Research Article

COMBATING RACIAL STEREOTYPES THROUGH FILM: AN EXAMINATION OF STRATEGIES ADVANCED BY THE FILM "A DAY WITHOUT A MEXICAN"

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

There are many diverging opinions on the issue of immigration and in 2012 one specific cultural group received large attention within national media. One movie offers a portrayal of what life would be like in California if those of Hispanic ethnicity suddenly disappeared. Director Sergio Arau's "A Day without a Mexican" (2004) is a satirical comedy that seeks to demonstrate how important Hispanics are to California. This movie intends to be comedic while conveying a persuasive message about the important role of Hispanics in America. Although race in the media has been traditionally focused on escalating negative portrayals of various ethnic groups, there is an apparent trend in employing humor in media to combat stereotypes and as a form of protest. This paper explores the types of rhetorical devices and strategies the film "A Day without a Mexican" (2004) uses to combat race issues, confront stereotypes, and then outlines the four main strategies discovered within the film.

INTRODUCTION

Immigration has been a controversial and highly contested issue throughout the history of the United States. People immigrate to America for a wide array of reasons and from many different countries but the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity is one specific cultural group that receive large attention in the national debate in relation to immigration. One film offers a portrayal of what life would be like in California if Hispanics suddenly disappeared. Director Sergio Arau's *A Day without a Mexican* (2004) is a satirical comedy that seeks to demonstrate how important Hispanics are to California by utilizing specific rhetorical strategies to deliver his message.

Film can be a creative and influential medium for sharing these messages. When speaking about why he made the film Arau stated, "It's important to me that everything I create has a political and social message and that it's always cloaked in humor," (www.adaywithoutamexican.com). This film is rife with messages about the importance of Hispanics and differing viewpoints on the role of immigrants in the United States. For this reason alone the film is worthy of academic inquiry and

leads to the question: what types of rhetorical devices and strategies does the film *A Day without a Mexican* use to address and combat race issues and stereotypes?

Social Identity andChange Theory

In order to remain a cohesive whole, groups must ensure their members "buy in" and work to continue group activities and aims. Without members forming a social identity, how can a group maintain its status as a unified entity? During the 1970s, a shift in intergroup conflict began focusing on psychological motivations and their intersection with social contexts to answer current problems in explaining intergroup activities (Goodge, 1978; Tajfel andTurner, 1979). Work by Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) highlighted the problem of in-group cohesiveness and noted one of the major problems that previous research in the field had uncovered: people seemed to focus on their group's identity and interests when interacting with others even in situations where such behavior would be unnecessary or even work against them. That is, "the baseline conditions for intergroup competition seem so minimal as to cause the suspicion that we are dealing here with some factor or process inherent in the intergroup situation itself" (Tajfel andTurner, 1986, p. 15). Or to put it even more simply: "in-group bias is a remarkably omnipresent feature of intergroup relations (Tajfel andTurner, 1979, p. 38).

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The two researchers believed their theory would supplement existing models of intergroup behavior and account for this unusual behavior by explaining how people identify with groups and how forces influence individual behavior toward the intergroup extreme (Tajfel andTurner, 1986). The basic answer is that individuals desire a positive social identity and will cognitively make favorable comparisons between themselves and those in out-group categories and work to make their own social identity more positively distinct (Tajfel andTurner, 1986). These cognitive dimensions encourage people to form social or group-based identities to establish what researchers have termed "distinctiveness", which helps explain why conflict heightens in-group identification through contextual salience (Tajfel andTurner, 1986; Ashforth andMael, 1989). Although identification is a mental construction and does not require that group members act in certain ways, the person who identifies "is seen as personally experiencing the successes and failures of the group" and would therefore have reason to assume particular behaviors involving their social identity (Ashforth andMael, 1989, p. 21).

Hogg, Terry, and White invoke the processes of categorization and self-enhancement to describe how people construct this identity (1995). The basic idea behind social identity theory is that the social categories to which a person belongs shape his or her self-identity (Hogg *et al*., 1995). This theory can apply to this artifact of study, due to the film's necessity of establishing a unified Hispanic identity through which it argues its points of systematic discrimination and conflict. *A Day without a Mexican* argues that Mexicans as a group have a subordinate status and characterizes these interactions as a conflict between groups. If the film has a chance at exposing hegemonic power structures, it must provide the audience with a salient image of what it means to be Hispanic and how those people should understand themselves.

