

REPRESENTATION OF LATINAS¹ AS MAIDS ON *DEVIIOUS MAIDS* (2013)

Fitria Afrianty Sudirman

Abstract

This article aims to analyze the representation of Latinas as maids by examining the first season of US television drama comedy, *Devious Maids*. The show has been a controversy inside and outside Latina community since it presents the lives of five Latinas working as maids in Beverly Hills that appears to reinforce the negative stereotypes of Latinas. However, a close reading on scenes by using character analysis on two Latina characters shows that the characters break stereotypes in various ways. The show gives visibility to the Latinas by putting them as main characters and portraying them as progressive and independent women who also refuse the notion of white supremacy.

Keywords

Latina, stereotypes, television, *Devious Maids*.

INTRODUCTION

Latin Americans have grown to be the largest minority group in the United States (US). According to the 2010 US Census, those identifying themselves as Hispanic/Latino Americans increased by 43% from the 2000 US Census, comprising 16% of the U.S total population. The bureau even expected that by 2050, the Hispanic/Latino population in the U.S. will be 132.8 million or 30% of the total population, which means one out of three Americans is a Hispanic/Latino. However, the increasing number of Latin Americans does not seem to go along with the portrayal of them in the US television. Research shows that they remain significantly under-represented on TV, only 1%-3% of the primetime TV population (Mastro-Morawitz, 2005). Unlike African Americans and Asian Americans whose frequency is increasing on TV portrayal, the frequency of Latino/a and Native Americans stays the same (Pornsakulvanich, 2007). Furthermore,

¹ Throughout this paper, I will use the term "Latina" to refer to Latin American women in the show *Devious Maids*. I understand that the term of Latina/Latino is problematic and fluid. Generally, the term refers to those of Latin American countries origin or descendants. However, people often use it also for Spanish descendant such as Penélope Cruz who is often categorized as Latina even though she is Spanish from Spain (Molina-Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004).

their portrayals tend to be stereotypical. There are not many successful-high rated TV series showing Latino/a as lead characters, and only a few of them show Latina in their main cast.

Devious Maids (2013) is the first primetime American comedy-drama series whose main characters are all Latinas. It is created by March Cherry, the creator of *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012), and executively produced by Eva Longoria, an American actress who is also a graduate of Chicano Studies. The series premiered on June 23, 2013 on Lifetime, a cable-satellite television channel which majorly presents women in leading roles in their programs. The show has an average of 3 million viewers during its first season and has already been renewed for Season 2, and, in October, the show will premiere in the UK on TLC. The show revolves around the lives of five Latinas working as maids in Beverly Hills. Marisol Suarez, a single mother as well as an English professor in disguise as a maid who struggles to solve a murderer case that frames her adopted son; Carmen Luna, a Puerto-Rican born whose dream is to become a famous Latin singer in the US; Rosie Valta, a single mother from Mexico who struggles to bring her son to the US; Zoila Diaz, a mother who has worked as a maid for more than 20 years, the longest time among all the maids; and Valentina Diaz, the daughter of Zoila who wants to be a fashion designer.

Before *Devious Maids* was launched, there were many (and still are, at the time of this writing) controversies around the show since the lead characters are all Latinas portrayed as hot sexy working maids. Tanisha Ramirez, a freelance journalist, wrote that the program was 'a wasted opportunity' and should have showed Latin woman with more varied roles (Ramirez, 2013). In addition, Michelle Mulligan, editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan for Latinas*, said that the series would harass over 20 million Latinas living in the United States (Mulligan, 2013). This depiction is feared to only reinforce stereotypes of Latinas as they have always been associated as maids. Many movies and primetime television shows have featured a Latina as a maid whether as a recurring or nonrecurring role, for example Jennifer Lopez in *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), Paz Vega in *Spanglish* (2004), and Shelley Morrison in *Will and Grace* (1998-2006). One of Latina actresses, Lupe Ontiveros, even confessed that she has played a maid role for more than 150 times (Benedetti, 2013). Despite these critical comments, surprising reaction came from Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) and the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC). As Latin American's empowerment organizations, they said that they fully supported the airing of the show (Julito, 2013).

The issue on working Latina has been around for years. For the search of a better life and economic condition, many people from Latin American countries have been crossing the border to the US for years. Most of them fill out jobs in domestic services, working in houses, restaurants, and hotels. Studies about them also have been conducted. Some scholars have highlighted the importance of studying Latinas as domestic workers.

Romero (2002, 1) states that studies about these domestic labors are important as they open the door to “race, class, and gender relations and reproductive labor”. Furthermore, “[the maid] is spoken about and represented in economic, legal, and political discourse” (Kim, 1999). The representation of Latina maid shows how the hierarchy of race, gender, and class in American society as they are in contact with the Anglo white.

