifford also details a vast, heterogeneous, and constantly changing audience (Clifford 94). The “circulating” and “converging” (94) audience traits describe viewing habits of different race/ethnicity, class, age, gender, and sexuality. Like audience diversity, the home differs from consumer to consumer. Clifford suggests, “[The home is] the site of conflicts, rituals, and sharing dimensions that are gendered, generational, and class oriented” (94). The home as a site of rituals is reflected in the relationships between characters in telenovelas. His research evaluating ratings and critiques for Television Azteca’s telenovelas, found that participants “assert that a telenovela, particularly ones with tones of realism, provides a means for broaching a subject that families enjoy discussing but may find difficult to raise” (94). The methods for producing telenovelas are shown to rely on codes and grammar specific to a target audience, audience viewing habits, and location (Fiske, “Television Culture” 1275); nevertheless, the portrayals of characters remains fixed on race/ethnicity, class, and gender stereotypes.

Denise Beilby and Lee C. Harrington’s research in “Opening America: The Telenovela-ization of U.S. Soap Operas” center the growing U.S. Latina/o population and the impact it has on U.S. English Language television. They describe three soap opera genres that are descriptive of telenovelas: “dynastic soaps (focusing on one powerful
family), community soaps (focusing on a number of equal, separate families and characters), and dyadic soaps (focusing on romantic engagement)” (Beilby and Harrington 80). Beilby and Harrington also note that “research on the export of U.S. television programs has focused almost exclusively on their ‘one-way-flow,’ [but] little scholarly attention has been devoted to the reverse: how programming from abroad fares in the United States” (79). The competition also signals U.S. English language media’s interest to revise narratives to model Latin American products in effort to appeal to the Latina/o market (81).

The research about production of history of telenovelas shows a trajectory that begins at in Latin America and Mexico, and the methods used to gain audience loyalty. As Beilby and Harrington note, the growing popularity of telenovelas in the United States offers opportunities to expand discourse. The following section first discusses popular themes in the dominant narrative in telenovelas, and is followed by research investigating gender, stereotypes, and sexuality.

**Themes and Narratives**

Narrative strategies, such as universalizing experiences, in telenovelas production and performance introduce another debate concerning the role of art and cultural production. Benavides explains that telenovelas were viewed as a low art form among intellectuals, but became an avenue to critique bourgeoisie, classism, and racial prejudices during the growth of television (Benavides 11). Television made more pervasive images and concepts previously reserved mostly for the elite; the mass production of telenovelas challenged the exclusivity of the theatre consumers. Marietta
Morrissey concurs, in her article, “Tres Mujeres (Three Women): Reclaiming National Culture in the Post-Colonial Telenovela” that “telenovela melodrama is devalued by the higher social classes, and is regarded by serious artists and audience as a low cultural form” (21).

Martín Barbero’s work focuses on Latin American melodrama and its influence on popular culture. Barbero centers class into his analysis of telenovelas and art; he articulates that “the bourgeoisie is indicated by its control of emotions and its need to separate sentiment from social setting, thus internalizing emotions and re-creating them as ‘private schemes’” (Qtd. in Benavides 11). For the economically wealthy of Mexico during the introduction of television, according to Barbero, revealing private consumption of material commodities to the masses threatened social stability; yet, Benavides suggest that the working class showed more interest in emotions because they are seen as more realistic to working class experiences. The narratives make “people’s marginality the key element in the telenovela production” (Benavides 5). The dominant narrative in telenovelas is responsible for controlling images and representations of racial/ethnic, class, and gender identity.

Benavides also discusses other reoccurring themes in telenovelas and Spanish media: the colonial legacy. In Benavides’ work, Aníbal Quijano’s scholarship explains colonialism and post-colonial representation in Latin American serial dramas. Benavides explains that “the phrase ‘colonial desire’ expresses a particular kind of longing, even nostalgia … defined … by its characteristic failure … and by the constant comparison to the ‘other’” (Benavides 7); part of thematic construction in telenovelas is due to romantic and exotic representations of marginalized groups destined to fail at assimilating into
Eurocentric ideals. Benavides proceeds to describe the colonizer who wants “what is projected onto the darker, enslaved bodies: lust, emotional freedom, less ‘civilizing’ constraints” (7), and the colonized as “striving for political and economical freedom while being injected with markers of cultural inferiority” (7). The portrayals of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy surface racism, prejudice, and racial hierarchy in Latin American telenovelas.

The colonial legacy plays a significant role in producing romantic and exotic images of colonized people (Collins 79). The images of the servant, the poor, and the rich, for example, structured normativity, and according to Pearson, “present a view of the world that is acceptable in line with audience’s expectations and beliefs, a view that is not questioned but assumed to be the norm” (403). Centering marginal, romanticized, and exoticized images and people, the realistic qualities and fantasy elements take advantage of colonial history still present in Mexico, Latin America, and the United States.

The colonial legacy is present in the commodification of mestizaje, and is packaged to portray social, political, and economic progress (Arrizón 23), but is often not recognized by researchers investigating the impact telenovelas have on cultural production and identity. For example, Slade’s research specifies a generalization made about Latin American telenovelas influence in the global market. She asserts, “It is interesting that [telenovelas] are produced in the periphery, not in great centers of production of Europe and the United States” (Slade 51). This biased perspective makes visible an empirical and Western lens that devalues the social, cultural, and economic impact of products made in Latin American, for Latina/os in Latin America, and that
target U.S Latina/os. Beilby and Harrington add that “the history of U.S. television is characterized … by strong resistance to foreign programming” (39).

Carolina Acosta-Alzuru’s “Beauty Queens, Machistas, and Street Children: The Production of Reception of Socio Cultural issues in telenovelas” accounts for the colonial legacy as a narrative theme that has social and cultural significance. Although her focus is on Venezuela, because of the global popularity, her focus on beauty, machismo, and street children are issues that cross Latin American social and political landscapes and also form “cultural fronts.” She argues, “Telenovelas are a cultural/media product … there is constant negotiation between the writers, directors, production team, actors, the audience, and the institutions that participate in the social formation” (Acosta-Alzuru 187). Multiple variables are needed to fully engage a successful production, but a key ingredient is audience consumption. For Acosta-Alzuru, the very act of viewing/consuming telenovelas gives validity to the representations of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. She finds that “the audience does not mind ‘unreal’ storylines when these involve romance … But when socio/economic issues are present … the public expects a ‘realistic’ treatment” (198). By these accounts, the telenovela consumer engages in the production of meaning. Acosta-Alzuru’s research also shows the ways the socio/economic variables take precedence over the representations of gender and sexuality.

*Gender and Sexuality*

The representation of masculinity and femininity relate to the genre most popular in the telenovela: the *novela rosa*. The *novela rosa* “is typical of the pure Cinderella
variant of the Mexican soap opera” (Morrissey 21). Acosta-Alzuru gives another
definition of the *novela rosa*, she comments, “Traditional telenovelas, also known as
telenovela rosa, tell the story of a heterosexual couple who fall in love in the first episode
and find many obstacles to their love until the happy ending more than 100 installments
later” (188). Also, Slade finds that in 1950s, Valentine Pimstein, who worked for
Televisa, “developed the formulaic telenovela based on the Cinderella … plotline which
served to carry advertise[ment]” (54). However, in the 1960s, Fernanda Villeli
introduced a new genre, the “young mistress of an older man, typically a young woman
who has come to the city from the pueblo, is finally rejected in favor for the wife” (54).
Regardless of the narrative style, telenovelas follow a heterosexual model, storyline, and
narrative that rely on traditional gender roles; furthermore, the research that follows
investigates the effects of telenovelas portrayals of gender in Latin America and U.S.
Spanish language television audiences.

According to Clifford men and women’s interests are distinct, and he finds that
“men claim to be more attracted by a mix of love underscored by action and even
violence” (98). His findings are based on viewing habits focused on TV Azteca’s *Mirada
de Mujer/The Look of a Woman*, and reports that “for middle-aged [and] middle upper
class women, *Mirada de Mujer* was good because it was more real [while] younger
women of the same classes were swayed by physical attraction and themes that revolved
around the issues facing young adults” (98). In addition to bringing gender to his
analysis, he introduces different interpretations resulting from socio-economic status. He
continues, “Young … middle and upper class [people] pay less attention to the qualities
of acting and more to the elements of music, fashion, and style … [while] the lower
classes find it more difficult to express what they wish to say” (98), and include more emotions in their interpretations (99). The examples describe gendered viewing habits, and differences between classes, and recall arguments made about the telenovelas place in art and cultural production.

Analysis of gender in telenovelas reveals an environment where male dominance, classism, and sexism intersect with the idea and socialization of the colonial legacy. Research about telenovelas show patterns of male dominance and racial formation are crucial to the construction of masculinity and the exercise of power, and women’s struggle for independence. The research presented by Jack Glascock and Thomas E. Ruggiero in “Representation of Class and Gender on Primetime Spanish-Language Television in the United States” strives to understand the growing popularity of Spanish language television in the United States and on U.S. Spanish speaking audiences (Glascock and Ruggiero 390). The research first attempts to define Latina/o cultural values and society. Their investigation speculates that “central to Latino Culture is the priority given to family relationships and the concept of machismo, which taken together dictate traditional sex roles, including male dominance” (392). Success, as an element of dominance, is best shown through aggression. Glascock and Ruggiero’s quantitative content analysis found that “male dominance in Spanish-language television is indicated by the preponderance of physically aggressive acts initiated by males” (399).

Mastro and Ortiz’s analysis of prime-time Spanish language television is centered on social identity theory, which “posits that people’s identity is derived (in part) from their membership in different groups, which offer norms of thinking and behaving” (Mastro and Ortiz105). In their research, they verify that masculinity “demonstrated the
highest level of social authority whereas older women exhibited the lowest level” (110). In terms of physical characteristics, men who were of higher income were represented with heavier body type (112), and on the basis of intelligence, they find that men “with fair complexion to be significantly more intelligent than women with fair complexion” (112). Representation and performance of masculinity relied on physical aggression, age, ethnic identifiers, and body shape to portray success.

Additional analysis about the representation and performance of femininity consider success and power, and these variables were determined racial phenotypes, age, and sexual appeal. Women are compared to machismo with their own stereotype of marianismo. Glascock and Ruggiero state that “marianismo, influences the female identity … characterized by a sense of self-sacrifice for the betterment of the family and spouse, but often to the detriment of the woman” (392). Their results show that men are represented more than woman (395), and that “female characters were depicted as having more parental responsibilities … more likely to have light skin … [and] more likely to have light-colored hair than male characters” (396). Though women were represented more than men, women are typically limited to domestic roles.

Women’s level of sexuality is linked to the struggle for power, success, and independence. Glascock and Ruggiero report that Anglo features “emphasized class (lighter skin and hair color), seemingly rendering the ideal even less attainable and inevitable comparison all the more self-deprecating for young female viewers especially” (398). Mastro and Ortiz’s analysis indicates that women’s roles were driven by beauty, skin tone, and age, which indicated success levels; women were younger (Mastro and Ortiz 113), and “women with lighter skin tone were less intelligent, less articulate, and
more verbally aggressive than women with darker tones … Wealthy women were the slimmest, most provocatively dressed and the most submissive” (115). This analysis recalls Casas Pérez’s discussion about targeting audiences that, along with social identity theory, as Mastro and Ortiz provide, portrayals of race/ethnicity, class, and gender in telenovelas carry ideological weight.

Glascock and Ruggiero’s research perpetuates Latina/o stereotypes rather than critiquing the role media has in sustaining such images. They first generalize machismo and marianismo; second, they neglect to address the ways telenovelas treat race/ethnicity. They explain, “The preference for lighter skin and hair among Latinos … appears somewhat ingrained as researchers have found that many Hispanic Americans retain preference for light complexion Blancos over dark complexioned Morenos” (Glascock and Ruggiero 392). Their assertion once again naturalizes the complex treatment of race and ethnicity and the consequences they have on subjectivity, and these assumptions deserve interrogation.

Like Benavides’ emphasis on the colonial legacy, Rocío Rivadeneyra’s article “Gender and Race Portrayals on Spanish-Language Television,” centers the role colonial history has on cultural production, and addresses gaps perpetuated by both Glascock and Ruggiero, and Mastro and Ortiz. In their analysis of Latina/o culture, machismo and marianismo became foundational for social construction. However, Rivadeneyra notes, “Cultural construction[s] of race [is] … based on each nation’s experiences with slavery and colonialism,” she continues, “Each country and culture has its unique set of circumstances and history that have led to wide variability in its conceptions of race” (211). Though Rivadeneyra’s findings parallel previous investigations, she centralizes
colonialism and the resulting racial hierarchy as highlighted by telenovelas, and is critical of subject formation.

Gender stereotypes, racial hierarchy, and class analysis have been prevalent themes researched in telenovelas. The research reifies a patriarchal and heteronormative construction of themes and narratives in telenovelas. Sexuality has not been a vital part of the discourse. Glascock and Ruggiero do find that “gays are often caricaturized” (392), but their use of “gay” has limitations because it is not defined. Rivadeneyra uses objectification theory to explain limited and “caricaturized” portrayals of queer people in Anglo heteronormative constructions. She states, “Objectification theory … suggests that the socialization of girls and women leads them to think of themselves as objects to be gazed at and who are evaluated based on their physical appearance” (Rivadeneyra 209). Objectification theory has been used to explain “a similar phenomenon for Black men in the gay male community where they feel sexually objectified,” she continues, “Stigmatized groups may also be more likely to be objectified due to their position of less power and status in society” (209). This point of view is significant because it evaluates the causes for representing certain groups in telenovelas in a marginal way. Queer representation, though depicted in telenovelas, has not been a core theme for researchers investigating telenovela’s influence on U.S. Spanish language audience.