When examining the process individuals, groups, or organizations proceed through in order for change to occur, Kurt Lewin's (1947) change theory provides a solid theoretical framework. Lewin originated the 3-step model of change and explains that the concept of change "refers to the difference between a preceding situation (S) and a following situation which has emerged out of the first as a result of some inner or outer influences" (1947, p. 151). He explains how if certain factors can be connected to a function and determined as responsible then a "law" of change has been discovered. It is important to realize that there can be inner or outer forces that impact change. According to Schein, Lewin's model of change was particularly useful in drawing "attention to the right kinds of variables that needed to be conceptualized and observed" (1999, p. 60). Due to the models ability to uncover the forces influencing organizational, group, and individual contexts, change theory is a useful foundational concept for understanding the process of change (Burnes, 2004).

Race in the Media

Jhally and Lewis (1992) argue that the media serves as a springboard to critically assess and unapologetically confront race issues in the United States. The extant literature reveals that the study of race in media has been central to three specific media contexts: race in the news (Mastro, Lapinski, Kopacz, andBehm-Morawitz, 2009), reality TV (Bell-Jordan, 2008), and Hollywood film (Bucholtz, 2011). Past scholars have significantly studied the depictions of race in the news-reporting context. St. John and Heald-Moore (1996) assert that there is a historically consistent racial prejudice toward specific minority groups, particularly from Whites, where certain racial groups are characterized as violent and aggressive, which in turn, leads these stereotypes to be disproportionately reinforced in television news. Dixon (2007) and Dixon and Linz (2000a, 2000b) reported that racial minorities are often portrayed as criminal suspects while Whites are reserved as victims. Specifically, Black males are often presented as suspects/criminals and disproportionately viewed as victims when compared to real-world statistics (Dixon andLinz, 2000a, 2000b). Dixon, Azocar, and Casas (2003) found that Blacks were nearly four times more likely to be presented as criminals than police officers. By inaccurately portraying members of minority ethnic groups, the news media misrepresents such races to their audience and contributes to the misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding minority racial groups (Mastro, 2003; Peffley, Shields, andWilliams, 1996).

Second, race in reality TV programs has also been a focused area of study. Bell-Jordan (2008) proposes that reality TV serves as a site of struggle where the meanings of race and racial issues are constantly negotiated. Brummett (1994) explains that, throughout reality TV's struggles and negotiations over the meanings of race, the media make sense of these meanings in ways that corresponds with their own social and cultural realities. Incorporating Grindstaff's (2002) framework surrounding race in television news, Bell-Jordan (2008) found that reality TV shows used five specific strategies to construct race: "(1) they dramatize race and racial issues by juxtaposing opposing viewpoints; (2) they promote conflict in the framing of race and racial issues, specifically in terms of interracial and intraracial conflict; (3) they perpetuate hegemonic representations of race by emphasizing violence and anger; (4) they personalize racism by privileging individual solutions to complex social problems; and (5) they leave conflict and contradictions unresolved" (p. 357). Orbe (1998) also argues that by claiming that reality TV is indeed "real," reality TV has strengthened the stereotypical perspectives of specific racial groups.

Third, scholars have heavily scrutinized issues of race in film and movies in the past. Shome (1996) argues that the mainstream media, especially movies, is a site where racial concepts such as "whiteness" is continuously reconstructed and reworked to conform to widely held viewpoints and stereotypes about certain racial groups. Balibar (1991) describes a common theme that is frequently portrayed in Hollywood cinema: the colonialist narrative of the "White Man's Burden" (p.44), which is the imperialistic idea that the majority of humankind is unable to successfully govern themselves without an intervention from the White person who arrives to save the day. Furthermore, the depictions of other racial groups in Hollywood films are often alienated and excluded from other Western ideologies, such as masculinity. Marchetti (1993) suggests that Hollywood's depiction of Asians on the movie screen is directly linked to the threat of the "Yellow Peril"—the idea of forbidding Asian and White sexual relations in an effort to maintain racial purity. Fang (2005) also contends that Asian Americans in Hollywood film are virtually invisible because the roles of Asian characters are

reserved for secondary characters. The media have been repeatedly associated with negative depictions of various ethnic groups, and the implications of such portrayals are clear. Scholars have also examined the relationship between race and humor, as comedy is the most popular category of entertainment for the media audience (Zillmann, 2000).