To look at how the current show *Devious Maids* represents Latina as maids, it is important to look back at how they have been represented on television texts. In her article, Kim (1999) examines three TV series: *I Married Dora* (1987-1988), *Designing Women* (1986-1993), and “The Rosa Lopez Hearing”² (1995). She argues that the status of maids in the series has been reduced to “illegal alien”, and they do not have any power since they are undocumented, therefore they are invisible to the eyes of law. Another study done by Padilla (2009) speaks the same tone as Kim. She analyzes Salvadoran maids in a TV series *Will and Grace* (1998-2006). Her finding shows that portrayal of Latina maid in the series confirms the stereotypes through the use of “ethnicity, undocumented status, accent, and wardrobe”. She suggests that the maid has gone through “domestication” process that makes her a domesticated foreign Other that upholds the white supremacy. In addition, both of them agree that the negative portrayal has been obscured by the use of situational comedy as the genre of the series. The fact that Kim’s and Padilla’s studies are ten years apart and have similar findings shows that there have not been many changes on the representation of Latina maids in the TV industry. They are still portrayed as submissive and passive. It is also important to note that both of the authors contextualized the portrayal of Latina maids in the history of immigration and current Latin American issues at the time of the writing. Padilla linked her studies to the post-civil conflict in El Salvador (1980-1992) which becomes the point of emigration of Salvadorans to the US, and Kim related hers to the “Nannygate” scandal³ during Bill Clinton’s presidency. This shows us that there is a close connection between reality and television.

As what can be seen, there are not many TV series that have been analyzed in the topic of Latina maid on television, not to mention the maids are all supporting characters. The presence of *Devious Maids* then becomes important. Not only does it become the first series with Latinas as main casts, but it also depicts Latina maids in a different way. I would argue that *Devious Maids* does use common stereotypes, such as hot and sexy Latinas, to attract viewers, but then, as the story goes on, it provides complex and multidimensional characters that counter the existing stereotypes towards

² “The Rosa Lopez Hearing is part of the criminal trial of O.J. Simpson murder case that was televised for 134 days. Lopez testified for the case.

³ “Nannygate” is a popularized term during Clinton’s presidency. Zoë Baird, Clinton’s nomination of attorney general, hired undocumented immigrants to work as their nanny and chauffeur.

Latina maids. My research on *Devious Maids* offers a new perspective as it will conduct a research on a story whose main point of view is from the maids with Anglo white plays as side characters. In addition, the show uses a first-person narration which gives 'voice' to these maids. I believe the narration which places the maids as main casts influences the way their stories are told because the story gets to be told from the maids' perspective in comparison to the series *Will and Grace* in which the maid was only the supporting character. The genre of the series which is more to a soap opera drama rather than a comedy also contributes to the directness of message delivery because humor sometimes is used to tamper stereotypes and racist jokes (Dubrofsky, 2013). Furthermore, given the current circumstances of the debate on the Latin Americans in the US and immigration issues, I think it is significant to see how Latina maids are being represented on television today.

To examine how Latina maids are being represented on *Devious Maids*, I will first take a look at the concept of stereotypes and how Latina women, in general, and Latina maids, in particular, have been represented on films and televisions. Then, I will apply character analysis through close reading on the scenes since Season 1. To go deeper into how the show represents Latina maids, I will only focus on two characters of Latinas from the show, which are Marisol and Carmen, due to the limited length of the paper. Both characters have a similarity in conveying the struggle to achieve their goals. Marisol wanted to free her son from jail, while Carmen dreamed to be a famous singer in the US. In addition, out of all Latina characters, their backgrounds are revealed more compared to the other three maids, so it is easier to understand and identify the motives behind their actions. Marisol was an English professor born in Los Angeles and a single mother who also adopted a son, while Carmen was a Puerto Rican who ran away from her abusive husband. Furthermore, at the end of Season 1, they both found an access to get their goals. Marisol reunited with her son, while Carmen was offered a career in music industry by Alejandro, her employer. I will also see social relationship of these characters with other characters in the show to be able to understand their characters. After analyzing these characters, I will draw conclusions from the analysis.

LATINA MAIDS AND STEREOTYPES AROUND THEM

Stereotyping and representation work hand in hand as stereotypes can be challenged, reinforced, or constructed by media through representation. The term "stereotyping" itself was coined by Walter Lippmann in 1922 as a process to see things more specifically by dividing data into categories. As the era develops, concepts of stereotypes become more various. Ramirez-Berg (2002) defines stereotype as a result of a process consisting category making, ethnocentrism, prejudice and "can be defined as a negative generalization used by an in-group (Us) about an out-group (Them)" (15). He also states that stereotype is a form of over generalization by selecting a few traits from a

group to homogenize the entire group which generalizes individuals and ignores variety within a group (15). Furthermore, Merskin (2007) argues that “stereotypes, as hegemonic tools, reduce individuals to a single, monolithic, one-dimensional type that appears and is presented as natural and normal as they fit into ideological patterns of representations that serve, among other functions, to establish in-group categorizations of out groups”. In other words, stereotypes can be used as a tool to overpower a group. One of effective ways to reinforce stereotypes is through media and this can be harmful. Berg (2002) says that production and repetitive stereotypes used in the media has a role “to maintain the status quo, in this case the domination of white, by defining Other. He specifically gives an example of the use of “illegal alien” as a term to express the existence of Latino/a immigrants in the US. This term overlooks many things from the immigrants and offers an understanding that they are in the State as criminals rather than as individuals that have migrated for a number of complex reasons. This way, as Berg puts it, stereotypes have “powerful ideological consequences [which] simultaneously marginalizing Them and establishing and maintaining an explicit Us-Them boundary” (22).