Julee Tate’s article, “From Girly Men to Manly Men: The Evolving Representation of Male Homosexuality in Twenty-First Century Telenovelas,” is one research project which centers portrayals of gay characters in telenovelas. The representation of gay males, like studies done on gendered roles and behavior, rests on effeminate stereotypes that counter the aggressive and dominant image of masculinity
Tate (103). She states, “Almost without exception this character is extremely effeminate and flamboyant in both dress and mannerism … He wears brightly colored, dandyish clothing and exhibits mannerisms that are more a parody of a gay man” (102). In addition to ostentatious illustrations, the gay character also serves the purpose of reaffirming gendered roles. While this may be true to her perspective, her analysis does not consider different telenovela genres, such as comedies, and the way homosexuality is treated.

In her analysis, male images in telenovelas are often hypersexualized; therefore, even though telenovelas are mirroring social issues, masculinity and femininity are measured against the gay character. Performance of masculinity relies on aggression; for example, the active versus the passive sexual role (Tate 104). This centers sexual desire, but reifies gender hierarchy where true masculinity is the dominant/active role. She states, “The passive individual is the one who acts in a way that is considered feminine. He cedes to the desire of others and is much the victim of the active man as is any woman” (105). Just as previous research essentialized machismo and marianismo, Tate shows studies from sociologists and scholars whose focus is on Latin American gender studies, and who conclude that homosexuality is defined by passive in contrast to active sexual performance (104-105). Furthermore, research done by Sylvia Chant and Nikki Craske, in Tate’s article, differentiates between Latin American and “North American” sexuality (104). They “insist that Latin American sexuality is defined by a man’s position as ‘active’ or ‘passive’” (104).

Tates research points to a divided homosexual landscape, but this perspective fails to acknowledge not only Latin American cultural diversity, but does not consider
telenovela genre differences in portraying gender, and ways that heteronormativity in the telenovela is ruptured. The research also avoids critiquing the lack of lesbian and queer women’s representations. The performance of masculinity, by gay characters, is intended to appease heteronormativity.
Chapter 4: Methodology

This study uses critical discourse analysis to better understand queer representation in *Relaciones Peligrosas*. It contributes to analyses of gender, sexuality, but is focused on examining the construction of queer representation. *Relaciones Peligrosas* provides this analysis with an opportunity to address gaps and claims about the representation of queer characters in telenovelas that target a heteronormative audience.

Queer theory forms my framework because it critiques heteronormativity and the performance of masculinity and femininity. Specifically, I use a queer-of-color lens that argues for ways culture complicates performance of gender and construction of meaning (Butler 903). Disidentification is a way of “failing to interpellate” ideologies of dominant normative gendered structures, but also highlight identity fluidity and ways that the racialized subject negotiates race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Muñoz 97). By locating the queer racialized subject in *Relaciones Peligrosas*, applying critical discourse analysis offers ways of examining “non-verbal (semiotics, multimodal, visual) aspects of interactions and communication: gestures, images, film, the internet, and multimedia” (Wodak and Meyer 2).

*Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical discourse analysis investigates naturalized social circumstances through a “multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach” (Wodak and Meyer 2). Framing my stance on qualitative critical discourse analysis is Douglas Kellner’s “Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture.” Kellner sees U.S. media, as an instrument serving
ideology, influences subjectivity. Kellner evaluates media through a cultural studies lens to reveal “how media culture articulates the dominant values, political ideologies, and social developments and novelties of the era” (Kellner 8). *Relaciones Peligrosas* is one telenovela produced and filmed in the U.S. that presents a complacent, homogenous, and heteronormative Latina/o culture.

Kellner values cultural studies because it “is … interested in how subculture groups and individuals resist dominant forms of culture and identity, creating their own style and identities” (8); *Relaciones Peligrosas* treatment of queer sexuality, more precisely, queer masculine sexuality shows an interest in maintaining heteronormativity. A cultural lens approach to media culture “provides the materials for constructing views of the world, behavior, and event identities. Those who uncritically follow dictates of media culture tend to ‘mainstream themselves, conforming to the dominant fashions, values, and behaviors” (8). Analyzing the representation of queer characters in *Relaciones Peligrosas* allows me to critique construction of queer masculinity through a heteronormative lens that perpetuates “sexist representations of women, oppressive ideologies of sexuality … and ideologies of race” (9). In short, Kellner’s cultural studies approach to critical discourse analysis provides me with a model to investigate queer characters in *Relaciones Peligrosas*.

Based on Hall’s (1981) “encoding/decoding model,” Kellner argues that critical investigation of media text takes three forms; first, production and political economy; second, textual analysis; and third, audience reception and use of media culture. To be critical requires devotion to deconstruction and production of knowledge to liberate oneself from domination (Wodak and Meyer 7). Understanding the ways that critical
analysis of political economy, textual analysis, and audience reception reify ideology in cultural texts is important for knowledge production.

Centering the political economy reveals that “commercial entertainment is a profit oriented business, largely controlled by giant corporations” (Kellner 2). It is important to understand systems of production that shows the relationship between audience reception and media messages that exacerbate consumer culture. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez dictate in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader* that “one ideally needs to be able to understand socioeconomic context in which it is created (political/economy/production)” (2). Kellner adds that the “economic factor explains why there are cycles of certain genres, and subgenres, sequelmania in the film industry, crossovers of popular films into television series, and a certain homogeneity in products … within systems of production,” and these facets are “marked by rigid generic codes, formulaic conventions, and well-defined ideological boundaries” (10). Kellner’s emphasis highlights the power media outlets, and the ways the U.S. economy is a political affair.

The second aspect is textual analysis which places emphasis on narrative and the ways it reflects ideology through representation. A textual analysis involves “multidimensional close textual readings to analyze their various forms of discourses, ideological positions, narrative strategies, image construction, and effects” (Kellner 11). Textual analysis utilizes qualitative and quantitative, as well as diverse disciplines and theoretical frameworks to discuss the messages embedded in media texts. He notes, “Various critical methods have their own strengths and limitations, their optic and blind spots” (12); the ability to apply various methods and theoretical positions permits an in
depth reading of media cultural texts. The goal is to critique “how cultural meanings convey specific ideologies of gender, race, class, sexuality, nation, and other ideological dimensions” (Kellner 12). Textual analysis comes from “one possible reading from one critic’s subject position” (Kellner 13).

The third facet is audience reception. One disclaimer Kellner notes is the open ended analysis media texts are subject to, and each audience applies their location and lived experiences while negotiating the message from media cultural texts. Regarding audiences as diverse and active participants, he articulates, “helped cultural studies overcome the previous one-sided textualist orientation to culture and also directed focus on the actual political effects that texts have” (Kellner 13). Although, this third area is of great importance, this research focuses on my interpretation of *Relaciones Peligrosas* discursive treatment of sexuality in media targeting U.S. Latinos.

*Textual Analysis*

For this thesis project, I will concentrate on textual analysis and the opportunities it provides to deconstruct portrayals of queer sexuality in *Relaciones Peligrosas*. As discussed, elements of textual analysis look at various discourses, social standpoints, and means of representations (Kellner 11). I center discourse, or rather critical discourse, to examine verbal, non-verbal, and visual aspects of the representation of queer masculinity, sexuality, and its relationship to racial/ethnic identity.

I turn to Rosalind Gill’s article, “Discourse Analysis,” who helps disseminate types of discourses. Gill explains the differences and diversity involved in discourse analysis, and the themes that they raise. From her evaluations, the type of discourse most
pertinent to my method is Speech action theory that is aware of “the functional or action orientations of discourse. Rather than looking at how accounts relate to the world” the interest is “in what accounts are designed to accomplish, and in looking in detail at the organization of social interaction” (Gill 173). This stance, along with post structuralism has “broken with realist view of language, and have rejected the notion of the unified coherent subject that has long been at the heart of Western philosophy” (Gill 173). I use Speech action theory and post structuralism to validate my feminist queer of color point of view and critiques about the representation of queer masculine sexuality in *Relaciones Peligrosas*.

Themes, such as understanding language as constructive and action oriented/function oriented are helpful to deconstructing language used to construct queer Latino masculinity, and the ways identity revolves around environmental factors (Gill 175). A constructionist stance; first, is critical towards knowledge and definition of truth; second, is conscious of divers positions and complex “world-views”; third, means having an ability to negotiate specificities and relativity; fourth, views knowledge as a social construction; and fifth, investigates the ways that social construction of knowledge are connected to action/practices (Gill 173). When applying these features to textual analysis, language rejects “realist notion[s] that [it] is simply a neutral means of reflecting or describing the world, and a conviction in the central importance of discourse constructing social life” (Gill 172). Speech action theory and Post Structuralism contribute to queer literature that critiques postmodernity, and, as Gill states, “break with traditional ‘realist’ models of language, in which it is taken to be a transparent medium –
a relatively straight forward path to ‘real’ beliefs or events, or a reflection of the ways things really are” (175).

The second theme is action oriented or function oriented. This theme considers the ways language drives action in the process of structuring subjectivity (175). Gill explains, “As social actors, we are continuously oriented to the interpretive context in which we find ourselves, and constructing our discourse to fit that context” (175). Action, Gill claims “should not be thought of in cognitive terms, for example, as related to an individual’s intention; often they can be global or ideological and … best located as cultural practices rather than confined to someone’s head” (175).

Episode Selection

*Relaciones Peligrosas* tells the story of a heterosexual romance, and in the chronological trajectory of the narrative, the heterosexual protagonists rescue their courtship despite setbacks. A sub-plot of the main narrative focuses on queer youths understanding and acceptance of queer sexuality, and also the obstacles these characters face that prohibit queer sexuality and consensual relationships. The trials and tribulations of queer sexuality are marked by verbal, visual, and symbolism that label queer sexuality as a social pathology; hence, make visible a heteronormative lens. My goal, by using critical discourse analysis, is to deconstruct heteronormativity to reveal the treatment of queer sexuality and performance of masculinity, and the message the telenovela carries to Latina/os about sexuality as such.

Broadcasting of *Relaciones Peligrosas* in the United States began in January 2012 on Telemundo, and spanned 109 episodes; the final 109th episode was an unaired
alternative ending to the telenovela. The telenovela aired at 10:00 p.m. and only on week-days. Most of the narrative takes place in the United States: Miami, Florida to be precise. Fiske reminds us of the importance of narrative unity, and the chronology of the storyline (Fiske, “Popular Discrimination” 218); therefore, it is crucial to analyze episodes that reveal; first, the queer narrative sub-plot; second, show the character’s understanding of his queer sexuality; three, portrayals of queer sexuality; and four, social reaction and consequence; and five, consequences of expressing queerness.

Out of the 109 episodes of Relaciones Peligrosas, I will begin my analysis with the first episode because it introduces the predominant heteronormative narrative, but also the queer subplot. This episode is important because it structures the tone, perception, and assumptions the telenovela makes about queer masculine sexuality and desire. The scenes from episodes are chosen in chronological order that examine the queer characters’ development. Analyzing these scenes’ textual and visual relationships to dialogue reveals the discursive treatment of male characters performance of masculinity, desire, and queer masculine sexuality.
Chapter 5: Analysis

Relaciones Peligrosas aired in Telemundo in the USA territory from January 24 to June 25 of 2012. The telenovela has a total of 109 episodes, but the last is an alternative ending. Relaciones Peligrosas tells the story of Miranda Cruz, a young high school teacher who has a conflicted relationship with Mauricio Blanco, a student at the high school. As noted by GLAAD (The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) in “Telenovela ‘Relaciones Peligrosas’ Breaking Ground with Gay Characters,” the telenovela gained national attention because of its representations of not only gay issues, but “an array of social issues including substance abuse, crime, dating, violence against women, as well as, race, class and LGBT issues” (Opposingviews.com). Thus, the concept of “relaciones peligrosas” or “dangerous relationships” lies in the characters’ ability to control desire, but for those who lose control, face severe consequences.

This chapter starts with a brief summary of the plot followed by a description of how even though production methods have changed, the narrative remains fixed by heterosexual contracts. I also discuss how Relaciones Peligrosas used a different approach to garner audience participation via social networking websites and by including queer sexuality. As described in chapter 2, Relaciones Peligrosas illustrates the ways the production of telenovelas has been altered to fit a global audience. Then, I look at significant points in the queer narrative poignant to the development of the queer character’s sexual identity.

The goal of this chapter is to exemplify through critical discourse analysis the discursive treatment of queer sexuality, the representation of queer characters, and the
performance of masculinity in *Relaciones Peligrosas*. The chapter will address my research question: how does *Relaciones Peligrosas* reinforce heteronormativity and how is queerness expressed? I will observe episodes and dialogue, beginning with the first episode, to track the queer narrative. I transcribe the dialogue to examine the discursive treatment of queer sexuality, and to analyze important moments in characters’ development. Additionally, I also look at visual components used to represent queer sexuality.

*Relaciones Peligrosas, Plot Summary and Description of Queer Character’s Story Line*

Literature about *Relaciones Peligrosas* was retrieved from online media sources; such as, Msnlatino.Telemundo.com and NBC Universal Inc; Telemundo is a division of NBC Universal Inc (Oyola [nbcumv.com](http://nbcumv.com)). These online sources promoted *Relaciones Peligrosas* by highlighting three areas related to the telenovela’s production. The first is the heterosexual romance; second, methods for engaging audiences; and third, the significance of the telenovela’s queer characters. Despite the traditional narrative format (heterosexual love) *Relaciones Peligrosas* is recognized for appealing to a modern, U.S. Latina/o demographic, and a globally connected audience.