Race and Humor in Mainstream Media

Social identity and membership within particular cultural groups are critical in how messages are created as well as received (Cohen, 2008; Kinefuchi andOrbe, 2008). In order to appreciate ethnic humor, Nilsen and Nilsen (2006) argue that "people must know the values and practices of a culture" (p. 132), which suggests that the best interpretation of humor comes from an existing knowledge-base of the topic at hand (Banjo, 2011). Essentially, cultural competence by an audience is key in creating successful humor about race. Although media depictions of race are often associated with supporting and condoning stereotypes, comedy is viewed as a neutral context in which controversial topics, such as race, are discussed. Banjo (2011) argues that ethnic humor in the United States addresses the power differences that exist between cultural groups. The influx of immigrants into the country along with the emergence of variety theater provided opportunities for people to socially ascribe stereotypes for the amusement of mainstream audiences (Dorinson and Boskin, 1988; Green, 1999; Lowe, 1986). One particular strategy is through self-deprecation. By adhering to racial stereotypes, ethnic humor allows performers to simultaneously resist against the social dominant power (Freud, 2003).

By actively pursuing and performing such stereotypes, ethnic groups were able to create opportunities to ridicule social dominance (Banjo, 2011). For example, Black humor is described by Barksdale (1983) as including comedy at the expense of both their own culture as well as White America, which allows the humor to become "an offensive-defensive strategy in race relations that causes no radical alteration in the power relationships between a Black minority and a White majority" (p. 359). As a result, ethnic humor is often utilized as a coping mechanism for oppressed minority groups and continues to serve as a strategy to resist oppression (Banjo andFraley, 2011; Gordon, 1998; Watkins, 2002). Although race in the media has been traditionally focused on escalating negative portrayals of various ethnic groups, there is an apparent trend in employing humor in race media to combat stereotypes and as a form of protest. This study's research question inquired: What types of rhetorical devices and strategies does *A Day Without a Mexican* use to address and combat race issues and stereotypes? This next section explores the film to answer this question.

Strategy 1: Crafting Identity

To make a statement at all on the status of race relations, *A Day Without a Mexican* must first construct a coherent identity for itself on which the movie can elaborate. That is, what are the unifying characteristics of the Hispanic group the film wishes to portray? How can the film construct an identity through which conflict between Hispanics and non-Hispanics can be framed? *A Day Without a Mexican* does this by locating Hispanics primarily as disadvantaged. The beginning of the

movie is rife with these images of subalternity. Hispanics occupy less-privileged positions such as cooks, fruit pickers, cleaners, lawn care, and painters. The opening sequence shows a (Black) police officer chasing a young Hispanic man. This causes a crowd of Hispanics by the side of the road to scatter, implying the possibility of police action against them and thus an illegal (and subordinate) status. Hispanic news anchor Jose Diaz delivers the weather on the "Buenos Diaz Report"—a lesser position within the newsroom hierarchy—and focuses on privileged people's interest—talking about how the fruit growers will view a prediction of rain and surfers will enjoy the sun. A woman calls her apartment supervisor asking to have her leaky sink fixed, and a state senator disavows knowledge of hiring those "illegal workers" (Arau, 2004). At the border, a group of Whites lead a protest, while two border patrol officers (one White and one Black) remain nearby to protect their "freedom of speech" (Arau, 2004). The protest leader, George McClaire, accuses Mexicans of taking jobs and leeching off welfare services.

Finally, a news anchor first presented as "Lyla Rod" corrects misinformation in a news report about the Mexican "Day of the Dead," identified as a Latino holiday. The studio head reminds her that he is looking for a Latina reporter and admonishes her firmly, showing his power over her. She reveals in response that she adopted a professional name instead of her real name Rodriguez and then reads the news script as written (mistake and all), putting herself back into the subaltern position. We even see the onscreen display changed to "Lila Rodriguez." Everywhere Hispanics are placed in a subaltern position, cut off from the film's construction of privilege that characterizes not only Whites but other racial minorities as also complicit in maintaining Hispanic subalternity. Identity is also constructed as ethnicity, though this aspect is much less important than the position of non-privilege. Both Hispanic nationals *and* their descendants disappear due to the strange fog. Where the White characters generally use "Mexican" to describe anyone with Hispanic identity, the movie references other specific countries like Guatemala and Argentina and argues strongly that not all Hispanics are Mexican. The movie's use of the terms "Latino/a" extends by implication the constructed identity to Brazilians and those of Portuguese descent.

