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Telenovelas: Ethnic and Gender Representations in Spanish Media in the U.S.

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Abstract
This study researched the gendered and ethnic depictions in a series of *telenovelas*, or Spanish soap operas. From an initial sample of five, a content analysis was performed of two of the most viewed *telenovelas* during 2011 in the U.S. (*Soy tu Duena* and *Cuando me Enamoro*). It was found that women wore more provocative clothing, while men wore more neutral clothing. Men held more white-collar professions while women had "other" as their more common occupation. It was also found that characters with lighter skin belonged to a higher social class, while characters with darker skin were more likely to belong to lower social class. Future research should investigate further these stereotypical portrayals of gender and race, and what are the possible effects on the viewer.

Introduction
Past research has indicated that media contributes to, communicates about, and constructs culture (Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2008). Additionally, according to cultivation theory, long term exposure to media, such as exposure to television serials or soap operas, can affect the viewer's social perception of reality. Among Latinos, *telenovelas*, or Spanish soap operas, are the most popular type of TV serial (Glascock & Ruggiero, 2004). However, there have been very little empirical research on the content of this type of media which is unfortunate given the size of this market and its profitability (see Barrera & Bielby, 2001, and Rivadeneyra, 2011). The present study researched the gendered and ethnic depictions in a series of *telenovelas;* from an initial sample of five, a content analysis was conducted of two of the most viewed *telenovelas* of 2011 in the U.S. (*Soy tu Duena* and *Cuando me Enamoro*).

The limited previous research on *telenovelas* shows that women compared to men are depicted as having different occupational roles, with women having more nurturing professions (teacher) or no profession at all. Women are also depicted with a greater emphasis on attractiveness; female characters are dressed more provocatively compared to men (Glascock and Ruggiero, 2004 Rivadeneyra, 2011). With regards to racial stereotypes, lighter skin characters have