In a promotional piece, Gerardo Oyola indicates, “Todo comienza con la historia de Miranda Cruz (Sandra Echeverria), una joven que inicia su carrera como profesora en [una escuela bilingue]” (“Everything starts with Miranda’s (Sandra Echeverria) story, a young woman beginning her career as a professor in a bilingual school”) ([nbcumv.com](http://nbcumv.com)). The website, theleadtype.com, adds that the telenovela “explores the relationships of the school’s professors, students and their parents … [and] Miranda Cruz, a young teacher
about to begin her career at the school … lives a passionate relationship with Mauricio Blanco (Gabriel Coronel).” Opposingviews.com, features a piece by GLAAD clarifying that the school is located in Miami, Florida. These sites also indicate that *Relaciones Peligrosas* is an adaptation of the Spanish series “Físico o Química,” or “Physical or Chemistry.” This element is important because most telenovelas follow similar narratives and plotlines, but are revised. Also, “Físico o Química” are themes important to the representation and discursive treatment of queer sexuality. The question behind queer masculine sexuality posed by the telenovela is: Is queer sexuality driven by physical desire (físico) or substance abuse (química)?

Various web sources also recognize the role social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have in the telenovela’s popularity. Oyola reports, “Para los televidentes que quieran saber todo … sobre ‘Relaciones Peligrosas,’ pueden seguirla en Facebook/RelacionesPeligrosas y Twitter @RPeligrosasTV, donde podrán descubrir secretos, intrigas y amores” (“For the viewers who want to know everything about ‘Relaciones Peligrosas,’ the show can be followed on Facebook/Relaciones Peligrosas and Twitter @RPeligrosasTV, where viewers can discover secrets, intrigues, and love affairs”) (Nbcumv.com). *Relaciones Peligrosas* integrates social media websites to advance the production to a different level of entertainment in which the telenovela is concurrently available seven days a week (Vargas “miami.com”). Georg Szalai also reiterates that “the content of the tweets will relate directly to on-air events as they were prepared by the writing team” (thehollywoodreporter.com). Thus, pushing the boundaries of fiction where “a message from a student shown texting or tweeting on the show could be shared with fans who follow the character’s Twitter feed,” and “a
character who is only seen in the background of a scene or shown passing by may react
on his Twitter account to a scene that he just witnessed” (Szalai
“thehollywoodreporter.com”). *Relaciones Peligrosas* is acclaimed for being “the first
fully interactive novela with exclusive content available on Telemundo.com, Twitter and
Facebook” (theleadtype.com). Although my analysis of *Relaciones Peligrosas* will not
focus on its presence in social networking and cultural production, these aspects
exemplify the ways new technologies are used to attract, promote, and gain audience
participation.

On the theme of queer sexuality, few online sources recognized the diverse
plotlines in *Relaciones Peligrosas*. Caracol.com provides a piece in its website covering
the telenovela’s major themes and narrative developments. This piece contextualized the
pervasive violence and homophobia shown in the *Relaciones Peligrosas* towards the
LGBTQ community. The site states, “Segun estudios … cada dos dias una persona
homosexual es asesinada en el mundo” (“According to studies, every two days a
homosexual person is murdered in the world”) (Caracol.com). They also discuss suicide:
“El maltrato psicologico y fisico hacia los homosexuales hace incluso que ellos intenten
suicidarse por sentirse culpable de ser distintos a los demas” (“The psychological and
physical mistreatment towards homosexuals causes them to attempt suicide for feeling
responsible for being different from others”) (Caracol.com). GLAAD also commends
*Relaciones Peligrosas* for breaking “the mold with its fair depiction of the highs and lows
of the novela’s so far only gay character. Alejandro ‘Alé’ Portillo (played by a Puerto
Rican actor Kevin Aponte.” Alejandro Portillo is further described as “torturado
constantemente … y la situación de Diego en donde él es quien los rechaza pero en el
fondo siente una inclinación sexual diferente” (“Constantly tortured … and the situation with Diego, where he (Diego) rejects homosexuals even when deep down inside he feels differently”) (Caracol.com). These online sources are the only two that reference “Alé,” and Caracol.com is the only review noting Diego, who plays “Alé’s” love interest and the hardships this character faces. Diego harbors repressed homosexual desire, shame, and self-hatred; he is the gay character who does not fall into effeminate gay stereotypes.

One theme left out of the conversations are other characters who do not identify as gay, but who deviate from the heteronormative masculine standard. These characters faced fatal consequences. In the first episode, the telenovela portrays friends and classmates, Rodrigo and Oswaldo falling prey to deviant homosexual desire one night at a high school house party. The desire is depicted as a result of excessive alcohol and drug consumption, and the consequence for acting upon that desire was Oswaldo’s death and Rodrigo’s suicide. Drugs and alcohol, like homosexuality, are treated as terminal social and physical ailments. This episode will be discussed in depth, but I will first discuss the main queer characters in telenovela.

Queer Characters

Alejandro is the only openly gay character in Relaciones Peligrosas, and “Alé” is the only one who expresses innate homosexual desire. All other characters exhibit queer sexuality when consuming alcohol or drugs (msnlantino.telemundo.com). According to the main website for Relaciones Peligrosas, msnlatino.telemundo.com, Alé is described as pure, innocent, and trustworthy. Alejandro endures homophobic teasing, bullying, physical violence as a result of expressing homosexual desire, and a gay identity.
Alejandro is further portrayed as the dependent, effeminate, and vulnerable gay figure compared to Sebastián and Diego, Alé’s objects of affection, who are strong, competitive, and independent.

Sebastián is not gay, but in moments where he finds himself in queer situations, he is comfortable with his own sexuality and is not homophobic. For example, in episode 10, Sebastián’s girlfriend and Alejandro’s best friend, asks Sebastián to kiss Alejandro. Though they do not kiss, Sebastián does declare his stance as a confident heterosexual male. Sebastián is Rodrigo’s older brother (Alejandro’s best friend), and is the ideal big brother who takes care of Alejandro. As the patriarch, he maintains order, stability, and reassurance. He is, according msnlatino.telemundo.com, “un guapísimo joven alto, de apariencia aria, de piel muy blanca. Siendo hijo de una mujer entregada a la vida política, Sebastián ha viajado por todas partes del mundo. Habla varios idiomas, es culto, refinado, comedido y educado” (“A very handsome young man with Aryan features, and he has very white skin. Being the son of a woman devoted to politics, Sebastian has travelled throughout the world. He is fluent in many languages, is cultured, refined, and educated”). Sebastián’s Aryan features, very white skin, and cultured demeanor are in sharp contrast to his younger brother Rodrigo who has an olive complexion, dark hair, and dark eyes¹. Rodrigo is also one of two characters in the first episode killed off after a night of heavy binge drinking and drug consumption that led to homosexual acts.

Diego is Alejandro’s main object of desire, and is the second queer character in Relaciones Peligrosas, though he never embraces a gay identity. Diego is athletic,
gleeful, optimistic, and a leader. His hobbies include sports, acting, drawing, dancing, and playing video games (msnlantino.telemundo.com); the site also reports that “por un evento inesperado descubre en contra de su voluntad una atracción física inevitable con ese amigo flaco y débil que tiene Sebastián, su compañero de equipo” (“[Diego] discovers, involuntarily, an inevitable physical attraction for Sebastian’s skinny and weak friend from the team”). The developing bond between Alejandro and Diego puts into question the “físico o química” of their relationship. Diego experiences homophobia at a different level than Alejandro. He is put through treatment and therapy to cure him of homosexuality. Diego is not a stereotypical gay male, meaning that unlike Alejandro who takes pride in his gay identity, Diego represents the other image, albeit repressed, image of queer masculine sexual identity. Thus far, Relaciones Peligrosas treats homosexuality as a consequence of excessive alcohol and drug consumption and an illness; both of which are curable. Queer masculine sexuality in this telenovela rests on representations that follow masculine and non-masculine dichotomies that reify stereotypes.

The Dominant Narrative and Patriarchy

Richard Rodríguez’s Next of Kin discusses that patriarchy in Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural texts have prioritized the role of the patriarch as non-negotiable to the stability of family and social structure. He poses that “the fact that dominant masculinities have typically managed the way the family is constituted and enacted, if women and queers are to retain la familia and other kinship-based bonds as useful organizational categories, the normative codes with which communitarian politics are chiefly saturated demand critical scrutiny” (14). That is, it is critical to analyze the ways
in which women and queers are portrayed through a lens that normalizes patriarchy as fundamental to social structure. In the case of *Relaciones Peligrosas*, as a Latina/o cultural text the patriarchal narrative controls the representations queer characters by limiting representations of gay identity to masculine images that reify the dominant and submissive stereotypes.

Rodríguez further discusses the ways queers have been cast to threaten family and social stability (17). For Rodríguez, queer masculinity in cultural texts are treated with “curious ambiguity” that “hinges upon the assumption of a ‘reproductive futurism’ … that finds homosexuality’s adoption difficult, if not impossible, given heteronormative prerogatives of *la familia* (the family)… as an organizing principle” (135). Patriarchal kinship is contingent upon the performance, appearance, and representation of heteronormativity, and once this privilege is forfeited, patriarchal power is also denied. As part of the criteria to recognize “the cultural production of Chicano gay men” (139), Rodríguez suggests that such projects should “critically examine the representations of Chicano gay men in various social and cultural contexts (such as in literature and film) to unveil their positioning therein” (140). The following analysis aims to scrutinize the representation of queer sexuality in *Relaciones Peligrosas*. I address the ways queer masculine sexuality is made to represent a threat to the construction of patriarchy, family, and social order, thus strive to address Rodríguez’s urgency to continue the cultural production of Chicano gay men.
“Vidas Peligrosas/Dangerous Lives”

The first episode, entitled “Vidas Peligrosas” is important to analyze because of the chronological structure of the telenovela genre. Besides the main plotline concerning heterosexual romance, this episode introduces main themes present throughout the narrative. In the case of Relaciones Peligrosas, the theme introduced in the episode is substance abuse, the consequences of over indulgence, and sexuality as part of youth narrative. Nevertheless, this episode is important to critically analyze because it exemplifies the significance of patriarchy to the overall narrative in Relaciones Peligrosas.

The role of patriarchy, dominance, and power are portrayed by two characters: Manuel Blanco and Sebastián Aragon. Manuel Blanco is Mauricio Blanco’s father who plays the protagonist role in the conflicting romance between him (the pupil) and Miranda Cruz (the educator). He is also Sophia Blanco’s twin sibling. In this scene and dialogue, Manuel and his wife, Carmen, are in a heated debate concerning their kids, and them being out late at night.

Manuel: No me gusta para nada que Sophia esté en una fiesta a estas horas. (I don’t like at all that Sophia is out at a party at this time.)

Carmen: Acabamos de hacer el amor, y lo primero que me dices es eso. ¡Que romántico! (We just finished making love, and that’s the first thing you tell me. How romantic!)

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2 A list of episode titles was provided by Wikipedia. The site also has a list of all primary and secondary characters, stated the relationship between the characters, and provided length of episode. I use the titles provided by Wikipedia to structure the sub-headings in this chapter.
Manuel: Déjate de payasadas. Tampoco somos quinceañeros. (Stop being frivolous. We are not adolescents.)

Notably absent from this conversation is Mauricio. Even though Mauricio and Sophia are celebrating their birthday together at a house party, Manuel is more concerned about Sophia’s whereabouts than her brother’s. Further, Carmen is characterized as being distant from the concerns of motherhood and more focused on their love making. The dialogue implies that Carmen’s obsession with sexual desire hinders her ability to recognize the hazards Sophia faces late at night.

Carmen is removed from her role of parent, mother, and wife (femininity), and too dedicated to sexuality and desire.

Carmen: No me puedo acordar que fue lo que me enamoré de ti. ¿Qué me conquistaste? Ya se te olvidó que cuando tenía la edad que ahora tiene Sophia tu me perseguías con una calentura … y allí perdí mi virginidad.

(I can’t remember why I fall in love with you. Did you forget that when you were Sophia’s age you feverishly followed me … and that’s when I lost my virginity.)

Manuel: Eran otros tiempos, y tú no eres mi hija … te advierto una cosa. Lo que le pase a Mauricio al fin ya al cabo no me importa porque es varón. Pero si Sophia, por descuido tuyo, termina revolcándose con un hombre por ahí, te juro … (Those were different times and you are not my daughter. I’m warning you. In the end, I’m not worried about Mauricio
because he is a man. However, if Sophia, because of your carelessness, ends up rolling around with some man, I swear …)

Carmen: ¡Qué, qué! ¿Qué me juras? ¡Me matas! O, me abandonas. ¡O se acaba el mundo! … contigo o sin tí este mundo sigue girando. (What do you swear? That you’ll kill me! Or, leave me. Or will the world end! … with or without you the world will continue revolving.)

This exchange illustrates the conception of gender roles. Manuel clearly sees the role of the mother and wife as responsible for her kid’s actions. Carmen is to be blamed for Sophia’s actions who risks losing her virginity by pure impulse. To revolcar, or roll around on the ground, is regarded as irrational, impulsive, and deviant to a chaste daughter’s role. The feverish sexual and impulse appetite describing Manuel (masculinity) is unquestioned but further naturalized.