Ethnicity, or at least skin color, is also the subject of consideration in the humorous scenes involving brown-skinned actors of other nationalities (one of them, for example, an Israeli) being asked to perform acting roles as Mexicans. Lila Rodriguez is also accepted by everyone, including herself, as a genuine Hispanic due to her skin color and upbringing, even though the film later reveals through her aunt that she is of Armenian heritage. In contrast, the film later tries to add to this Hispanic identity by showing them as valuable and productive members of California society. At first glance, singer Roberto Quintana seems rather unsuccessful—he seems to be in his thirties or possibly even forties and is shown practicing in his garage with his bandmates. The group has nevertheless been successful enough to have a tour schedule, and Roberto is about to leave on an extended trip to perform at a number of places. George McClaire's father Louis is a fruit grower who employs a large number of Hispanics, and in doing this job he puts a great amount of trust in his friend Jose Mendoza, who is portrayed as a capable, down-to-earth advisor. An early mention of Ricardo Montalban sets up nicely the later "deck of

the missing," a series of playing cards with pictures of famous, successful Latino celebrities. The state's Lieutenant Governor disappears because of his Hispanic heritage, showing some measure of political power. The Los Angeles Dodgers cancel games due to the disappearance of several of their athletes (although the Lakers are noted to be fine). In total, 14 million people (more than one-third of the state's population) disappear, making them a substantial group despite being a minority. The film also uses statistics to show how much of an economic impact this cultural group has on the state of California as teachers, law enforcement officers, and agricultural workers. In fact, the government's attempt to use prisoners to replace Hispanic fruit pickers ends in spectacular failure. These portrayals never move Hispanics out of their subaltern position—Mendoza is not the boss, the *Lieutenant* Governor is Hispanic, Roberto does in fact practice in his garage—but they can achieve what success is available to them. In short, Hispanics are worth a great deal culturally and economically to California (and by extension, the rest of the country).

Hispanics are also constructed as group of people who embody similar values as the majority. They can be successful up to a point within the boundaries of Californian society. Their willingness to take difficult, labor-intensive jobs implies a work ethic reminiscent of the Puritan ideal. Roberto has a loving relationship with his wife Mary Jo and children and seems quite devoted to her, even though she had an earlier affair with a (White) neighbor that resulted in her daughter's birth. She expresses her apprehensions about his new (female) background vocalist, but he reassures with intimate gestures and the promise to call her while on tour. Despite a possible opportunity for infidelity, it seems that he will remain faithful to his marriage vows. From her hospital bed where she has just learned of her Armenian ethnicity, Lila reacts with disbelief and lists the lessons and by extension associated values she learned growing up in a Mexican household: to share toys (generosity), to clean up her own messes (responsibility), to say "thank you" and "please" (politeness), and that actions speak louder than words (integrity). In contrast to the assertions made by George and his band of protestors, this speech constructs Hispanic identity as ethical and moral. This Hispanic identity is considered at least as good as (and perhaps even better than, because it does not perpetuate such oppression) the hegemony that serves to constrain them.

Strategy 2: Engaging Stereotypes

An additional major theme is the stereotypical portrayal of Hispanics. These stereotypes are then countered with information either from other characters or from on-screen text. Martin and Nakayama (2010) provide a basic description of stereotypes as "widely held beliefs about some group. Stereotypes help us know what to expect from others. They may be positive or negative" (p. 205). In the opening credits of the movie we are presented with the first stereotype of Hispanics and this is done through the jobs that they perform. They are presented as cooks, farm workers, janitors, landscape workers, painters, and workers for hire on a street corner. The audience is later introduced to other Hispanics in more detail. One character is Catalina, a housekeeper for a wealthy politician's family who helps the family conduct their daily routine. Jose Mendoza is a farm supervisor and friends with

owner Louis. One of weather reporter Jose Diaz's earliest lines is that he will be the "Grand Marshal of the San Jose low-rider car show" (Arau, 2004). All of these characterizations of Hispanics in low-paying and seemingly inconsequential jobs play into the stereotype that Hispanics are not that important to society and do not add anything to the culture of the United States. These early stereotypes of Hispanics as insignificant and unproductive members of society are, however, countered throughout the entire film. Not long after the disappearance of Hispanics, Louis McClaire says, "California depends on these people to make these fields work" (Arau, 2004). Later on in the film a newscast asks, "Who are these people that we have taken for granted?" (Arau, 2004) and shows pictures and accolades of Hispanics who have made contributions to society. They show Mario Molina, who discovered the hole in the ozone layer and won a Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Ralph Gonzalez, who won the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his role in the rescue of Apollo 13, actress Selma Hayek, boxer Oscar De La Hoya, and singer Placido Domingo. This demonstrates that not all Hispanics work in low-paying, menial jobs but have instead made significant contributions to society.