been found to be more likely to play major roles and hold upper social class status. Lighter skin characters were also more fit and young than darker skin characters (Glascock & Ruggiero, 2004); darker skin characters have been found to dress in more provocative clothing than lighter skin characters (Rivadeneyra, 2011). Based on the works of Rivadeneyra (2011) and Glascock & Ruggiero (2004), it was hypothesized that female characters would be depicted in traditional gender roles, including women having more childrearing roles, and having lower status professions. It is also hypothesized that there would be more emphasis on female characters' appearance, with female characters wearing more provocative clothing. In terms of ethnic depictions, it was hypothesized that characters with lighter skin would belong to higher social class compared to characters with darker skin color. Characters with lighter skin would be more fit than darker skin characters. Darker skin color characters would be dressed up more provocatively than lighter skin color characters.
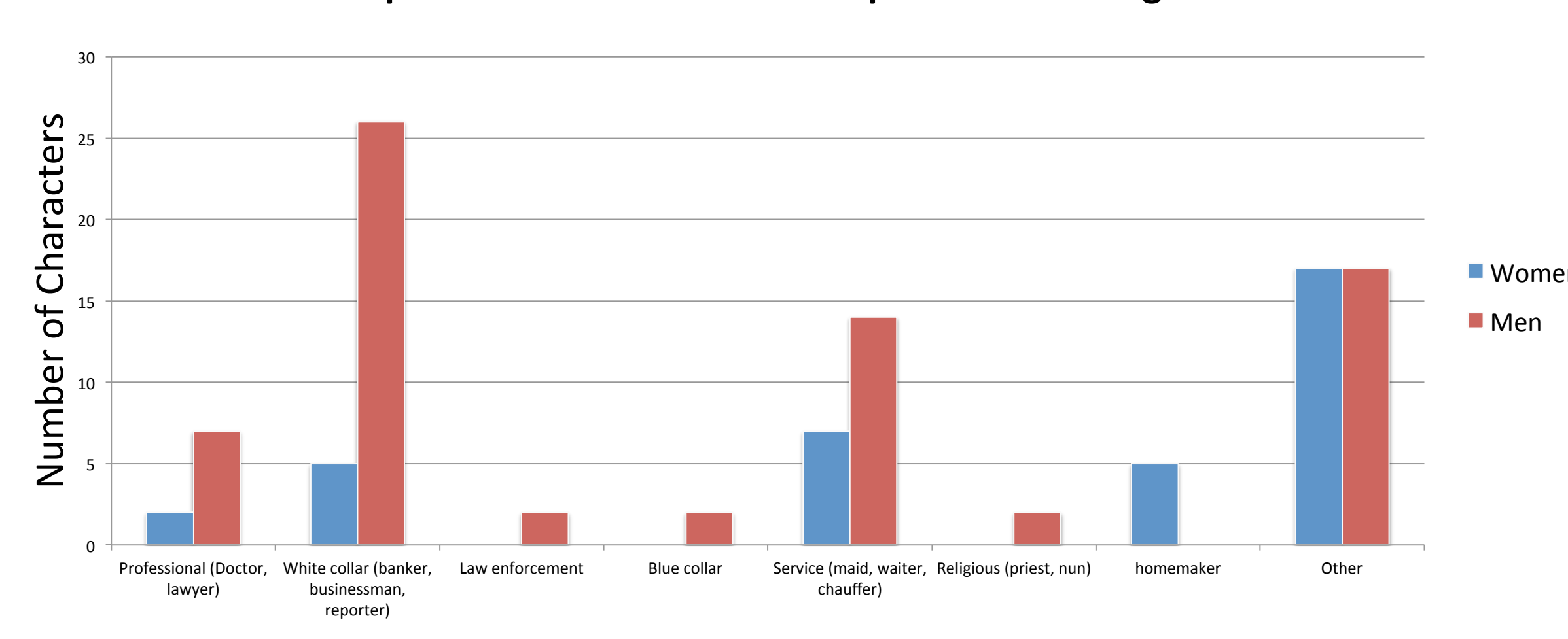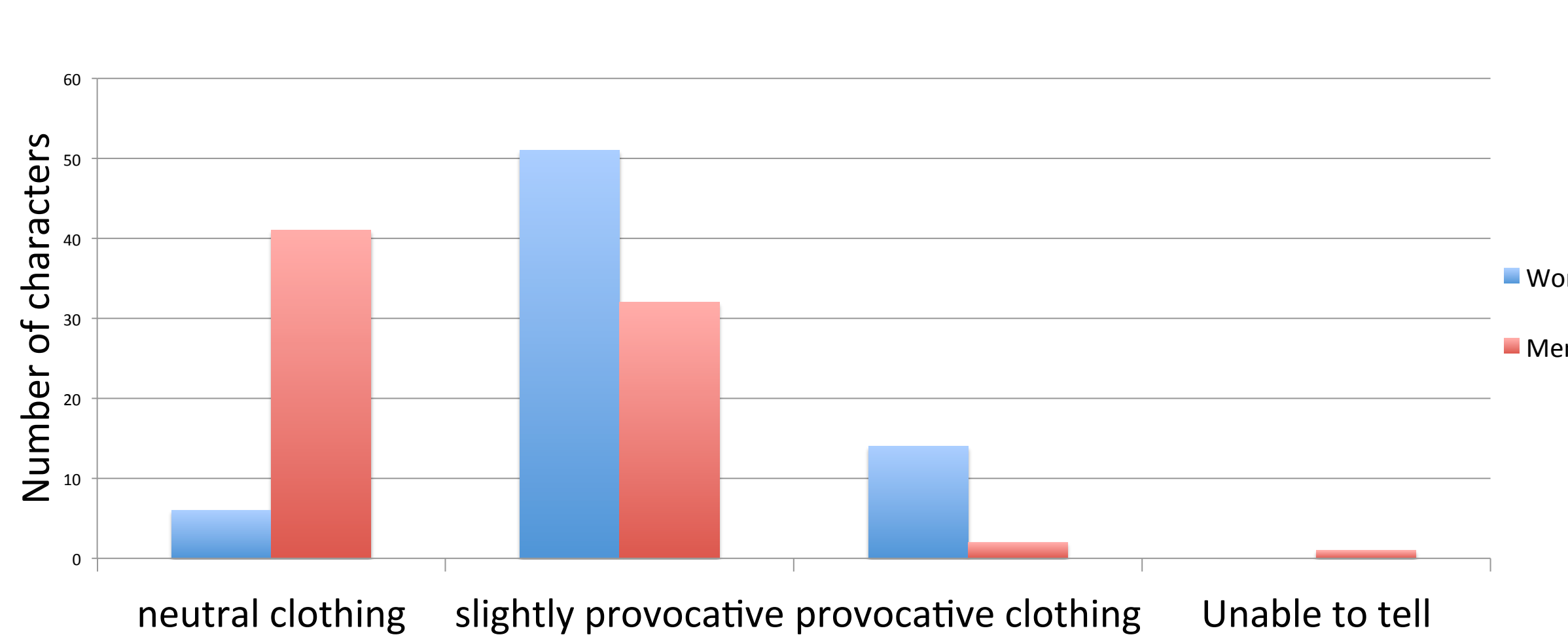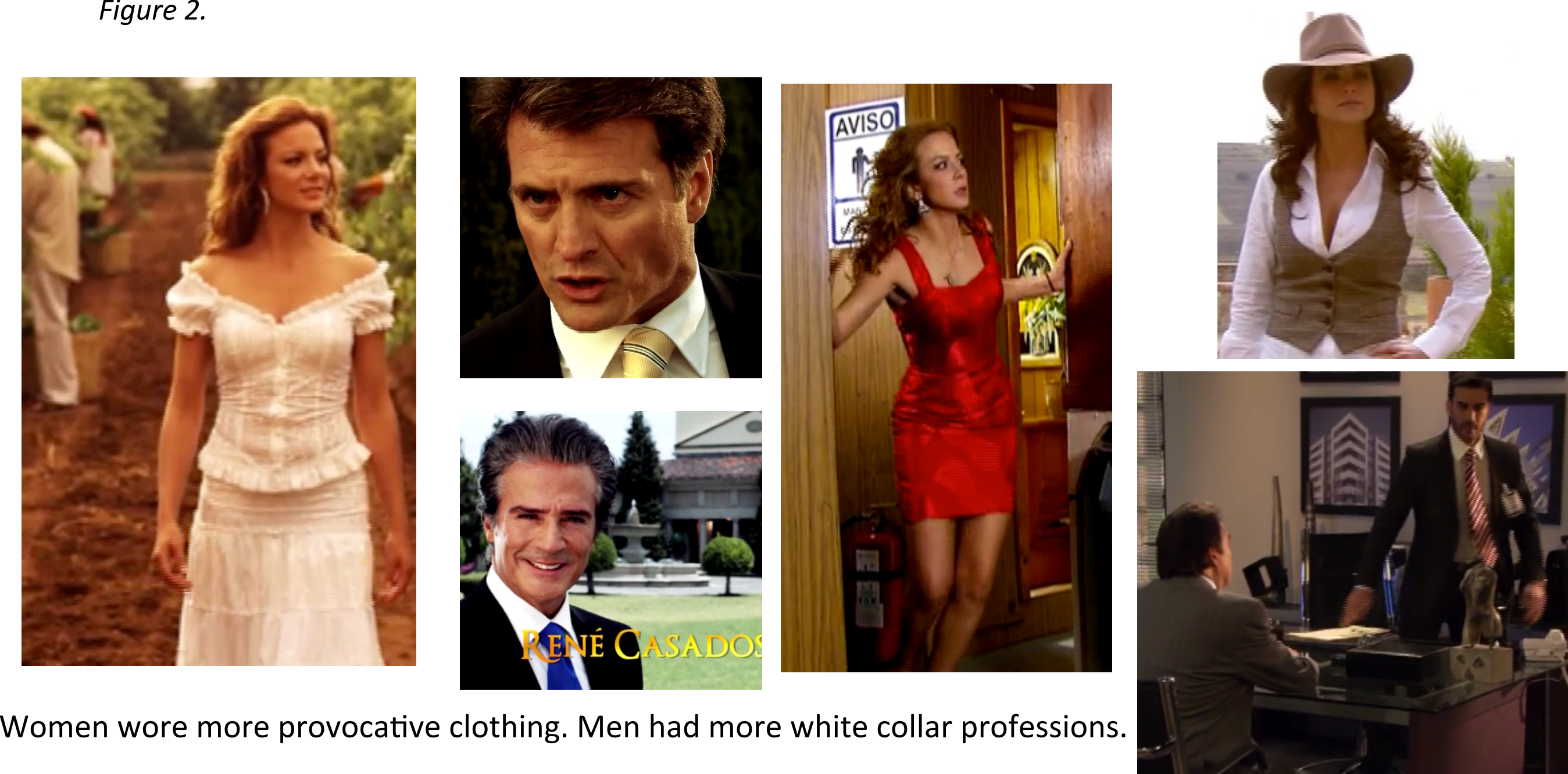
Figure 1.