Similar case occurs in television. For years Latinas have been stereotyped to certain tropes through films and network televisions. Some scholars have broken down the stereotypes that have been put on Latinas, such as “*Cantina girl*”, “*faithful-self-sacrificing senorita*”, and “*vamp*” (Keller, 1994 qtd. in Merskin, 2007); “*spitfire*”, “*hyper-sexualized temptress or harlot*”, the “*female clown*”, the “*dark lady*”, “*good-girl/Madonna*” (Ramirez-Berg, 2002; Rodriguez, 2005 qtd. in Padilla 2009). Some Latina maids appear as recurring supporting roles, and many of them appear just as guest roles. As guest roles, they are insignificant and only seen while serving their employers and most likely wear maid uniforms, while as supporting roles, the viewers get to see more sides of them even though the focus of the show is on the Anglo white main characters. As Padilla observes in the role of Rosario in *Will and Grace* (1998-2006), she states that “Rosario is a highly visible portrayal of the figure of the Salvadoran *doméstica*. However, this rendering fails to call into question the stereotype of Latina servants”. As a Latina maid, Rosario was portrayed to always wear a maid uniform and speak in an accent. The emphasis on the uniform and accent sets her apart as they function as reminder of her job and ethnicity that are associated to lower class status. Her status as an undocumented immigrant also put her as a helpless and powerless human being. In addition, Molina-Guzmán (2010) observes that Latina maids are often portrayed to have been rescued by Anglo white males who come to their lives and ‘safe’ them from disadvantages. For example, in *Maid in Manhattan*, Chris Marshall (Fiennes), a wealthy Anglo white politician, with whom

⁴ “*Cantina girl*” presents Latina as an available sexual object; “*self-sacrificing senorita*” presents Latina as a woman who is willing to do anything for her love towards an Anglo white man; “*vamp*” presents Latina as devious who uses all means possible to get what she wants (Keller, 1994 qtd. in Merskin, 2007).

Marisa Ventura (Lopez), a chambermaid, fell in love, was told to be such a 'savior' for her and family because he advanced the social class status of Ventura. Similar thing occurs in *Spanglish*, Flor's daughter could continue her study in the US because of the help from her Anglo white employer.

Looking back to *Devious Maids*, it is important to note that Latina maids are not only the ones who are being stereotyped, but also the Anglo white employers. The difference is only in the parts in which they are being stereotyped. The stereotype of Latina maids in the show is limited only on their physical appearance. The poster and the trailer of the show portray them in a seductive manner wearing tight clothes that shows their curvaceous bodies. This may seem reinforcing the stereotype of hot hyper-sexualized Latina. However, as the episodes go on, they are mostly portrayed wearing casual clothes that barely show too much skin. On the other hand, the Anglo white employers are stereotyped on their physical appearance and characters. Their physical appearances are typical rich people who use branded products and dress nicely. In addition, their characters tend to be one dimensional. They are depicted as cold, ignorance, and insensitive. This depiction is almost a way of mocking them because the source of joke is often from their thoughtless questions or statements. For example, Genevieve, one of the employers, innocently asked whether there was Mandarin Oriental⁵ in Congo (Episode 13 "Totally Clean"). Another example is when she straightforwardly said that if her son wanted to help poor people, he just needed to make a donation to Burbank⁶ (ibid). Unlike the characters of the Anglo white, the characters of Latina maids are more multidimensional and complex. They have their own agenda and motives that become the backgrounds of their actions. Each of them has a distinct personality. For example, Rosie is depicted as very feminine and soft-spoken, while Carmen is depicted as very ambitious and assertive. With the different personalities that each character carries, the series seems to offer viewers with a variety of Latina maids and shows that they are also humans with complex personalities and problems. Therefore, they should not just be categorized into one trait. In addition, looking at the juxtaposition of the Latina and Anglo white characters, a question of which one is categorized as Us and Them then arises. It seems that the show wants to 'otherize' and decenter the Anglo white by putting the Latina maids on the spot. Therefore, based on the explanation above, I would try to see how the two characters, Carmen and Marisol, were portrayed in *Devious Maids*, and in what ways they countered the stereotypes of Latina maids.