Later in the film Mary Jo is shown in a playground with children playing in the background. She says that the schools may have to shut down because so many of her colleagues have disappeared. As she states this, text appears on the screen saying, "20% of California K-12 teachers are Hispanic" (Arau, 2004). Even later, a professor is shown in an interview where he debunks the myth that undocumented workers are a drain on the economy. He states that although undocumented workers take $3 billion in social services they also contributed $100 billion to the California economy. These scenes work to show that the stereotype of Hispanics as unproductive members of society who work in menial jobs is untrue. By showing how Hispanics have contributed in science, arts, education, and the economy this film counters the negative stereo type of Hispanics and replaces it with a positive one. Another negative stereotype of Hispanics that is depicted in this movie is the misconception that all Hispanics are Mexicans. Rinderle (2005) provides definitions of the signifiers Mexican, Mexican American, and Hispanic. She states, "Mexican…is used to refer to Mexican nationals, and often to people who were born in Mexico despite residing in the United States and even becoming naturalized citizens or permanent residents" (p. 302).

She continues, "A Mexican American can be defined as a U.S. American of Mexican descent, born and living in the United States" (p. 303) while a "Hispanic is a broad signifier that denotes a person residing in the United States with origins or ancestry from Spanish-speaking countries" (p. 305). Throughout the film many people confuse the terms much to the chagrin of the Hispanic characters. When the Abercrombie family is having breakfast the Senator states, "they are illegal Mexicans from Guatemala and Honduras," and this stereotype is countered with text that reads, "Guatemalans and Hondurans are not Mexican." This stereotype occurs again when Lila Rodriguez is interviewing to become a television reporter. During her casting session she reads a newscast, "The Cinco De Mayo festival is the fastest growing Latino holiday in the…" (Arau, 2004) and then counters this statement by saying, "Excuse me, it's not a Latino holiday; it's only a Mexican celebration" (Arau, 2004). Later in the film an interview with a traffic enforcement officer is shown depicting

this stereotype again. The officer says, "Cubans, Bolovians, Columbians, Argentines, they're all Mexicans right? They're all south of the border right?" After this statement, text appears on the screen saying, "There are 40 countries south of the border" (Arau, 2004). These scenes demonstrate the problematic stereotype that all Hispanics are Mexicans, but the film provides counterexamples through character dialogue and on-screen text to dispel this negative stereotype. In exchange, the film replaces it with a more positive stereotype in which all Hispanics are entitled to their own unique cultural and national identity. Another way that this film counters stereotypes is the over-exaggeration of stereotypical Hispanic traits. Two of these traits are skin color and accents and how Hispanics are viewed based upon these stereotypes. Correa (2010) examined media portrayals of Hispanic women and concluded that the prevailing stereotype is "that Latinas are overly sensual but also religious, conservative and family oriented. They have a Spanish accent and a homogeneous look: slightly tan, dark hair, short and curvilinear" (pgs. 425-426). Correa then continues to dispel this stereotype, but two of the characteristics are important for this analysis. While Lila Rodriguez, a dark haired and dark, slightly tan woman, is interviewing for her job as a television news reporter, she first appears as Lyla Rod and works hard to hide her accent.

The producer stops her and says, "We are looking for a Latina reporter…do you *hablo espanol*? Take it from the top, and this time don't Americanize the Spanish. Let me hear the real deal, let me hear the Latino *sabor*" (Arau, 2004) *Sabor* translates to "flavor" and this scene demonstrates how the producer wanted his reporter to fit the Hispanic stereotype by using a heavy, presumably sensual accent to fit the perceived qualities of a Hispanic woman. Another exaggerated stereotype is skin color, and in one scene a reporter walks up to a man with a dark complexion and asks, "Excuse me, are you Mexican?" He replies, "Do I look like Mexican? Everyday they ask me the same thing…I'm Israeli not Mexican…" (Arau, 2004). During this interview text appears at the bottom stating that he is an unemployed actor. Later in the film he is shown playing a Mexican person in a commercial with the words "We were forced to use non-Hispanic actors" (Arau, 2004) shown across the bottom. This over-exaggerated stereotype that casts all darker skinned people as Mexicans is another way the filmmakers attempt to dispel stereotypes of Hispanics as a homogeneous group of people who all share the same physical characteristics.