The second character portraying patriarchal dominance is Sebastián Aragon. Sebastián is Rodrigo’s older brother, and portrayed to be the most cultured, educated, and refined out of the two. Coupled with his features (Aryan features and very white skin), he is the ideal patriarch, like Manuel Blanco. In the following exchange, Sebastián is concerned over Rodrigo’s well-being, and aware of the alcohol and drug consumption at the party. At the party, Rodrigo and Oswaldo (a friend and classmate) are in the bathroom about to swallow a drug in tablet form. Sebastián aggressively knocks at the door and Oswaldo retorts, “busy!”

Sebastián: Soy Sebastián, I know you’re in there Rodrigo. Abre me! (It’s Sebastián. Open the door!)
Rodrigo: (To Oswaldo) Nos cacho, escóndela. (He caught us, hide it.)

Sebastián: ¡Abre la puerta, o la tumbo a patadas! (He walks into the bathroom) ¿Qué estaban haciendo? (Open the door, or I will kick it open!

What were you doing?)

Rodrigo: Nada. (Nothing.)

Sebastián searches his brother’s pockets and finds half a pill.

Sebastián: ¿Dónde está la otra mitad? Te la tragaste, o la tienes tú. (He speaks to Oswaldo). ¿Saben lo que les puede hacer estos químicos al cerebro? ¡O sea, te quieres morir! ¿Quién te dio esto? ¿Saben lo que les pueden hacer estos químicos al cerebro? ¡O sea, te quieres morir! ¿Quién te dio esto? La compraste …

Fue Gonzalo, fue Gonzalo verdad? Si fue el Mexicano lo voy a matar. I told him not to mess with you! (Where is the other half? Did you eat it, or do you have it? Do you have any idea what these chemicals can do to your brain? Do you want to die? Who gave this to you? Did you buy it?

Was it Gonzalo? It was Gonzalo. If it was that Mexican, I’ll kill him!)}

Sebastián’s role serves to condition morality. He polices his brother’s deviant behavior and seems to be aware of Rodrigo’s destructive predispositions. While this may be seen as positive quality, his language describing Gonzalo, “El Mexicano,” provides another point of view. Considering that Gonzalo is described as “el chico malo … el rebelde, abusador, bullicioso, adicto a las drogas” (“The bad boy … rebel, abuser, bully, and drug addict”), raised in Mexico, and is from a broken family (msn.latino.telemundo.com), Sebastián’s tone towards Gonzalo, “El Mexicano,” holds prejudices. Racism is a prevalent theme throughout the telenovela. Rodrigo also has
Sebastián programmed as “Big Brother” on his cell phone which reaffirms Sebastián as the ubiquitous presence and power.

The telenovela’s representation of masculinity normalizes class, racial/ethnic hierarchy, gender roles and gender hierarchy, and privileges heterosexuality. Manuel Blanco and Sebastián Aragon symbolize the power of patriarchy in *Relaciones Peligrosas*. They initiate the politics of patriarchal kinship by modeling performance of masculinity. Through their heteronormative presentation, queer masculinity is constructed. The next section focuses on the discursive treatment of sexuality and representation of queer characters in *Relaciones Peligrosas*.

*Queer Machismo*

The treatment and representation of queer masculine sexuality are linked to Rodríguez’s concept of curious ambiguity, that is, the extent to which heteronormative assumptions about masculinity are performed thus allowing one to pass. Rodríguez’s idea relates to Daniel Enrique Pérez’s investigation of the queer macho. The queer macho, as described in *Re)Thinking Chicana/o and Latina/o Popular Culture*, are characters in Latina/o and Chicana/o cultural products that retain heteronormativity allowing them to survive a heteronormative world.

For Pérez, the queer macho disrupts Western standards of masculine beauty and gender expectations (D. Pérez 12), and these are helpful to understanding representations of queer masculine sexuality Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural texts. Pérez declares that the pejorative representation and depictions, such as, “the Latin lover, buffoon, clown, gang member, drug dealer, ‘dirty Mexican,’ and ‘lazy Mexican’” (10) in media
establishes us/them social binaries, as well as a criteria that demean Latina/o cultural signifiers. He further argues that “these images have contributed to an aesthetic discourse that has vilified, dismissed, objectified, exoticized, and eroticized Chicano/Latino men” (10). The performance of masculinity as well as the performance of race/ethnicity are in sharp contrast to the “hegemonic paradigms of beauty” that “are constructed solely around Anglo, patriarchal, heteronormative values” (10). Whiteness and Eurocentricism, he discusses, “prevent minoritized people from becoming the beneficiaries of the privileges associated with possessing traits deemed aesthetically valuable by the dominant culture” (10). Yet, the construction of Latino/Chicano masculinity, he argues, deserves interrogation to reveal instances in which these images destabilize both Anglo and Latina/o heteronormative understanding of masculinity. *Relaciones Peligrosas* is structured around Western masculine aesthetics and western concepts of power, as illustrated by Manuel Blanco and Sebastián Aragon. This looks at; first, the construction of dominant patriarchal narrative; second, the construction of patriarchy and power; and third, the construction of queer masculinity. These elements are linked by a heteronormative and patriarchal lens part of telenovela narrative tradition.

Pérez defines macho and the images associated to them as a complex and contradictory concept. He uses works by Alfredo Mirande to narrow the term. Accordingly, “[Mirande] suggests that there is a difference between the Anglo macho and the Latino macho; while the term may be associated with positive attributes for Anglos (manhood and masculinity), it is typically associated with negative ones for Latinos (the oppression and coercion of women)” (D. Pérez 11). Pérez concerns the ways macho’s negative inclinations are regularly associated with Latinos/Chicanos. Throughout much
of the discussion dedicated to deciphering the macho image, little was devoted to rethinking the term masculinity which can carry misogynistic implications in both Anglo and Latino representations.

To queer the macho image destabilizes heteronormative assumptions by critically examining the portrayal of sexual desire, performance of masculinity, and aesthetics. Pérez explains that “the queer macho is a conflation of the two figures that are almost always caricatured and placed in a diametrically opposing positions in popular culture: the macho and the maricón” (12). This macho/maricón binary echoes many dualities that embrace women’s gender roles where one aspect is determined socially valuable and other elements pathologies. Representing the macho/maricón binary does more to reify gender hierarchy than opening discourse about masculinity and fluidity in sexual desire. While the macho is described as masculine and carries the essence of manhood, Pérez describes, “the maricón figure is typically associated with gay Chicano/Latino men who exhibit effeminate behavior” (12).

Even though the macho/maricón binary has been appropriated in media depictions, it remains problematic in that it suggests gender hierarchy by maintaining women’s subordination. Pérez ultimately argues that the queer macho “destabilizes the straight/gay and macho/maricón binary, thereby allowing for the possibility of a Chicano/Latino gender and sexual continuum where queers can be considered macho and vice versa” (12). Although I agree with Pérez’s claim to dismantle constraints on Latino/Chicano masculinity, and likewise agree with his use of queer to investigate sexual fluidity as discussed in Chapter 2, I find that the representations of queer masculinity works with the dominant patriarchal narrative to reify gender conflicts that
structure gender norms. In *Relaciones Peligrosas*, Alejandro and Diego represent the polarizing macho/maricón stereotypes.

**Queer Masculinity in Relaciones Peligrosas**

The ability to express homoerotic desire and sexuality in *Relaciones Peligrosas* are specific to space, place, and time that allows for such performance. For Alejandro and Diego, the telenovela’s gay characters (it is important consider that Diego never openly admits it), examining the performance of masculinity is important to the ways queerness is portrayed, and whether the performance sustains stereotypes of gay men or are progressive in the ways sexuality as such is presented. For instance, I observe that Alejandro and Diego comply with the queer macho aesthetics described by Pérez, and their depiction reifies gay stereotypes. The following section analyzes the spaces used to initiate homoerotic desire, examines queer character representations, and dialogue all of which follows the patriarchal dominant narrative.

There are four events that disclose homoerotic desire, and these events are parties symbolic of places outside social institutions, such as, the school and the home that governs social norms. These places allow for hedonistic behavior (the consumptions of drugs and alcohol) and correlate with sexual experimentation. The message implied is that abusing alcohol and drugs leads to homosexual acts, and in the telenovela homosexuality is treated as a social illness.

**“Vidas Peligrosas” and Queer Sexuality**

The first episode introduces themes that remain prevalent throughout *Relaciones Peligrosas*. The consumption of alcohol and drugs is the predominant issue because it
has caused the deaths of two students, Rodrigo and Oswaldo. These students also engaged in homosexual acts while in an intoxicated state. Breaking from traditional masculine heteronormative conception effects Rodrigo and Oswaldo state of being and existence.

After Rodrigo’s brother, Sebastián, found and disposed of the pill in the bathroom scene. Gonzalo, another fellow classmate and troubled youth, finds Rodrigo and Oswaldo lamenting the lost tablet. Gonzalo offers them a new drug, “The Last Generation,” and the three consume it. After some time, the three friends find themselves in an empty bedroom, and are obviously still under the drug’s effects.

Gonzalo: ¡Esto sí es lo mejor que he probado en la vida! (This is the best thing I’ve tasted in my life!)

Rodrigo: Me pica. (Grabbing his throat) (It is rough.)

Oswaldo: Es mal viaje, Rodrigo. (It is a bad trip, Rodrigo.)

Gonzalo: Necesitas un chupón. Abre la boca, metete el dedo, y chúpalo. (You need a pacifier. Open your mouth, insert a finger, and start sucking it.)

Gonzalo takes hold of Rodrigo’s hand, and guides his finger to his mouth, and suggestively thrusts it back and forth. Oswaldo begins to laugh and also sucks his thumb. Gonzalo then reaches into Rodrigo’s pant pocket and takes his camera phone, and begins to photograph Rodrigo and Oswaldo sucking their thumb. Though no sexual act is
performed, the scene carries sexual tension because the fingers are symbols of the phallus.

Although the scene never explicitly shows them engaged in homosexual act, the next morning Oswaldo leaves the house where the party took place in haste. Rodrigo soon rushes after Oswaldo.

Oswaldo: ¡No me toques! (Don’t touch me!)

Rodrigo: ¿Qué diablos te pasa? (What the hell is wrong with you?)

Oswaldo: ¡A caso no te acuerdas lo que hicimos! (By chance, did you forget what we did?)

Both go into the car, and drive away. Rodrigo is at the wheel. Alejandro is then shown also leaving the house. He is not in any hurry, but seems to be looking for his two friends. This moment is important to the way queer sexuality is treated because Alejandro, who becomes the only openly gay character in the telenovela, does not consume the same drug that Rodrigo and Oswaldo took. Even though Gonzalo took the drug, the queer narrative remains fixed between Rodrigo, Oswaldo, and Alejandro who are presumably best friends.

The only instances that infer a queer moment between the three friends are shown in flashbacks. Gonzalo recalls the three of them jumping in bed, wrestling, and removing his t-shirt. The most information about the events that took place between Rodrigo and Oswaldo are while they argue in the car.
Rodrigo: ¿Tu te acuerdas de lo que pasó después de que nos tomamos las porquerías que nos dió Gonzalo? (Do you remember what happened after we took that filth Gonzalo gave us?)

Oswaldo: ¡No quiero hablar de eso, te dije! ¡Que hicimos dude! ¡Que hicimos! (I told you I don’t want to talk about it? What did we do! What did we do!)

After arguing and driving dangerously on the freeway, they get in an accident. The car overturns and Oswaldo is knocked unconscious. Rodrigo escapes, but finds Oswaldo suffering from head injuries and unresponsive. Rodrigo flees the scene of the accident. While hiding in the bushes beyond the highway, he receives a call from his brother. The camera angle shows his phone that reads, “Big Brother.” He ignores the phone call.

Rodrigo is tormented by the events of the party, the car accident, and his friend’s subsequent death. The police and other authority figures also begin to look for him at his high rise apartment. Rodrigo becomes desperate for definite escape. Sebastián finds Rodrigo sitting on the ledge. Facing Sebastián, who is inside the room, Rodrigo is frantic.

Sebastián: Hermano, no me parase gracioso que estés sentado allí. Bájate con cuidado por favor. Son muchos pisos Rodrigo. (Brother, I don’t appreciate you sitting there. Please carefully come back down. Those are a lot of floors.)

Rodrigo: Perdóname, big brother. (Forgive me, big brother.)
He jumps from the ledge and kills himself. There are several indications that foreshadow Rodrigo’s demise. Unlike Oswaldo, who has no direct patriarchal figure dominating him, Rodrigo has Sebastián. Three events serve as a catalyst to his death. First, he consumes drugs; second, he surrenders to homosexual acts; and third, he ignores his brother’s (patriarchal authority) phone call. These actions defy patriarchy and heteronormativity, therefore, Rodrigo and his actions are considered amoral. To rescue heteronormativity in the narrative, Rodrigo and Oswaldo’s character are eradicated. Queer masculine sexuality in Relaciones Peligrosas is policed by these regulations.

“Amor Imposible/Impossible love” and Queer Sexuality

The first episode laid the thematic foundation and showed the consequences of alcohol and drug consumptions that follow these youth. Episode 32, titled “Amor Imposible,” focuses on the discursive treatment of queer masculinity while continuing with the themes of alcohol and drugs. The focus shifts to the ways Alejandro endures, reacts, and evolves as a result from the bullying because of his queer sexuality. Up until this point in the telenovela, Alejandro has come out to his best friends, Nora and Sebastián, and Yesenia, a free spirited and independent young woman.

Alejandro has also ventured into gay chat rooms on the internet from which he believes he is developing a relationship with Javier. This episode is set at another house party hosted by Leonardo, and is celebrating Gonzalo’s 18th birthday. Alcohol and drugs are rampant but only because Gonzalo spiked the punch bowl with drugs. Although everyone is shown drinking, Alejandro is not drinking or taking drugs, yet this space remains a site where sexuality becomes unrestrained.
At the party, Javier expresses interest in finding a room for more physical contact.