⁵ Mandarin Oriental is an international hotel group which provides luxury hotels, resorts and residences

⁶ Burbank is a city in Los Angeles County that is not poor at all. The city is only miles away from Hollywood and known for home to many well-known production houses companies, such as The Walt Disney Company, Warner Bros. Entertainment, and Nickelodeon.

CARMEN, THE PROGRESSIVE LATINA

Carmen Luna was a Puerto-Rican born who worked at Alejandro Rubio's house, an established well-known Latin singer. In the house, she worked together with Sam, an African-American butler, and Odessa, a Russian-American house manager. She breaks the stereotypes of Latina maid by being progressive, wanting to get away from the domestic world. Her progressiveness can be seen through her determination in relationship and career.

Before coming to the US, Carmen had a family. She was married at a very young age. Her husband was abusive and demanded her to be "a traditional Latin wife, someone who would cook for him and clean and have a house full of babies" (Episode 5 "Taking out the Trash", 08.01) and did not allow her to be a professional singer. However, Carmen could not have babies and, she admitted, her life was so empty. Singing was the only thing that could cheer her up. She wanted to do something with her life by singing professionally, but her husband did not want to approve. As a man and a husband, Carmen's husband felt that he should have been the one who was in control, while Carmen should have just stayed at home and dealt with domestic works. Carmen who felt repressed wanted a divorce, but her husband would not agree because that would mean that he had failed. Carmen told Sam and Odessa her past after her husband came to Alejandro's house and forced her to come back to Puerto Rico. Carmen, who did not want to go, was hit and strangled by her husband. It took a group of police to stop the fight and make her husband leave. It was clear that Carmen was under patriarchal oppression, and, by looking at how Carmen reacted to this condition, it shows that she indirectly challenged traditional sex roles of man and woman as she refused to conform to the idea of traditional Latin wife and being the oppressed wife to an abusive husband. Instead of conforming, Carmen stood for herself, made her own decision, and created her own path to follow her dream as a singer in the US.

As she worked at the Alejandro's house, Carmen developed a romantic relationship with Sam. In the beginning of the season, Carmen did not have an eye on Sam because he was just a butler. However, later on the series, it was revealed that she actually had feelings towards Sam. Their relationship is worth noticed because, normally, when it comes to romantic relationship, Hollywood or televisions would portray a Latina having one with an Anglo white male to show that white is superior and that a privilege can only be accessed through an Anglo white man, such as in the movie *Maid in Manhattan*. However, in *Devious Maids*, Carmen was told to have a romantic relationship with Sam, an African American man, and this shows two things. First, the show refused to put the Anglo white male at the center of attention which means it did not give a place for white superiority. Second, Carmen did not bother about race and cared more about personality of a man because she saw Sam as a kind-hearted and hard-working man. The fact that she is having a relationship with an African American man counters the stereotype of

a Latina maid who seeks for a relationship with an Anglo white man for the sake of gaining access to white privilege (Molina-Guzmán, 2010).

Furthermore, Carmen's work relationship with Alejandro also breaks traditional stereotypes of a Latina maid who is submissive and passive. Living under the same roof as Alejandro enabled her to know secrets that other people did not know, such as Alejandro was actually a gay and already had a partner. Because she was trusted by Alejandro, she was introduced to his gay partner. Having known this secret, Carmen was actually in a great advantage as she could use it as a weapon to threaten Alejandro. However, she kept quiet. When she was asked by an entertainment reporter about Alejandro's being gay, she could have just told the truth and received an amount of money the reporter offered. However, she rejected to tell the truth even though it was told that she was broke at that time. The way Carmen responded to this situation supports the idea that Carmen is not a woman who would do anything for money like the *vamp* stereotype in Keller's categorization (1994). Even though money was an important thing for her, she still had a moral side. A friendship relationship was also developed between Carmen and Alejandro as the show went on. Carmen advised Alejandro for personal matters, such as telling him to come clean about his being gay. In addition, as an employee, Carmen did not hesitate to confront Alejandro. In "Scrambling the Eggs" episode (see Figure 1 and Figure 2), Carmen threw Alejandro's dinner because she was annoyed by Alejandro's indifferent reaction towards Odessa's sickness. Carmen was trying to tell Alejandro that Odessa was having a hard time facing her cancer treatment and needed moral support. However, Alejandro seemed did not care and just asked Carmen to buy some flowers for Odessa.



Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 Carmen threw Alejandro's dinner to show her annoyance (*Devious Maids* "Scrambling the Eggs", 31:46 and 31:50)

Near the end of the season, Alejandro became dependent on Carmen for he needed her help to cover the news of his being gay. In order to save Alejandro's career, Alejandro with a support from his management team asked Carmen to be his wife for a two-year contract to convince public that he was a straight man. In return, they would produce an album as well as get her on tour and talk shows. The offer was very tempting for Carmen.