Strategy 3: Turning Point of Change Challenging Norms

In this particular movie there are disappearances of people of Hispanic descent, establishing a climactic turning point of change that challenges current norms. Kurt Lewin's (1947) change theory can be applied as a useful lens through which to process and recognize the three steps involved with group and individual change. Specifically, by analyzing how *A Day without a Mexican* depicts Lewin's three-step model of change theory we begin to discern how this turning point of change strategy is used to convey the director's message by demonstrating positive group and individual change and transformation. There are three steps involved with transformation: "unfreezing" one condition, experiencing a transition, and "refreezing" into a new condition (Jean-Thornton and Keith 2009). Lewin (1947) argues the first step

necessary for change is "unfreezing" of the current conditions and norms. "He argued that the equilibrium needs to be destabilized (unfrozen) before old behavior can be discarded (unlearnt) and new behavior successfully adopted" (Burns, 2004, p.985). Schein (1996) expands on this concept by further examining what is necessary to accomplish unfreezing. Schein explains how three processes of unfreezing—disconfirmation, the induction of guilt or survival anxiety, and the creation of psychological safety or overcoming learning anxiety— all have to be present to some degree for readiness and motivation to change to be generated" (Schein, 1999, p.60). Thus any disruption, altered routine, or unexpected occurrence can fulfill this condition and enact an initial unfreezing phase, setting forth a possible path for change. As is demonstrated in *A Day without a Mexican*, the recognizable unfreezing event was the unexpected disappearance of Hispanic people across the state of California.

As a result of the disappearances, a frustration forms among those left behind. Schein explains how "disconfirmation must arouse what we can call 'survival anxiety,' or the feeling that if we do not change, we will fail to meet our needs or fail to achieve some goals or ideals that we have set for ourselves ('survival guilt')" (1999, p.60). The movie depicts scenes of Californians' lives being severely disrupted due to their reliance on Hispanic labor. Having one's way of life disrupted leads quickly to dissatisfaction and a desire to have equilibrium reinstated. This desire to return a sense of normalcy and equilibrium leads characters in the movie to seek an explanation for the disappearances and to find a temporary solution until the Hispanics return. Those Californians left behind enter the second step in Lewin's model ——moving. Lewin (1947) believed that after unfreezing occurs people enter a time of transition in which they are motivated to learn. This learning approach opens them up to new concepts, ideas, and behaviors that lead to cognitive redefinition or reframing of their position.

"Cognitive redefinition occurs when the learner has become unfrozen (i.e., motivated to change) and has, therefore, opened him- or herself up to new information" (Schein, 1999, p.62). In *A Day without a Mexican* this period of transition occurs when the non-Hispanic people of California begin to understand their reliance on those of Hispanic descent for survival (or at least comfort) and question their previous position where they exhibited attitudes of ingratitude. Many of them thus began to redefine their position and adopt a new and different perspective. This process progresses into Lewin's third step of refreezing, which ventures towards stabilization. Achieving stabilization and equilibrium is revealed in *A Day without a Mexican* by depicting a desire for reconciliation. The act of reconciliation is seen as a way of bringing back balance and harmony, and in this case, with renewed vigor for cooperation.

Strategy 4: Reconciliation of Culture Groups

Initially, there were mixed reactions to the disappearance of Californians of Hispanic descent. While some, such as George McClaire, relished in the disappearances, others were deeply worried and concerned, not only about their current state of affairs but about how they would continue forward with their professional (Louis McClaire), and personal lives (Mary Jo and Vicki Martin). As the film progressed, the remaining citizens

of California began to realize exactly how crucial the Hispanic community's contribution was to the economy and to their individual lives. Upon that realization, their views about the Hispanic population changed immediately. The idea of reconciliation did not reveal itself until the latter part of the film, but it shows its prevalence in many of the primary characters. Senator Abercrombie had based his entire political career on assertions against illegal immigration. It is made very clear that his political beliefs reflect his personal beliefs. Ironically, both his personal and professional lives are very much dependent on the existence of the Hispanic community. It appears that his daughter's nanny, Catalina, performed the everyday household tasks for his home, such as cooking, cleaning, and care-taking. Upon her disappearance, her absence is immediately recognized and missed. Politically, the disappearance of the Latino population originally appeared to offer advancement in his career. Due to the absence of the Governor and the disappearance of the Lieutenant Governor, his position rose from state senator to acting Governor of California. Unfortunately for him, he was unaware of how dependent the state was on Hispanic labor, agricultural, and economic contributions.