They find an empty bedroom.

Alejandro: Te confieso que si bailé así de bien, es porque sabía que tú me estabas viendo. Fuiste mi inspiración. (I have a confession, if I danced that well, it is because I knew you were watching. You were my inspiration.)

Javier: Y tú la mía. Ale, vine a esta fiesta solo por ti … desnúdate. (You are mine. Ale, I came to this party just for you … remove your clothes.)

Alejandro: Mira, no te burles de mi pero me da mucha vergüenza. Nunca lo he hecho con nadie. Ni hombre, ni mujer. (Look, don’t make fun of me, but I’m very shy. I’ve never done anything with anyone. Man or women.)

Javier: Y si lo hago yo primero. ¿Me quito la ropa yo primero y luego tu? ¿Eso te relajaría? En el baño. (What if I do it first? I will take my clothes off, and then you will take your clothes off. Will that relax you? I will go in the bathroom.)

Javier gets up and walks to the restroom, but reminds Alejandro to remove all his clothes. Once Javier is out of the bedroom, Alejandro undresses.

Javier: (Calling from the restroom) Ahorra cierra los ojos. (Now close your eyes!)
Javier walks out and is completely dressed. With a smirk on his face, he walks to Alejandro who is standing naked with his eyes closed.

Alejandro: ¿Estas allí? (Are you there?)

Javier: Si. Muy cerquita. Déjame darte un beso. Pero no abras los ojos. (Yes, very close. Let me give you a kiss, but don’t open your eyes.)

Alejandro expects a kiss from Javier; instead, Gonzalo suddenly appears behind Javier and begins to take pictures of Alejandro. Javier then dumps a bucket of water on Alejandro who is still standing there with his eyes closed. Surprised by the water, he opens his eyes.

Gonzalo: Te tenemos desnudito. (We have you naked.)

Javier: ¿De verdad creíste que soy gay? ¡A mí me dan asco los invertidos como tú! (Did you really think I was gay? I’m sickened by inverted people like you!)

Gonzalo then takes money from his pocket and pays Javier. At this point, Alejandro understands that Javier was only faking a relationship as part of a larger joke. Gonzalo then says, “Tenemos la foto de lo que quería” (“We have the picture we wanted”).

The episode ends with this dilemma that Alejandro is facing. The main perpetrators bullying Alejandro are Gonzalo and Leonardo, and they are threatening to shame and “out” him by mass texting the photograph of a naked Alejandro. These two characters, along with Diego, consistently bully Alejandro in the football field, locker
room, and bathroom. Alejandro played football until he declared that he is not meant for contact sports.

The next episode, “Beso de Despedida (The Good-bye Kiss),” continues in the bedroom scene where Alejandro has been tricked and the teasing he has been facing has reached a climax. The events of the second party have less to do with alcohol and drugs, but show the homophobic treatment and representation of queer characters. These events are significant because they mark Alejandro’s development and process of accepting his queer sexuality. The teasing Alejandro received attention by GLAAD that viewed the depiction of bullying in Relaciones Peligrosas as an important political statement that shows the turmoil and ways of overcoming bullying.

Standing naked, Alejandro asks, “¿Que les hice yo? … ¿Porque me hacen esto?” (“What did I do to you? Why are you doing this to me?”). Alejandro appears confused and angry because he was manipulated by Javier. Gonzalo and Javier, nevertheless, are proud of what they have accomplished.

Gonzalo: En Lunes toda la escuela lo va ver. Desnudita te vez más bonita. (Gonzalo and Javier are laughing.) (By Monday, the whole school will see it. You’re prettier when you’re naked.)

Javier: Y por dinero y porque era divertido hacerte creer que iba hacer tu futura esposa … que asco. (For money, and because it was fun making you think I was gay. How disgusting!)

Alejandro: ¿Hace cuanto planearon esto? (How long ago did you plan this?)
Gonzalo: ¿Hace cuanto? Desde que nos enteramos que te gustan las espadas. (They take his clothes.) … Pues haber que inventas cuando llegues a la fiesta en cueros. Porque si dices la verdad te va caer a la fregada. (Since we found out about your interest. Well, we will see what you invent when you show up naked. If you say the truth, you will face the consequences.)

Javier: Chao sirenita. (Good-bye, my little mermaid.)

Javier mockingly blows him a kiss, and flashes the money he earned for his part in the joke. In the aftermath, Alejandro, distraught, falls into a depression and contemplates suicide. Javier’s use of “sirenita” is an example of how queer masculine sexuality is viewed as effeminate. By engaging in homosexual act, Alejandro has rejected the “curious ambiguity” permitting patriarchal kinship. Within the telenovela’s heteronormative narrative tradition, Alejandro homoerotic desire took precedence over control, and control is trait associated to masculinity. Alejandro’s character faces two options; first, annihilation (as his friends faced); or second, accepting his queer sexuality thus portraying an alternative queer masculinity.

Alejandro’s process of coming out was facilitated by Nora and Sebastián. However, at this point of the narrative Diego Barron, Nora’s boyfriend, becomes a major part of the queer narrative. Diego finds and takes Alejandro home after the incident with Gonzalo and Javier. Unaware of what just occurred, Diego finds him but notices that Alejandro is not acting like his usual self. Once dropped off, Diego leaves with hesitation. The next day Alejandro is more depressed. Recalling the joke, he finds a
bottle of prescription pills, pours a handful of pills, and contemplates suicide. Alejandro has performed one of the three elements that policed Rodrigo and Oswaldo’s masculinity. He has followed homoerotic desire, but has not abused drugs or alcohol. Also, Alejandro has not defied Sebastián (the patriarch), who views him as his little brother. Evading alcohol and drugs and complying with patriarchy are important elements that continue Alejandro’s character in the storyline. Alejandro is significant to portraying the macho/maricón binary.

Episode 34 is devoted to Alejandro’s acceptance of his sexuality. In this episode he confronts his aggressors. Hearing a knock on the door, Alejandro puts the pills down. Diego went by to return Alejandro’s keys that he unknowingly took. At the center of their conversation is another incident that happened at the same party. A classmate, Elizabeth, suffered an overdose and is hospitalized. Diego’s dad, a doctor, is attending her.

Alejandro: Elizabeth no es junkie. Tiene que ver sido que Gonzalo le dio una droga. (Elizabeth is not a junkie. It had to have been Gonzalo who gave her a drug.)

Bringing up Gonzalo, who is Diego’s friend, Alejandro decides to confront him as well.

Alejandro: ¿Por qué ustedes tienen que tratar a las personas como si fueran basura? (Why do you treat people like trash?)

Diego: No se de que me estás hablando. (I don’t know what you’re talking about.)
Alejandro walks to retrieve his lap top. Upon opening it, he shows Diego a picture of a young boy, Jamey Rodemeyer.

Alejandro: ¿Sabes quién es? Es Jamey Rodemeyer. (Do you know who this is? It is Jamey Rodemeyer.)

Diego: ¿Quién? (Who?)

Alejandro: Lady Gaga le hizo un concierto en su nombre. (Lady Gaga dedicated a concert in his name.)

Diego: ¿En serio? Bueno, que cool que Lady Gaga le dedique un concierto. (He takes the lap top.) ¿A ver donde lo veo? (Seriously! How cool that she dedicated a concert to him! Where can I see it?)

The use of popular culture to contextualize the current problems faced by LGBTQ youth is poignant to the queer narrative in Relaciones Peligrosas. By referring to a victim of bullying and homophobia, the telenovela becomes more than a romantic tale of heterosexual courtship.

Alejandro’s subsequent dialogue shows a new trajectory in the queer narrative.

One in which queer sexuality is not associated with alcohol or drugs.

Alejandro: Ella lo izo porque Jamey tenía 14 años cuando se suicidó. ¿Y sabes porqué se mató? Por el abuso de unos desgraciados que lo hicieron sentir como basura. Sólo porque era distinto. ¡Era gay! Pero yo creo que no se suicido, sabes. Si no que lo asesino alguien como Gonzalo, alguien como Máximo, Alguien como tú. (She did it because Jamey was 14 when
he committed suicide, and do you know why he killed himself? Because of the abuses he suffered from people who made him feel like trash because he was different. He was gay! But, I don’t think he committed suicide. I think he was killed by someone like Gonzalo, like Maximo, by someone like you.)

Diego remains aloof from the reasons why Alejandro is talking to him about Jamey Rodemeyer.

Alejandro: Si no hubieras llegado en este momento yo sería otro Jamey Rodemeyer. Y te hablo del porqué se hizo famoso. Pero somos miles los que sufrimos los bullies de las escuelas. Todos los días de nuestra vida. Con un punado de estas (Alejandro shows Diego the pills) yo podría acabar mi tortura. (If you wouldn’t have showed up, I would have been another Jamey Rodemeyer. And, I’m talking about him because he became famous. However, we are thousands who suffer from bullying. Every day of our lives. With a handful of these pills, I could end my torture.)

Diego: Porque te sientes tan mal, no entiendo. (Why do you feel so bad? I don’t understand.)

Alejandro: ¿Por qué les divierte ver llorar a gente como yo? … ¿Dónde esta lo divertido del dolor ajeno? (Why do you guys enjoy seen people like me cry. Where is the fun in hurting people you don’t know?)

He steps towards Diego.
Alejandro: Ustedes lo que les molesta es que yo soy diferente. Pero recuerdas lo que dijo Kurt Cobain? Ustedes se ríen de mi porque soy diferente, pero yo me río de ustedes porque son todos iguales. (What bothers you guys is that I’m different. Do you remember what Kurt Cobain said? You laugh at me because I’m different, but I laugh at you because you’re all the same.)

Alejandro now stands face to face with Diego.

Alejandro: Soy gay, Diego. Y quiero agradecerte porque ustedes son lo mejor que me ha pasado … no tengo que vivir mi vida escondido, con miedo, callado, y sabes qué? No voy a dejar que ustedes me maten. (Diego, I’m gay. I want to thank you for being the best thing that’s happened to me. I don’t have to live my life in fear, hiding, and silent, and you know what? I won’t let you guys kill me.)

Diego: Mira, yo sé que he sido un poco duro contigo. Pero, pero, es que no se Alejandro … así lo aprendí en mi casa. La gente gay está enferma. (Look, I admit that I’ve been a little hard on you. But, I don’t know Alejandro … that’s what I learned at home. Gay people are sick.)

Alejandro believes he is different from everyone else. His gay identity makes him distinct from normative heterosexuality; yet, this assertion does not help heal homophobia. Even though Alejandro is not one to abuse alcohol and drugs, and which would lead him to queer behavior following the narrative in Relaciones Peligrosas, the discursive treatment treats queer masculine sexuality as both a social and physical illness.
Diego’s father best exemplifies the ways homosexuality is treated as a malady when he tells Diego that in his home, he does not believe in thieves, homosexuals, and drug addicts (Episode 35).

Episode 35, titled “Violencia Familiar (Familiar Violence),” airs the scene discussed by GLAAD. The setting is still in Alejandro’s living room, and Nora (Alejandro’s best friend) is recording from her cellular phone Alejandro’s message. Nora, along with Sebastián, recommended Alejandro to the internet site “It Gets Better,” so that he is able to get help and support not readily available to him. The message recorded is for that site.

Alejandro: Hoy, estuve a punto de quitarme la vida. Pero gracias a alguien entendí que la guerra con tus bullies termina en el momento que aceptas lo que eres. Porque logras estar en paz contigo mismo, en vez de angustiarnos cuando se ríen de nosotros porque somos diferentes … Hola, mi nombre es Alejandro y estoy orgulloso de ser gay. (Today, I was about to take away my life. But, thanks to someone I understand that the fight against your bullies ends at the moment when you accept yourself. You learn to be at peace with yourself, and not in anguish when they laugh at us for being different … Hello, my name is Alejandro and I am proud of being gay.)

Nora stops recording and hugs Alejandro to show him her support. The message given is one that encourages overcoming shame, and the teasing resulting from homophobia. It promotes self validation and accepting queer sexuality; however, the message also
declares homosexuality and other LGBTQ issues as being truly different from presumed “norms.” This emphasis on making queer characters’ sexuality an anomaly is the catalyst for portraying Alejandro within gay normative stereotypes that surfaces the macho/maricón dichotomy. He renounced patriarchy.

“Violencia Familiar” is also the episode where Alejandro comes out to his school. The manner in which gay identity is represented in Relaciones Peligrosas perpetuates stereotypes about gay men. In this scene, Diego, Gonzalo, and Leonardo are sitting down when they see Alejandro, and immediately mock his appearance. Alejandro is evidently gay when he shows in spotless white sneakers, light blue fitted jeans cuffed at the bottom; a white matching belt; a pink, purple, and white plaid patterned button down shirt, and a matching white tie. His hair is different too, whereas his hair covered his forehead and is long enough to partially cover his eyes, Alejandro now wears product to style his hair in a trendy way. He is fashionable. He also carries a yellow notebook with a peace symbol sticker in rainbow colors. The rainbow peace sticker makes distinct his gay identity: a gay cultural marker.

The discourse that follows reflects Alejandro’s newly found confidence. While finding support by his girlfriends, he remains a target for teasing by Gonzalo, Leonardo, and Diego.

Yesenia: ¡Wow! Alé te vez guapisimo. (Wow! Alé you look so handsome.)

Nora: Y mira estas estrenando mis pulseritas. (And look, you are breaking in my bracelets.)
Sophia: Así se hace mi Alé. ¡Con la frente bien en alto! (That’s how you do it my Alé. With your head held high!)