However, she was in a dilemma because she had agreed to Sam to move in together. Until the end of Season 1, it was still unclear whether she would accept the offer or not. If she received the offer, it might show that Carmen is a type of person who would sacrifice anything for career even though it would hurt her and anyone else, while if she refused, it could strengthen her stance as an independent hard working Latina that she could work her way to her dreams.

Throughout Season 1, Carmen had been portrayed as a focused ambitious woman who wanted a music career in her life. She applied as a maid at Alejandro's house, not merely to be a maid but to get in touch with Latin music industry. On her first day of work, her main concern was nothing but on how to get Alejandro notice that she had a good voice. Her ambitious side was clearly showed in "Taking a Message" episode. She believed that "Everyone should want to accomplish as much as they can in life before it's too late" (28.30), and she lectured Sam about how he should have aimed for a higher goal in his life because Sam was content being a butler and would not mind to be a butler for the rest of his life. Carmen who was planning to have a serious relationship with Sam and started to develop a deep feeling for him felt insecure because she did not want to spend her future with a butler. She then continued saying to Sam that "This isn't about money. It's about ambition. You should want to do something amazing with your life," (29.07). Even though Sam was defensive about Carmen's opinion, he later resigned from his job as a butler and tried out for a better job which is a music agent. This scene shows how significant it is to have a dream for Carmen. Her aspiration to catch her dream in the US can be related to the notion of "American Dream" that states that everyone, man or woman, can be successful in the US through hard work and diligence. America has grown as a land of hope, not only for white descendants but also for African, Asian, Latin descendants. This notion has attracted many immigrants from all over the world to come to the US, and this was probably Carmen's reason to come to the US instead of other countries.

The notion of American Dream, however, works differently for minority groups as they have to face intersectional problems involving race and gender. Hardships that Carmen had to overcome were highlighted clearly in the series. As a woman and minority in the US, Carmen had to work hard to reach her dreams. She had to escape the patriarchal oppression she was experiencing back in Puerto Rico. In addition, Carmen had to adapt to the American culture to be able to have a career in America. Even though she was going for Latin music, her audience would be an American market. In "Wiping Away the Past" episode, Benny Soto, a music producer who was finally interested to Carmen's music clearly stated "If you're gonna sing in English, you gotta rid of this accent. That's the audience. Americans, they like Latinas as long as they're not too Latin" (24.45). He told Carmen to start practice speaking and singing in American accent.

The issue of class struggle was also told. Carmen did not want her profession as a

maid to be noticed by Benny Soto. Therefore, she asked Sam to pretend to be her driver and drove him with *Bentley* to her meeting. This issue was also showed when Alejandro had a party at his home attended by musicians and producers of Latin music industry. Carmen who realized that Benny Soto was coming to the party explained her condition to Alejandro and asked for a day off. Alejandro did not mind and even told her to attend the party. What can be perceived from these scenes is that Carmen aspired to be part of a higher social class. This aspiration has been seen from "Setting the Table" episode when she said to her fellow Latina friends "I should have been born rich. You guys know how to pull off poverty. I don't. Ever since I was a kid, I knew I was meant to own nice things, not clean them" (15.06). However, one thing that makes Carmen an interesting character is that she realized and understood how patriarchal system works. In the same episode, Marisol asked her "If you like money this much why don't you do what the rest of Beverly Hills does? Marry a rich guy," (15.36). Carmen rejected this idea by saying "Because then it's his money, and he has the power. And that is unacceptable," (15.42). This dialogue shows that Carmen is not a typical woman who seduces and marries a rich man to work her way to the top. She realized that to be powerful, she should make her own money, and therefore she had to work hard.

To sum up, Carmen breaks stereotypes through her progressiveness. Instead of being reduced to a one-dimensional role, she was portrayed in a multidimensional character that develops throughout the series. Unlike *Cantina girl* or *vamp* stereotypes that Keller (1994) categorized who presents herself as a sexual object and deviously used it to get what she wants, Carmen strived for her dream in the midst of her struggle as a woman and minority in the US, and she did not deliberately use her body a means to get to it. In addition, Carmen's relationship (both romantic and work) to non-white men shows that she was not allured by the notion of white supremacy that showcases white as the powerful one. Furthermore, Carmen was not afraid to confront her employer and spoke her voice which is an unusual pattern because maids usually appear submissive and passive like Rosario in Kim's study (1999).

MARISOL, THE EDUCATED LATINA

In the beginning, Marisol was portrayed as a mysterious woman who tailed the four maids to Flora's funeral. Later on the series, her true identity was revealed. She was actually the mother of a young boy who was being jailed as Flora's murderer, and she was also an English professor with a specialty in Oscar Wilde, an Irish writer and poet. During Season 1, she was in disguise to find out the real murderer of Flora. Marisol breaks the stereotypes in terms of education and personality.

While most shows depict Latina with no college background or unintelligent because they tend to be hyper-sexualized, Marisol appeared as an educated and tough woman. In the "Pilot" episode, she was told to have been born in Los Angeles (LA), and

in "Taking out the Trash" episode, her background story was revealed more when she visited her adopted son in jail.