Throughout the movie, he continuously assumed that Hispanics could be easily replaced—until the replacements proved to be incompetent and much less than capable. His moments of reconciliation occurred when all of his preconceived notions about the Hispanic population were proven wrong. When the painters that he had previously hired (and fired) returned, he was ecstatic and showed himself quite welcoming and appreciative; this same feeling also held true for his reception of Catalina. He and his wife found a whole new appreciation for her and what she does for the family. The interracial relationship between the two news anchors, Vicky Martin and Jose Diaz, was a situation where the Diaz found himself unappreciated in his relationship. Harris and Kalbfleish (2000) addressed the reasoning in which an individual might participate in an interracial relationship using the structural theory and racial motivation theory, which were originally employed as a basis for explanation by Kouri and Lasswell (1993). They assert that in an interracial relationship "demographics and mutual attraction contribute to its initiation, development, and maintenance they occur *because* of racial difference…" (Harris andKalbfleisch, 2000, p.50).

In the case of Martin and Diaz, both Martin's infatuation and apprehension with Diaz are rooted in racial differences. Before his disappearance, he made it clear that his feelings for Martin outweighed everything in his life, but her reluctance, whether motivated by fear or embarrassment of their relationship going public, was obvious and she made it clear that she had no desire to move their relationship any further than it already was. When Diaz disappeared, his absence also made her realize how valuable he was to her, and that awareness led her away from her apprehensiveness. When the Hispanics returned and she saw Diaz for the first time, she lunged toward him and displayed her true affection for him publicly for the first time without shame or fear. Abercrombie and Martin both independently came to the recognition that their lines of thinking had been incorrect in regard to the roles that Hispanics played in both of their lives. Reconciliation in this particular storyline occurs in two ways. There is a scene in which George is on the phone with a man named Mr. Catana,

who seems to be either a home or real estate developer. Catana tells George that a "deal" must be put on hold due to the deficiency of a particular "kind of people", which leads the viewer to assume that they are referring to Hispanics. George expresses his frustrations upon realizing that even his "All-American" lifestyle also very much depends on the existence of the Hispanic population. Louis also makes an attempt at reconciliation in a way, on George's behalf. Louis transferred George out of his will in regards to his land and leaving that land to Mendoza, who seems to be a good friend and will work and take care of the land and appreciate it much more so than George. Restoring balance and creating an environment of appreciation or, at the least, tolerance acts as forms of reconciliation between the differentiated groups involved. Reconciliation can only occur after a realization has been made. In the case of this film, once the remaining citizens of California realized that their livelihoods where extremely dependent on the Hispanic population in some capacity, out of need their views changed.

Conclusion

Combating racial issues and stereotypes continues to be an issue that plagues modern day politics, economics, education, and societies as a whole. The messages translated through this film are somewhat exaggerated, but the essence of its message is very much true and accurate. The role of immigration and the significance of the Hispanic contribution to the United States have been constantly misrepresented physically and statistically to no advantage of the Hispanic/Latino population. The rhetorical devices and strategies of this film used those misrepresentations to display exactly how misleading stereotypes can be and how destructive those distortions can be in the efforts to dispel racial tensions. Examining *A Day without a Mexican* through a scholastic lens offers the opportunity to examine race relations through social identity theory to further understand an alternate view of how race can be constructed in contrast to the media's portrayal of exaggerated stereotypes thus understanding better how communication technologies influence our relationships and cultural paradigms.

Most depictions of other races and cultures are inaccurate and overstated, but the distinctions between reality and media representations are often left unmade. Films like this are beneficial because they offer actual insight and aid in the deconstruction of stereotypes and one-sided statistics through humor and entertainment allowing us to take a different path in cultural understanding than was taken in the past. By questioning the strategies in which race and identity are created by the majority, addressing the accuracies and inaccuracies of those identities displayed through stereotypes, challenging those uneven portrayals, and reconciling after the realization of oppression, the framework is in place to continue to reshape the way we approach race and cultural relations and conflict as we continue into the future.

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