Alejandro: Gracias muchachas. (Thank you, ladies.)

Alejandro walks towards Diego who is sitting with Gonzalo and Leonardo. Diego appears nervous.

Alejandro: Diego, quería agradecerte por todo lo que hiciste por mi. (Diego, I wanted to thank you for everything you’ve done for me.)

Diego: ¡Y a ti que te pasa Alejandrita! (What’s going on with you, Alejandrita!)

Diego’s retort solidifies a patriarchal and heteronormative view of Alejandro’s gay identity. To the heteronormative masculine characters, Alejandro has relinquished his patriarchal privilege. He is feminine.

The classroom also becomes a place where he confronts his bullies. Noticing that, once again, Gonzalo, Leonardo, and Diego are making fun of him, Alejandro addresses the class about homophobia, bullying, and discrimination.

Alejandro: Guys, guys, quiero decirles algo, es que Gonzalo y Máximo son tan homofóbicos que tuvieron que contratar una lacra que se llama Javier para sacarme las fotos que les enviaron ayer.
Casios: Discrimination is not only against homosexuals.³

Alejandro: Pero esta etapa de la escuela es solo un pedacito de nuestras vidas. Cuando seamos adultos todo mejora. Y, al demás ya estoy cansado de esconder quien soy. (Guys, Guys, I want to tell everyone something. Gonzalo and Maximo are so homophobic that they contracted someone named Javier to pretend to be gay, and take nude pictures of me that were sent to you yesterday. But, this stage in school is just one moment in our lives. When we become adults, everything will be better. Also, I am tired of hiding who I am.)

The message in Alejandro’s dialogue, like the previous, targets LGBTQ youth facing bullying and homophobia. It conveys strength, perseverance, and self-acceptance. Yet, despite the positive advice given to gay people, it is structured around binaries in which gay identity is truly different from the normal heteronormative image. Alejandro’s gay identity in Relaciones Peligrosas revolves around appearance, materialism, and commodities all of which reinforces a gay stereotype that contrast with traditional rugged and aggressive representations of masculinity.

“Pasado Peligroso” and Queer Sexuality

The third party in episode 41, titled “Pasado Peligroso (Dangerous Past)” is different in that it takes place at school, but follows the themes of drugs and alcohol. Diego Barron is more prominent in the queer narrative. Whereas Alejandro has gone

³ Casios is a young Haitian boy experiencing racism. His story is part of the racist dialogue also exemplified in the first episode.
through transformation and has accepted his gay identity, Diego is not as fortunate and suffers his father’s patriarchal abuse. His father, Hector, is a successful doctor and single parent. He values family and views marriage as the most important element to maintain a strong social fabric. The dialogue between Diego and his father shows the ways homophobia is treated as a social illness, an aspect never resolved in the telenovela.

“Pasado Peligroso” shows another view of homophobia that does not come from youth, but from a paternal, authoritative, and medical figure. Hector Barron sees homosexuality as a physical illness made worse by the consumption of alcohol and drugs. Alejandro and Diego are now friends since Diego began dating Nora, Alejandro’s friend. In the first encounter Hector has with Alejandro, Diego and Alejandro are playing video games at Diego’s house when his father comes home from work. This scene also shows Diego’s first inclination at homoerotic desire.

Diego: ¿Si sabes cómo jugar? (Do you know how to play?)

Alejandro: No, es que no tengo ni idea. Es la primera vez que juego. (No, I have no idea. It is my first time playing.)

Diego: ¿En serio? No te preocupes. Mira, es muy fácil. (Seriously! Don’t worry. It is really easy.)

Diego holds Alejandro’s hands, and shows him how to maneuver the video game controller.

Diego: Aquí, aquí con este, controlas tu espada. (Here, with this one, you can control your sword.)
In the meantime, Alejandro stares longingly into Diego’s eyes, but he does not notice. Then, Diego’s dad walks in.

Hector: Buenas tardes. (Good evening.)

Diego and Alejandro stand up from the floor in panic; their intimacy abruptly interrupted.

Alejandro: Buenas tardes señor. Bueno y ya me voy. (He turns to Diego)
Gracias por enseñarme. (Addressing Diego and his father) Mi mama me está esperando, y ya es tarde. Con permiso. (Good evening sir. Well, I better get going. Thank you for showing me how to play. My mom is waiting for me, and it is late. Excuse me.)

Hector: ¿Eso que acaba de salir, es amigo tuyo? (That thing that just left is your friend?)

Diego: No. Para nada. Es un amigo de Sebastián. (No, not at all. He is Sebastián’s friend.)

Diego’s father refers to Alejandro as a thing. By stating “eso que acaba de salir,” Alejandro is not only dehumanized, but in the eyes of Hector, emasculated. The scene is also valuable for the symbolism between the video game, and the way Diego teaches Alejandro how to play. Diego remains in control, and is the dominant of the two.

Episode 42, “Fiesta Peligrosa (Dangerous Party),” continues with a Halloween party being held at school. Diego shows up dressed as a cowboy, and Alejandro is dressed up as an Indian. After some time, Nora has left the party, but Diego and Alejandro find themselves alone. Diego is drinking alcohol and shares with Alejandro.
Diego is obviously in an inebriated state, and in this condition kisses Alejandro.

Although Alejandro tastes the alcohol, by all accounts and at this point of his story, Alejandro’s queer desire is innate and not a result from drugs or alcohol.

Alejandro: ¡Uy, esta fuerte! (They both laugh.) (Wow, that is really strong.)

Diego: El segundo trago arde menos, y el tercero ni lo sientes. (The second drink won’t be so bad, and by the third you won’t feel a thing)

Diego takes back the bottle and takes another drink.

Alejandro moves closer, and sits next to a space Diego made for him.

Alejandro: Oye Diego, tu papá es un señor muy, muy serio. (Listen Diego, your father is a very serious man.)

Diego: Si. Me tiene hasta aquí. (He points to his forehead.) Con sus reglas. (Yes, he has me up to here with his rules.)

Alejandro: ¿Y si no tuvieras que seguir sus reglas? Al menos por un día. ¿Serías diferente a quien eres? (What if you didn’t follow the rules? At least for a day. Would you be a different person?)

Diego: (Taking a deep breath.) No sé. Tal vez. (I don’t know, maybe?)

Alejandro: ¿Por qué a veces me tratas bien, como ahora, y luego cuando estas con tus amigos, es como si yo fuera invisible? ¿Es por miedo por lo
que diran tus amigos y tus papas? ¿O, verdaderamente odias a los gays?

(Why do you sometimes treat me great, like today, and other times when you’re with your friends, I’m invisible? Are you afraid of what your friends and parents will say or do you really hate the gays?)

This scene is important for the degree it symbolizes the relationship between Alejandro and Diego. The costumes reflect their sexual roles. Dressed as an Indian, Alejandro’s character remains subjected to violence and vulnerability. Diego is a cowboy. Illustrations that follow the cowboy image are virility, independence, and adventure. These values associate to dominant masculinity (Katz 265).

Diego does not reply to Alejandro’s question. Instead, he takes another drink, but the bottle is empty. They both laugh. Diego then tries to get up, but loses his balance. Alejandro tells him to put one arm around him so he can support him. As Alejandro tries to get Diego to stand up, they closely begin to face each other. Then they kiss, but the kiss is not shown.

Alejandro: Siempre soñé que mi primer beso fuera así. (I always dreamed that my first kiss would be like this.)

Both Diego and Alejandro are smiling, but Diego is still overtly drunk.

Alejandro: Como hoy. Fue tan bonito. (Like today. It was so nice.)

The parties are significant because they provide spaces where sexual constraints are deregulated. However, depictions of sexual promiscuity along with homosexuality suggest desire is being controlled by chemicals, rather than physical.
Homosexuality as a Disease

Within social institutions, such as school and the home, queer sexuality remains policed by patriarchal and heteronormative figures. In episode 63, for example, Alejandro confronts Diego at school about their encounters. Alejandro kisses Diego, but they are seen by Hector who happens to be at school, during school hours, and within institutional jurisdiction. Hector, a doctor, becomes the dominant factor policing, controlling, and treating homosexuality as a physical and social illness. At this point of the telenovela, Alejandro is the only openly gay character, but the ways Diego’s character is treated provides further evidence of the homophobic treatment of queer sexuality.

By this point, the story revolves more around the grand heteronormative narrative, and less time is devoted to the subplots, including the queer storyline. Diego is under increased pressure by his father to invite Nora and her parents to dinner. Hector’s intention is to formalize the courtship and prepare it for matrimony. Meanwhile, Diego and Alejandro continue having their sexual encounters. The best description and assumption about masculinity is described by Hector in episode 69. In the scene, Diego visits his father at his office in the hospital.

Héctor: ¿Diego, que te pasa? (Diego, what’s wrong with you?)

Diego: Me impresiono ver a Mr. Madrazo así. (It was hard seen Mr. Madrazo like that.)

Héctor: ¿Fue eso? ¿O, es por la sangre? (Was it that, or was it the blood?)
Diego: Bueno, por los dos. Es que no estoy acostumbrado. (Well, both. I’m just not use to it.)

Héctor: Pues acostúmbrate. Compórtate como un hombre. Cuando estudies medicina, veras este tipo de cosas desde los primeros años. No vallas hacer el primero de la familia que rompa con la tradición. Diego, escúchame bien lo que te voy a decir. No contradigas al destino. Vas a estudiar, te vas a graduar, te vas a casar, me vas a dar nietos, punto. Diego, tu problema es una enfermedad y esa enfermedad tiene cura. Yo te voy a ayudar salir de esa fase tan vergonzosa de tu vida. Te voy a dar un libro que te va orientar, eso y con la terapia con … el mejor psiquiatra que conozco y cree en el proceso de la re-orientación sexual. Hijo, profundiza tu relación con tu novia. No me des más escusas. Lleva la a la casa como tu novia formal. (Well, get use to it. Act like a man. When you begin studying medicine, you will see these things in the first years. Don’t be the first in the family to break tradition. Diego, listen to what I’m telling you. Don’t contradict destiny. You are going to study, you are going to graduate, marry, and give me grandchildren, period. Diego, your problem is a disease and that disease has a cure. I will help you overcome this embarrassing phase in your life. I’m going to give a book to guide you, and therapy with the best … psychologist I know who believes in sexual re-orientation. Son, take the next step in your relationship with your girlfriend. Don’t give me anymore excuses. Take her to the house as your formal girlfriend.)
Masculinity means controlling emotions. Diego is expected to control his feelings over Mr. Madrazo, a school counselor beloved by many students who was in an accident, and overcoming aversion to the site of blood. As the patriarch, Hector has a plan for his son, and that plan is to continue tradition and “destiny.” School, marriage, and procreation are essential to fulfilling tradition and destiny. Hector’s empirical voice also views homosexuality as a disease. Deterring from using “homosexuality,” Diego’s father instead uses sickness, a phase, and sexual re-orientation to suggest that homosexuality can be avoided or healed.

In episode 94, “Peligro de Amor (The Danger of Love),” depicts the influence Hector’s scientific and empirical voice has on repressing Diego’s homosexuality. Diego and Alejandro meet again at their secret rendezvous spot. Like the previous meetings, it is during the evening, and in a secluded area in what seems like a park surrounded by trees and bushes. These are the only properties that link it to the queer sexuality manifested in the parties.

Alejandro: Aquí estoy Diego. ¿Qué querías decirme? (Here I am, Diego. What do you want to tell me?)

Diego: Quería darte algo. Algo que me estaba ayudando mucho. (I wanted to give you something. Something that’s been helping me very much.)

Diego hands Alejandro a book titled Como Curar a la Homosexualidad (How to Cure Homosexuality).
Alejandro: Un libro sobre cómo dejar de ser homosexual? Diego yo no necesito esto. Yo estoy tranquillo con lo que soy. Yo no creo en esa estupidez que se puede dejar de ser homosexual como que se cambia un sombrero. (A book about overcoming homosexuality? Diego, I don’t need this. I’m comfortable with who I am. Also, I don’t believe in that stupidity of being able to stop homosexuality like one would change a hat.)

Diego: El que lo escribió es un científico. El debe de saber lo que está diciendo. (The person who wrote it is a scientist. He must know what he’s talking about.)

Alejandro: Y seguramente ese científico es un gay del closet como tu … Creo que los hombres que nos critican y que se burlan de nosotros es porque están en el closet. Porque los que están seguros de su sexualidad ni les va ni les viene. (Surely, that scientist is in the closet just like you. I think that those who critique us and who laugh at us are all in the closet. Those who are confident in their sexuality don’t care.)

Diego: Alejandro, yo no soy ningún gay del closet. (Alejandro, I’m not a gay in the closet.)

Alejandro: ¿A no? Entonces porque me ignores cada vez que estamos enfrente de todos. Pero me besas cuando estas borracho o cuando estamos a solas. (No? Then why do you ignore when we’re in public, but then you kiss me when you’re drunk or when we’re alone.)
This exchange illustrates the themes driving the telenovela; the physical or the chemical influence driving relationships. Within the themes of the telenovela, Alejandro and Diego’s relationship is balances between physical (disease) and chemical (drugs and alcohol) both of which have remedies. Nevertheless, sexuality remains fixed and non-negotiable. One is either homosexual or heterosexual.

In another example of the ways homosexuality is treated as an illness, Diego confesses the ways the therapies he undergoes causes homosexual aversion. Diego tells Nora about the forced treatments conditioning him to repress sexuality.