"I was only six when my mother died, but I didn't cry. When the doctors told me that I couldn't have any children of my own, I nodded, and called an adoption agency. When your father ran off with that waitress, I laughed and said 'good riddance'. My whole life I thought I could handle anything. But I'm not strong enough to lose you."

(*Marisol, Devious Maids, Episode 5 "Taking Out the Trash, 34.31*)

From her explanation above, it can be seen that Marisol had struggled in her life, especially with her husband and her inability to have children, which became the reason why she adopted one. Despite her unpleasant past, she managed to be successful in her career as an English professor. She managed to get grants and wrote a book about Oscar Wilde. In "Taking a Message" episode, when Rosie wanted to find more information about Marisol on the internet, she found some online newspapers that wrote about her. Some of the headlines were "Local Professor Wins Prestigious Genius Grants" and "College Awards Tenure to Celebrated English Professor" which means Marisol was also an influential and productive academician. Her profession, as an English professor, is an interesting choice from the show because she was a Latin American woman who was supposedly fluent in Spanish and learned to speak English properly, but then she taught English to American students in an American college. Marisol's presence in the show seems to counter the popular belief in the US that Mexicans, Puerto-Ricans, and other Latin Americans are all lazy immigrants who speak improper English. In addition, based on the presumption that she was born in LA, Marisol possibly is the representation of those Latin American descents of second or third generation living and working in the US and actually have been emerged to American culture by speaking English without an accent. Furthermore, she might be one of the models of successful Latina who made the American dream because as it can be seen in the show Marisol was privileged because she even had her own maid and could afford private lawyer to solve her son's case, and was able to adopt a child. Besides being educated, she was also a tough and independent woman. Marisol was not told to have any relatives which mean she raised her son by herself after her husband left her. She was also not in a relationship with a man to support her life. Her toughness can be seen from the way she was willing to investigate the case of which her son was accused without any help. She learned the case by herself and finally succeeded to solve it.

The way she investigated the Flora's murder showed the intellectuality of Marisol as well. As a character, she can be said as devious in terms of tricking everybody to get to her agenda and might fall into the *vamp* stereotype. However, her deviousness was not in a form of harming others, instead it was in a form of seeking justice for her son. She smoothly involved herself in domestic world by applying as a maid in Stappord's house.

Step by step, she worked her way to find the truth. She even worked at the Powell's house, Flora's workplace, to get more information. One piece of information led to other pieces, her efforts were paid off in the final episode where she got Michael Stappord, lawyer of Philippe Delatour, the real murderer, to tell her the truth. It was interesting to see that Marisol did not use any physical violence or threat at all to look for the truth. Instead, she used a personal approach to get close to everyone who seemed holding important information, including her employers and other maids. For example, to get into the circle of maids, she applied to work as a maid in the Stappord's house who eventually was in need of a maid. As she started working, she approached Taylor, her female employer. Even though Taylor doubted her at first, she then became dependent on Marisol's advices and developed a friendship relationship with her. Marisol gained her trust and made her share her personal secrets. Taylor stated that Marisol was her friend, and she needed her (Episode 3 "Wiping Away the Past"). She also approached the other maids personally by having lunch and engaging in other activities with them to find out about Flora and other rumors that might have connected to Flora's murder.

Furthermore, Marisol's appearance in the show helped to pinpoint the uneducated stereotype that a Latina usually being associated to. Marisol was portrayed as an elegant and well spoken woman. In the "Pilot" episode, when she had a home-interview at the Stappord's, she confused Taylor and almost did not get the job.

Taylor : You don't have an accent
Marisol : Should I?
Taylor : I've never met a maid who didn't have an accent
Marisol : I was born here in LA
Taylor : You sound like you went to college
Marisol : Thank you

(Devious Maids, Episode 1 "Pilot", 06.11-06.27)

The fact that Taylor was in disbelief that it was something impossible for a maid to not have an accent implies that an accent has become a signifier or label of someone from low social class, such as domestic workers, because in her mind, maids are those who speak in an accent. This situation also pointed out a prejudice that white people normally have towards Latina who should always have an accent and be uneducated. It also shows her ignorance to the fact that nowadays Latin Americans have been born in the US and emerge themselves to American culture and speak English properly. Another negative stereotype that was pinpointed by Marisol was showed in the scene when Marisol offered her advice to Taylor but was refused because Taylor thought Marisol would not understand. Marisol then said "I may unclog drains for a living, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid" (Episode 1 "Pilot", 14.32). This also shows the prejudice Taylor had towards maids that maids would not have understood nothing but cleaning

houses which implies that she still thought that maids were uneducated and not mutual conversation partners. Marisol grasped what Taylor implied, and she said it out loud instead of just be silent.