Diego: No te imaginas la pesadilla que estoy viviendo con mi padre. Yo estoy yendo a terapias. Y me voy a volver loco con las cosas que me están haciendo. (You can’t imagine the nightmare I’m living with my father. I’m going to different therapies, and I’m going to go crazy with the things they do to me.)

Nora: ¿De qué me estás hablando? (What are you talking about?)

Diego: Desde que tu mama se fue a ver con mi papa en el consultorio mi papa me está llevando a terapias todos los días … Me están haciendo electro shocks, Nora. Por favor, cáscate conmigo. Así sean por tus papeles o para que a mí no me sigan torturando. (Since your mom went to talk to my dad, he’s been taking me to therapy every day. They are giving me electro-shock therapy, Nora. Please, marry me? Marry me to get your papers, or to make them stop torturing me.)
For Diego’s father, marriage is one way of controlling, protecting, and continuing tradition, lineage, and heteronormativity. For Nora’s mother, marriage serves as a way to avoid her daughter’s deportation. As previously mentioned, one sub-plot in *Relaciones Peligrosas* regarded illegal immigration, and Nora and her parents are undocumented immigrants seeking stability in the United States that only a “marriage contract” could offer.

“Lucha Por Amor/Fight for love” and *El Gran Final/the Grand Finale*

The final episodes of *Relaciones Peligrosas* are time lapsed. In the first several months that pass everyone has graduated and have began to follow their careers. Several years later, many of the classmates and other main characters have married and formed families. Diego became a resident at a hospital and is married to Nora. Nora’s occupation is unknown, but they have their own home. By all accounts they are successful. They receive news from Alejandro telling them that he will be moving to Spain, and of a class reunion. The class reunion is the final party shown, but is different from the previous in that it is outside social institutions thus marking their adulthood, and contributions to maintaining tradition and social norms.

Episode 107, titled “Lucha Por Amor,” first aims to show the way Diego and Nora live a heteronormative life. The camera pans to show the certificates and diplomas that Diego and Nora have received, but Diego, as the patriarch, is the most successful. Coming home from work, Diego finds Nora on the couch and discontent about Diego’s consistent absence. Both have heard from Diego, and about the reunion. Although both attend the gathering, Diego shows up alone while Nora arrives in the arms of Sebastián.
Diego: ¿Por qué llegaste con Sebastián? ¿Es una manera de decirme algo?
(Why did you show up with Sebastián? Is that a way of telling me something?)

Nora: De hace unos meses … Me he estado viendo con Sebastián. Y no es una relación que me pone orgullosa pero lo mínimo me ha vuelto la ilusión de poder amar intensamente otra vez. Algún día yo espero …
(Since some months back … I’ve been seeing Sebastián. I’m not proud of this relationship, but at least I have regained the illusion of falling in love again. Someday, I hope that …)

Diego interrupts Nora from completing her thought, and he calls Alejandro and Sebastián. The four friends are reunited.

Diego: Yo también quiero anunciar algo públicamente. (I also have something to publicly announce.)

Diego looks at Alejandro, and then takes his hand.

Diego: Hamas he amado a alguien como te amo a ti. Y ya no me importa lo que mi papá piense. El hizo su vida y yo tengo el derecho de hacer la mía … con quien quiera. (I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you. I don’t care what my father thinks anymore. He made his life, and I have the right to make my own … with whoever I like.)

Nora: ¿Supongo que tú sientes lo mismo Alejandro? (I suppose you feel the same way Alejandro?)
Alejandro responds to Diego saying “Si, y tu sabes cuanto” (“Yes, and you know how much!”). In this conversation, Nora and Diego share similar properties: loss of control of emotions, sexual desire, and most importantly sexual desire for a man. As also shown with Carmen (Mauricio and Sophia’s mother), *Relaciones Peligrosas* reserves losing control of sexual desire and being sexual to women as a sign of weakness. The same goes to queer masculine characters who abandon patriarchal privilege, and follow sexual desire for other men. Although the conclusion is important because Diego openly declares his love, Diego never “comes out” the way Alejandro did; thus, Diego’s identity is never truly resolved.

Their conclusion offers four different points of view; first, it shows how Diego’s sexual identity remains controlled; two, it exemplifies that identity categories can be secondary to following one’s innate desire; three, Diego’s lack of identifying exclusively to a gay identity is a way of showing fluidity in sexuality; or four, by not identifying with a sexual identity, Diego maintains kinship to patriarchy. In either case, it is important to look at the ways the dominant narrative treats queer sexuality, and in the case of *Relaciones Peligrosas* the dominant patriarchal narrative resurrects stereotypes about queer masculinity. Discursively, queer masculinity is an illness or surrender of power, rather than, another way of seeing masculinity. Visually, Alejandro and Diego portray submissive/dominant stereotypes. These factors are attributed to gender and sexuality. To be effeminate implies submissiveness which is associated with femininity, and to remain in control expresses dominance and masculinity. The stereotypes follow images that depict dominant/submissive dichotomies that do little to resolve gender inequalities and homophobia, but rather perpetuate gender stereotypes and patriarchy.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

I examine the representation of heteronormativity and queer sexuality in *Relaciones Peligrosas* to demonstrate the central role telenovelas had during my childhood and today. At home, even if serving only as background noise, the images projected to me illustrated family unity that strictly relied on gender roles. During my childhood, telenovelas modeled the ways a working class heterosexual family should function. Mostly, masculinity was shown to be in control and femininity was controllable. Portrayals, such as in, *Tu o Nadie* (1985), *Rosa Salvaje* (1987), *Yo Compro Esa Mujer* (1990), and *Corazon Salvaje* (1993) are also representative of the dominant narrative that mostly focused on romance in which heterosexuality was the main ingredient to the telenovela narrative. Queer representation simply, to my recollection, did not exist.

Today, telenovelas still have an important role in our home, but for myself, I now use a queer lens to critique heteronormative constructions of gender and sexuality. While in the process of exploring, accepting, and validating my queer sexuality and place in my family dynamics, I noticed an emphasis on heterosexual romance. This tradition in telenovelas follows Butler’s assertion of a “heterosexual-based system of marriage” (905). While this aspect is pertinent to all productions, telenovelas have become more diverse in production, and in representing heterogeneous populations. Nevertheless, the perspective which social reality is portrayed stems from a heteronormative and patriarchal gaze.
Relaciones Peligrosas changed the way I saw the possibilities of telenovelas as a genre. The way this particular telenovela addresses current issues and the degree to which queer sexuality was portrayed is a significant example of the way the genre can make some changes to the narrative techniques in order to reach a global and more interconnected audience, especially Latina/os in the United States. Although not as significant to the main heterosexual romance, the queer narrative between Alejandro and Diego was important for me because it stressed the homophobia that Alejandro experienced. GLAAD commends Relaciones Peligrosas for politicizing the portrayal of Alejandro’s character, and the violence he faced as a result of his gay identity and homosexual desire, but also important is how Alejandro confronted and overcame such struggles. Nevertheless, I found it imperative to examine the ways queer sexuality is represented within a heteronormative lens: I am critical of the representation of queer sexuality because of the ways the telenovela presented performance queer of masculinity.

This chapter reviews findings from my critical discourse analysis on reinforcement of heteronormativity and queer representation in Relaciones Peligrosas. The chapter is broken down to three sections. The first explains the significance of Relaciones Peligrosas. This section revisits my theoretical framework and literature written about telenovelas. I explain that feminist and queer theory offer useful tools to renegotiate the commercial power telenovelas have in influencing fixed notions of identity. The second section discusses the significance of the study and answers my research question: how does Relaciones Peligrosas reinforce heteronormativity and how is queerness expressed? The last section discusses the advantages of my research, and suggestions for future research.
Significance of Relaciones Peligrosas

Publicity pieces recognize Relaciones Peligrosas for utilizing social networking sites to gain audience participation that specifically target U.S. Latina/o youth. Even though Relaciones Peligrosas is commended for politicizing contemporary social political issues such as immigration, domestic violence, LGBTQ, and substance abuse, my reception of the telenovela is focused on the ways queer sexuality is represented. The performance of gender and queer representation was my primary interest because of the ways I saw it governed by heteronormativity and reaffirmed normative gay stereotypes. Feminist and a queer theory provided me with the tools to critically examine the construction of power and representations of gender and queer sexuality in Relaciones Peligrosas.

Feminism and queer theory employ critical tools useful to scrutinize the construction of power, and Butler’s article provided the foundation from which to explain the manner I consume, critique, and reinterpret Relaciones Peligrosas as a commercial and Latina/o cultural product. Borrowing Butler’s explanation of how feminism rethinks the “phenomenological theory of acts,” I wanted to exemplify that Chicana feminist, queer Chicana/o feminist, and queer-of-color discourse, such as from Alicia Arrizón, José Esteban Muñoz, Daniel E. Pérez, and Sandra K. Soto, discuss ways to critique postmodernist efforts to essentialize or homogenize cultures, gender performance, and sexuality especially as presented in telenovelas. Relaciones Peligrosas offers me an opportunity to apply a feminist and queer lens to investigate the discursive treatment of queer sexuality and the representation of queer characters, elements I use when deciphering meaning.
Butler’s feminist criticisms of empirical and androcentric views of phenomenological theory of acts includes ways that the cultural, the personal, and the theatrical help disseminate homogenous assumptions of gender performance and sexuality. The cultural considers a spectrum of political experiences that cultivate gender acts (903), the personal includes ways individuals uphold or redefine social language and symbols that interpellate gendered identity (904), and the theatrical centralizes in how individuals navigate the cultural and the personal, and the way gender is performed (906). The feminist of color and queer-of-color theorists I use further deconstruct and exemplify specific cultural signifiers, and the ways those markers are renegotiated to challenge performance of gender and sexuality. For queers of color, “failing to interpellate” (Muñoz 7) queers the heterosexual contract.

Queer theory aims to omit categories of sexual identity (Spargo 32-33), challenges institutionalism (Arrizón 3), and argues for identity fluidity (D. Pérez 2). I use queer to explain characters in the telenovela who do not always adhere to prescribed masculine gender roles. In Relaciones Peligrosas, Alejandro and Diego are two characters who destabilize heterosexuality by eventually following homosexual desire. From the two, Alejandro is the only one who identifies as “gay.” In the trajectory of the telenovela, my interests are in the discursive treatment of queer sexuality, that is, instances in which characters reject heterosexuality as the norm. Several other characters, all male, exhibit homoerotic desire, but the manner in which Relaciones Peligrosas frames this behavior potentially sends misleading assumptions about queer sexuality then projected to the LGBTQ community.
Chapter two discusses the ways that technological advancements in communication diversified the production and themes in the telenovela narrative (Benavides 52). From the formulaic narratives telling a “Cinderella” storyline: the novela rosa (Morrissey 21), telenovelas have embraced a more global audience by complicating character formations and settings to reflect contemporary issues. Morrissey and Acosta-Alzuru, for instance, write about the polemics telenovelas visualize. On the one hand telenovelas may politicize geographic, economic, and socio-political plights, but on the other hand, sensationalism, romanticization, and maintaining traditional gender roles curtail political statements.

Telenovelas have also influenced quantitative research concerning themes related to gender construction. Glascock and Ruggiero research, while influential in discerning gender roles and the ways race and ethnicity affect character development, the research made assumptions about Latina/o culture. Mainly, the notions of machismo and marianismo remained pervasive and institutionalized (Glascock and Ruggiero 392). These types of work primarily neglect a complex colonial history that essentialize Latina/o culture and gender roles; the construction of race/ethnicity and power in telenovelas goes without investigation. Rocío Rivadeneyra’s work addresses this gap by noting in her research that each Latin American nation has a unique colonial experience (Rivadeneyra 211).

The topic of queer sexuality was primarily discussed by Julie Tate, and focused on the representation of gay characters in telenovelas. I found Tate’s work important because it expanded discussions about telenovelas and contributed to analysis of gender and queer theory. Tate points out how gay male characters have become more prominent
figures, and grown from playing traditional comedic roles portraying them as flamboyant and effeminate figures. Gay masculine characters are more frequently being played as aggressive businessmen (Tate 102-103), and corroborates with Glascock and Ruggiero’s analysis about masculine roles.

However, Tate’s view of homosexuality did not challenge the polarizing figures that gay characters portray; the effeminate/aggressive or as Pérez points out the macho/maricón binary (Tate 104). Tate’s analysis suggests that Latino gay sexuality only exists within the macho/maricón binary, and is uncritical of the manner these representations are dictated by a heteronormative gaze or how they reinstitute gender hierarchy. The analysis additionally did not consider how telenovela comedies create gay masculine characters used to measure heteronormative performance of masculinity and femininity: queer characters in comedies results in the hypersexualization, or hypergenderization, of both masculine and feminine characters. These limitations about queer masculine sexuality are important to address and Relaciones Peligrosas provided me with an opportunity to rethink the construction of queer sexuality in telenovelas.

Significance of Study

The significance of the study contributes to literature focusing on gender and sexuality, and to existing queer discourse examining queer representation in visual media. In many respects, I try to follow Rodríguez’s call to collect “the cultural production of Chicano gay men” (Rodríguez 139). I use a queer perspective on characters who destabilize heteronormative representations of gender and sexuality. I also apply critical discourse analysis to investigate language and visual portrayals of queer characters. The
framework and method permit me to gauge the degree these queer characters do justice to the problems facing the LGBTQ community, and to discern the message this telenovela is giving Latina/os about queer sexuality. *Relaciones Peligrosas* was an ideal telenovela because it exemplified many of the aspects raised by researchers looking at the role telenovelas have on Latina/o cultural production, and my interest in investigating queer masculine sexuality.