Similar to Carmen, Marisol did not hesitate to take a stand. In the pilot episode, she was the one who saved Michael's birthday party from Olivia, Michael's ex-wife, who was trying to ruin the party. Instead of staying silent like the rest of the guests, she confronted Olivia, dragged her outside of the house, and slammed the door on her face (see Figure 3). The guests were in awed and gave her a round of applause. Marisol instantly gained Taylor's trust from this incident. Another example is from "Making Your Bed" episode. Marisol was trying to get a key from a coroner who handled Flora's case who also happened to be Adrian Powell's friend. She deliberately spilled a drink on his pants and asked him to change. However, the coroner misunderstood Marisol's intention. He then seduced Marisol to have a sexual intercourse and paid her a handsome amount of money. Marisol who was not interested at all warned him that "If you take one more step, I will hit you" (33:41), but then the coroner kept cornered her. She then calmly set a curtain on fire to get out of the room and leaved the coroner alone to extinguish the fire (see Figure 4).



Fig. 3 Marisol confronted Olivia (*Devious Maids*, Episode 1 "Pilot", 40:10)



Fig.4 Marisol set a curtain on fire (*Devious Maids*, Episode 4 "Making Your Bed", 34:15)

Another thing worth noticed is Marisol's adopted son. This is problematic and raises questions, such as why Marisol decided to adopt an Anglo white boy, instead of a Latin American boy. The fact that Marisol adopted the boy shows two things. First, it confirmed that Marisol was indeed from a higher social class status and privileged because she was able to adopt and went through all the adoption process which involved legal and finance paper works that requires a substantial amount of money. Interracial adoption with people of color as foster parents is not a common thing in the US. Most cases of interracial adoption occur between the Anglo white as parents and ethnic minority children as adoptee. A national survey done by U.S. Department of Health & Human Services shows that "whereas a majority of adopted children are non-white, the majority of these children's parents are white (73 percent)" (U.S. Department of Health &

Human Services, 2007). Second, it is a revelation point of the series to show that it is not always the Anglo white that have the privileges and save the 'helpless' ethnic minorities. Hollywood and televisions have a long history in using Anglo white characters to show the superiority of white. For example, in *Spanglish*, the Anglo white employer gave a scholarship to the Latina maid's daughter to continue her study in the US. What can be seen from these examples is that the Anglo white characters are portrayed like a 'savior' who comes to the lives of Latina maids to solve their problems. With *Devious Maids* showing Marisol adopting an Anglo white boy, the hierarchy is then shifted. It is not always the Anglo white who gets to be on top and be the powerful one. Marisol, the Latina woman, shows that she was not the helpless one, but a 'rescuer' for the Anglo white boy.

Overall, Marisol breaks the stereotype in many ways. As a Latina, she was an educated woman working as an English professor which means that she could speak English properly and understand English literature. This is an interesting juxtaposition since Latin Americans normally learn English, but do not teach it. Her intelligent was seen through the way she investigated Flora's murder in which she used personal approach rather than physical or threat. Her role in the show has been a channel to pinpoint some of negative stereotypes that are labeled on Latina, such as being uneducated and always speaking in an accent. She also was not hesitant to take a stand for something that she thought was right. Furthermore, by adopting and raising an Anglo white son, Marisol showed that a Latina could also be a "savior" to a white descendant.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores the representation of Latinas as maids in the US through TV series *Devious Maids* (2013), the first American commercial TV drama comedy to put five Latinas as main casts. The discussion of the series was based on the current phenomenon occurred in the US in which Latin Americans have grown to be the largest minority group. However, they are not frequently depicted on TV and movies, and their portrayal tends to be stereotypical. By using character analysis through close reading on scenes, I analyzed two characters in the series which are Carmen and Marisol. The choice of the characters was based on their similarities in conveying struggle to achieve their goals, the amount of their background information revealed, and how they get an access to their goals at the end of the show. I also saw how these characters interacted with other characters in the show to be able to understand their characters. Throughout the analysis, I refer to the previous stereotypes that Latinas have been labeled on to see whether these two characters counter or reinforce them.

Some stereotypes towards Latina have been categorized by some scholars, such as "Cantina girl", "faithful-self-sacrificing senorita", and "vamp" (Keller, 1994 qtd. in Merskin 2007); "spitfire", "hyper-sexualized temptress or harlot", the "female clown", the "dark

lady”, “good-girl/Madonna” (Ramirez-Berg, 2002; Rodriguez, 2005 qtd. in Padilla 2009). These categorizations were used as bases to determine how Latina characters on the series reinforce or counter the stereotypes. I also used Molina-Guzmán (2010) observation on how Hollywood portrays Anglo white as the superior of Latina through *Maid in Manhattan* (2002) and *Spanglish* (2004) to see whether or not Carmen and Marisol follow the pattern.