*How does Relaciones Peligrosas reinforce heteronormativity and how is queer sexuality represented?*

Despite the various sub-plots and conclusion to Alejandro and Diego’s relationship, *Relaciones Peligrosas* abides by a traditional narrative reinforcing patriarchy and heteronormativity. Even though the themes are more progressive, in that they explore sexual fluidity, homosexual desire, homophobia, and queers the performance of masculinity, they remain controlled by patriarchy. The first episode establishes male privilege by having them dominate family and other social institutional structures. Patriarchy and heteronormativity are illustrated in the dialogue between Manuel and Carmen, Mauricio and Sophia’s parents. In this dialogue, Manuel expresses how the woman’s duty, as wife and aspect of femininity, is to control her emotions, control the children, and remain submissive. To lose control of emotions suggests that it interferes with pragmatism and consequently with ability to mother and perform other spousal duties. Though control is stressed, women in *Relaciones Peligrosas* ultimately lose control, as do queer male characters, and this aspect is used to reinforce a patriarchal narrative. The heterosexual men in the telenovela offer stability.
The second character establishing patriarchy is Sebastián, Rodrigo’s older brother. Sebastián’s dominance is privileged even outside the telenovela. Mslnlatino.telemundo.com emphasizes his white skin and Eurocentric features, and he is further described as cultured and sophisticated. These characteristics are in sharp contrast to Rodrigo’s olive complexion, dark hair, and dark eyes. Power is further established because Rodrigo lacks shrewdness, control, and desire. On more than one occasion, Rodrigo refers to Sebastián as “big brother”; thus, associating an omnipotent quality to Sebastián’s patriarchal authority. From the start, the telenovela privileges heterosexual men with Eurocentric characteristics, such as in Manuel “Bla
nco (white)” and Sebastián physical features.

The first episode also introduces themes targeting youth: the consumption of drugs and alcohol. The consumption of drugs and alcohol takes place in locations and spaces outside the control of institutional forces, and timing is also crucial. These social gatherings are held at night, and without concrete symbols of authority. The telenovela additionally uses these settings to demonize homoerotic desire and homosexuality by attributing that behavior to substance abuse. These spaces are consistently reserved for queer sexual acts.

The queer narrative and romance between Alejandro and Diego is a progressive move that challenges standard heterosexual courtship; however, they are not the only characters who queer heteronormativity. The message the telenovela conveys is that youth will face the pressures of drugs and alcohol, but abusing them brings unintended consequences.

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4 Latina/o culture has historically favored lighter skin Latina/os, and telenovelas are instances where this favoritism is viewed.
consequences. For example, despite homosexual encounters, Rodrigo and Oswaldo are not gay, but follow homoerotic desire. In the aftermath of their drug induced sexual indulgence, both of these characters are killed off. These characters, like Diego, never embraced a gay identity, but queered masculinity. The remaining queer characters in Relaciones Peligrosas serve to stereotype two figures of queer masculine sexuality.

Pérez describes the ways queer masculinity has been depicted in Latina/o and Chicana/o popular culture: the macho/maricón dichotomy is often used to cement sexuality (D. Pérez 12). In Relaciones Peligrosas Alejandro and Diego are examples of these stereotypes. Alejandro’s character development does not revolve around drug and alcohol consumption. Unlike Rodrigo and Oswaldo, he is distinct because his queerness is presented as innate, yet this remains an anomaly and treated as un-natural to a heteronormative world. Still, his queer sexual encounters remain limited to the themes described. On the occasion that Alejandro ventures outside queer spaces; for instance, he openly kisses Diego during school hours, Diego’s father witnesses his son being kissed by “eso (that thing).” Alejandro’s existence threatens Diego’s state of being. Whereas Alejandro’s parents and friends accept his sexual identity, Diego is not as fortunate. His father is a doctor who believes homosexuality is a curable disease, and his friends were the main culprits who teased and bullied Alejandro. Diego does not defy patriarchy because he recognizes the privileges that come with it. Moreover, following the queer narrative, Diego does not reject patriarchy because it would mean his demise. Rodrigo and Oswaldo are examples of the consequences of defying patriarchy, abusing alcohol and drugs, and indulging in homosexual acts.
After many defeats, Alejandro develops pride in his sexuality and gay identity. His gay identity, as he asserts to Diego, makes him different from everyone else, and this hubris encourages him to confront his bullies. Though this is closure to that dilemma, Alejandro’s gay identity declares him different, unusual, and abnormal from everyone else who is heterosexual, the norm. The gay/straight binary that develops in the narrative makes assumptions that gay masculinity is distinct from heterosexual masculinity. These assumptions remain framed by a heteronormative lens established in the first episode. *Relaciones Peligrosas*’ queer narrative does not transform the possibilities of validating sexual fluidity or LGBTQ identities. The telenovela places emphasis on pan-Latin society, but within this melting pot of Latina/o cultures, heteronormativity maintains heterosexism.

Even though more was written about Alejandro, Diego’s character deserves discussion because the dilemmas this character faces link queer sexuality to both social malady and physical illness. The relationship between Hector, Diego’s father (the patriarch), and Diego, is suggestive of the homophobia issued by a conservative heteronormative world view. Hector views homosexuality as a social and physical illness. By referring to Alejandro as “eso,” he removes Alejandro’s humanity; hence, a threat to social construction. Hector, after all, proclaims that heterosexual matrimony is the basis of society (Episode 101). He then subjects his son to various therapies, including shock therapy, and empirical literature sustaining that homosexuality can be reversed or cured.

Despite Diego’s servility to his father’s needs, Diego embodies all the dominant aspects that, as Rodríguez describes, allow Diego access to patriarchal kinship through
“curious ambiguity” (Rodríguez 135). Throughout the entire narrative, until the very last episode, he passes as a heterosexual male. He graduates, marries, and studies medicine; thus, fulfilling every deed posed by his father. Diego follows the rules that govern masculinity: obeying patriarchal authority, refusing alcohol and drugs thus avoiding homosexual desire. The only missing element is procreation. In the final episode, after his wife, Nora, admits to an affair with Sebastián, Diego challenges his father’s beliefs. Diego, though not admitting a gay identity, recognizes his love for Alejandro. Diego refutes a categorical sexual identity. While refusing a sexual identity is a way of recognizing sexual fluidity, it also maintains kinship to heteronormativity; therefore, Diego remains the dominant of the two because he has access to patriarchal sites.

Examining heteronormativity and queer representations in Relaciones Peligrosas poses additional questions about the role Latina/o media has on a broader scale. This telenovela includes diverse storylines, but another question is: Does Relaciones Peligrosas advance queer discourse and how does having an openly gay character inflect the heteronormative values differently? As previously mentioned, GLAAD recognizes this telenovela because of its portrayal chronicling the homophobia Alejandro faces at school, and amongst his peers outside of school. I understand this as a political move especially because Jamey Rodemeyer was included in Alejandro’s dialogue. Though narrow in representing LGBTQ diversity, this gesture links to the growing publicized LGBTQ youth suicides, as well as, a growing discontent and anti-bullying discourse that speaks to U.S. Latina/o youth facing these perils on a daily basis. However, the question remains: does Relaciones Peligrosas advance queer discourse.
My response takes into account the extent *Relaciones Peligrosas* reinforces heteronormativity and patriarchy. Even though organizations such as GLAAD see Alejandro’s gay identity (pride) as a positive representation of gay people, I argue that the portrayal is governed by the heteronormative and patriarchal authority examined in the first episode. The patriarchal narrative perpetuates onto the queer characters; thus, the telenovela exposes the macho/maricón binary. The effeminate/masculine roles rest on submissive/dominant stereotypes. In this telenovela, Alejandro represents the submissive role when he identifies as gay, and Diego remains dominant by avoiding the gay category. Diego’s choice maintains his privilege in patriarchal circles and protects his social standing as a respected doctor. These values were important to his father.

The other question raised is *how does having an openly gay character inflect the heteronormative values differently?* The narrative structure of *Relaciones Peligrosas* focuses on the romantic storyline between the two main heterosexual protagonists. The queer narrative is allocated much less time and depth. Milestone moments in the queer narrative include scenes in which Alejandro accepts his sexuality and develops a stance against bullying. Alejandro, as the only openly gay character, politicizes issues that affect not only the LGBTQ community, but anyone experiencing violence on the basis of race/ethnicity, religion, immigrant status, class, and gender. Alejandro’s character is specific to the queer narrative, but characters such as Casios raises issues concerning racism and Nora illustrates undocumented youth experiences. Understanding that the queer narrative is a fraction of broader subplots to the dominant narrative reveals the minute possibility for Alejandro and Diego’s storyline having transformative possibilities.
to heteronormative values. In the grand scope of Alejandro and Diego’s story, the macho/maricón binary they represent reinforces heteronormativity.

Another question this research raises includes: *Is Spanish language media more progressive when portraying racial/ethnic, cultural, class, gender, and sexual diversity?* According to the literature discussing telenovelas, changes in both communicative technology and globalization allowed for exchanges in telenovela narratives and production from a myriad of Latin American nations. In Mexico, TV Azteca and Grupo Argos, in 1993, marked a change in the telenovela narrative. Telenovela’s increasingly portrayed cultural heterogeneity by displaying socio-political and economic issues linked to class differences.

In the literature, Morrissey analyzes *Tres Mujeres,* Acosta-Alzuru discusses *Costa Rica,* and Tate investigates telenovelas such as *Ruby* and *Yo Amo a Juan Querendon (I love Juan Querendon):* these studies emphasize the impact telenovelas have on global Latina/o audiences, and alterations telenovelas make to gain audience participation. Nevertheless, as *Relaciones Peligrosas* models, efforts to politicize social problems and injustices are, at best, used as prompts from which to situate the predominant heteronormative romance narrative. The descriptions of characters by Telemundo, such as Sebastián, and racialized dialogue in *Relaciones Peligrosas* reifies the ways race and ethnicity remain components to character formation that maintains stereotypes and prejudices. Lastly, the portrayals of queer sexuality in *Relaciones Peligrosas* rest on masculine figures that only strengthen patriarchy. The telenovela omits queer women, for example, and therefore maintains an androcentric narrative that is far from a progressive stance representing audience heterogeneity. In this aspect, the performance
of masculine and feminine roles, including queer masculinity, comply with the “novela Rosa” formula with sexism at the center of telenovela production.

Limitations for This Study

I use critical discourse analysis to investigate the discursive treatment of queer sexuality, and visual to draw relationships between textual and the representation of queer sexuality in Relaciones Peligrosas. Kellner was influential because he poses a methodological approach when applying critical discourse analysis to media. His cultural studies lens views media as naturalizing images of race/ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality, and therefore influencing social construction (Kellner 8). Kellner also poses that the application of critical discourse analysis takes three forms: political economy, textual analysis, and audience reception.

My approach to textual analysis uses speech action theory to critically look at details that organize social construction. Post-structuralism also aids my work because this view detaches from the assumption of homogenous subjects, especially as presented in telenovelas (Gill 173). These aspects to textual analysis compliment my feminist and queer theoretical lens analyzing the construction of language and its relationship to portrayals of queer sexuality; specifically, the representation of queer masculinity. Nevertheless, this also offers another limitation because my analysis speaks to my reception, and should not be read as a universal understanding.

Other issues that arose were obstacles I faced in the transcription process. Although Spanish is my first language, I was not educated in the proper mechanics, spelling, and proficiency. Transcribing the mostly Spanish dialogue was a challenge
given my limited experience in reading and writing; I also faced some difficulty with definitions and had to properly look up some words I was not familiar with. These obstacles did not misguide my reading of the telenovela; rather, it clarified and strengthened my argument that the language structured a patriarchal and heteronormative narrative.

**Future Research for This Study**

As previously described, some research opportunities include an investigation of the political economy of *Relaciones Peligrosas*. Continuing with Kellner’s cultural studies approach to media studies, including the political economy and audience reception strengthens an investigation to the representation of queer sexuality. An analysis of the political economy adds to the economic stakes of *Relaciones Peligrosas*, and the marketing towards youth through new communicative technology; such as, twitter and Facebook. An interesting aspect that the political economy raises includes the ways that the telenovela was marketed across different regions. For example, my analysis is one feminist and queer perspective specific to my location in the U.S. territory. This would also require a look at the original Spanish series, *Físico o Química*, to grasp the cultural impact of this narrative.

Audience reception takes into consideration audience diversity and the vast regional socio-political and economic differences of people across national spaces and geography. Audience reception is important to reduce criticisms about the “one-sided,” biased, and possible misinterpretations that can surface with only a textual analysis. In the case of *Relaciones Peligrosas*, individual interviews and focus groups where
participants are shown scenes of *Relaciones Peligrosas* specific to my research question can record experiences, responses, and criticism that make-up audience diversity.

As new communicative technologies influence telenovela narratives and productions, research investigating the impact of these productions on Latina/o cultural production is needed. Relaciones Peligrosas is but one telenovela from one network in the United States that portrays queer characters. This telenovela is distinct because portrays obstacles faced by an openly gay character, and the politics of gender that permeates queer masculinity as demonstrated by Diego. The performance of queer masculinity was significant to analyze because it targets U.S. Latina/o youth facing homophobia, and the message it conveys to Latina/os about queer sexuality. At first glance, this appears to be a progressive stance that changes the traditional heteronormative romance story, but upon analyzing the discursive treatment and visual representation of queer sexuality through a feminist and queer lens, the queer characters in *Relaciones Peligrosas* remain conditioned by heteronormativity and patriarchy.

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5 Telenovelas, or serial dramas, that are independent and/or associated with television networks are being produced online. This may be an area for future studies, but is not the focus of this study of *Relaciones Peligrosas*. 
Works Cited