After analyzing the characters, it was found that the two Latina characters in *Devious Maids* counter the stereotypes of Latina women in various ways. Carmen breaks the stereotypes in terms of her progressiveness and eagerness to get away from domestic world, and Marisol in terms of education and personality. Both of them were portrayed as independent and tough women. Instead of being submissive and passive, they stood up for themselves, and they did not hesitate to confront their employers. Furthermore, both of them are portrayed refusing the notion of white supremacy. Maids are usually portrayed to have a relationship with Anglo white man to gain access to white privilege or being “saved” by an Anglo white man. However, in the show, Carmen was portrayed to have an intimate relationship with African American man, and Marisol was the one who “saved” an Anglo white boy as she became the foster mother of the boy. Furthermore, the decision of the show to put the Latinas as main casts provide visibility to more Latinas characters and decenters Anglo white as they appeared only as supporting casts. However, ambivalency can be seen in the way the Latinas were portrayed serving in a seductive manner and wearing tight clothes on the poster and the trailer of the show which may reinforce the negative stereotype of hot hyper-sexualized Latinas.

This paper offers a new perspective as it conducted a research on a story whose main point of view is from the maids with Anglo white playing as side characters. Hopefully, this paper can contribute to the discussion of representation of Latinas as maids on television, especially on US TV series. However, there are still many other issues or aspects in the show that could be analyzed and have not been addressed here due to the scope of the writing. The other three Latina characters in the show are definitely worth to analyze since they represent other aspects of Latinas as well. In addition, the intersection of race, gender, and class that the Latina characters experienced is also worth further investigation.

REFERENCES

Benedetti, Maria A. “Lupe Ontiveros Played A Maid 150 Times, Wanted To Break Free Of The Stereotype (VIDEO)”. *Huffington Post*. 21 June 2013. Web. 25 Sept 2013.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/21/lupe-ontiveros-maid_n_3480416.html>

Devious Maids. Prod. Marc Cherry. Lifetime. Los Angeles. 2013. Television.

Dubrofsky, Rachel E. "Jewishness, Whiteness, and Blackness on Glee: Singing to the Tune of Postracism." *Communication, Culture & Critique* 6.1 (2013): 82–102. Wiley Online Library. Web. 14 Sept. 2013.

Julito. "A Sad Inconsistency: The Support of "Devious Maids" by MALDEF, NCLR, and NHMC." *Latino Rebels*. 28 May 2013. Web. 25 Sept 2013. <<http://www.latinorebels.com/2013/05/28/a-sad-inconsistency-the-support-of-devious-maids-by-maldef-nclr-and-nhmc/>>

Kim, L.S. "Serving" American Orientalism: Negotiating Identities in The Courtship of Eddie's Father." *Journal of Film and Video* (2004): 21-33. SAGE. Web. 23 Sept. 2013.

Mastro, D. E, and Elizabeth Morawitz "Latino Representation on Primetime Television." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 82.1 (2005): 110-130. PROQUEST. Web. 13 Sept. 2013.

Merskin, Debra. "Three Faces of Eva: Perpetuation of the Hot-Latina Stereotype in Desperate Housewives." *Howard Journal of Communications* 18.2 (2007): 133 - 151. Web. 21 Sept. 2013.

Molina-Guzmán, Isabel. *Dangerous Curves : Latina Bodies in the Media*. New York: New York University Press, 2010. Print.

Molina-Guzmán, Isabel, and Angharad N. Valdivia. "Brain, Brow, and Booty: Latina Iconicity in U.S. Popular Culture" *The Communication Review* 7 (2004): 205–221. Web. 21 Sept. 2013.

Mulligan, Michelle. "Devious Maids Misrepresents Latinas". Huffington Post. 9 May 2013. Web. 25 Sept 2013. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michelle-herrera-mulligan/devious-maids-eva-longoria_b_3248787.html>

Padilla, Yajaira M. "Domesticating Rosario: Conflicting Representations of the Latina Maid in U.S. Media." *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 13 (2009): 41-59. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

Pornsakulvanich, Vikanda. "Television Portrayals Of Ethnic Minorities In The United States: The Analysis of Individual Differences, Media Use, and Group Identity and Vitality" *ABAC Journal* 27.3 (2007): 22-28. Web. 21 Sept. 2013.

Ramirez-Berg, Charles. "Categorizing the Other: Stereotypes and Stereotyping." *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance*. USA: University of Texas Press, 2002. asu.edu. Web. 10 Nov. 2013.

Ramirez, Tanisha. "Eva Longoria's Devious Maids Is a Wasted Opportunity." Huffington Post. 3 May 2013. Web. 25 Sept 2013. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tanisha-l-ramirez/eva-longorias-devious-maids_b_3210204.html>

Romero, Mary. "Introduction to the 10th Anniversary Edition." *Maid in the USA*. New York: Routledge, 2002. Amazon.com. Web. 2 Nov. 2013.

US Census Bureau. "The Hispanic Population: 2010". May 2011. Web. 25 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04.pdf>>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Adoption USA: A Chartbook Based on the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents". Web. 1 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/09/NSAP/chartbook/chartbook.cfm?id=15>>