Figure 2.

Women wore more provocative clothing. Men had more white collar professions.

Darker skin characters were portrayed as having lower SES and having service type occupations.
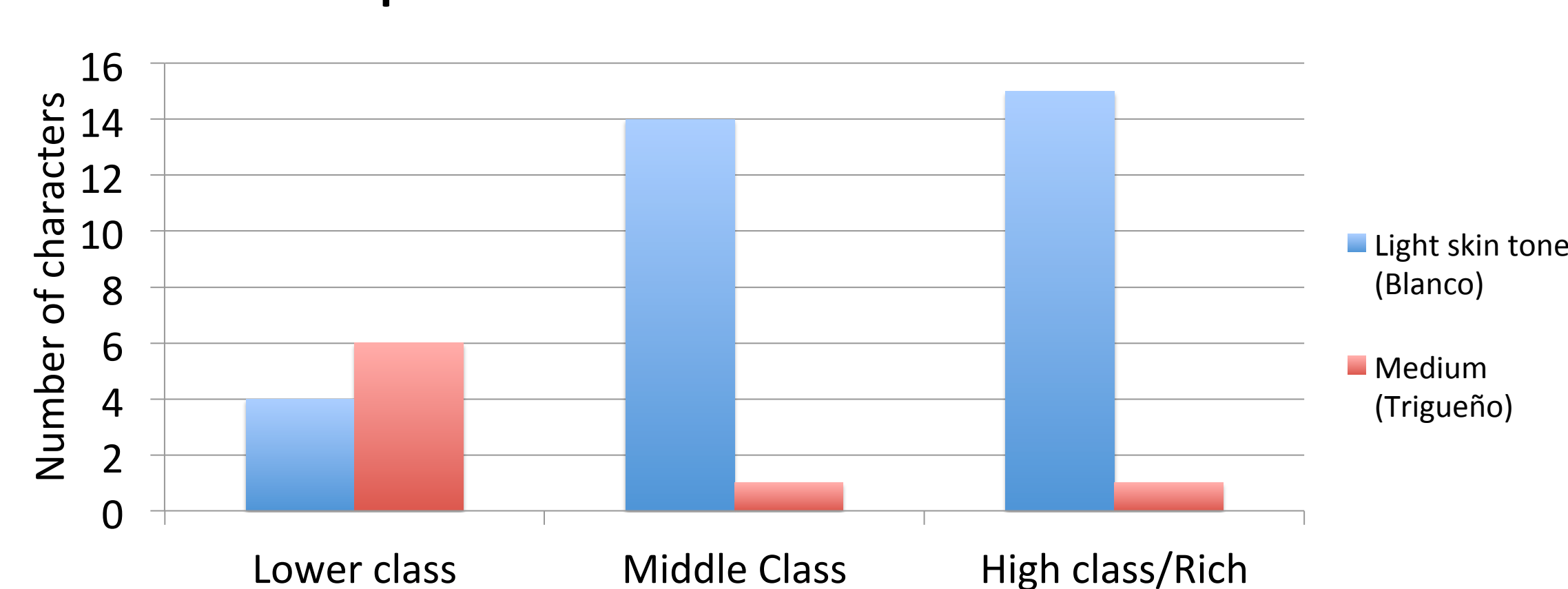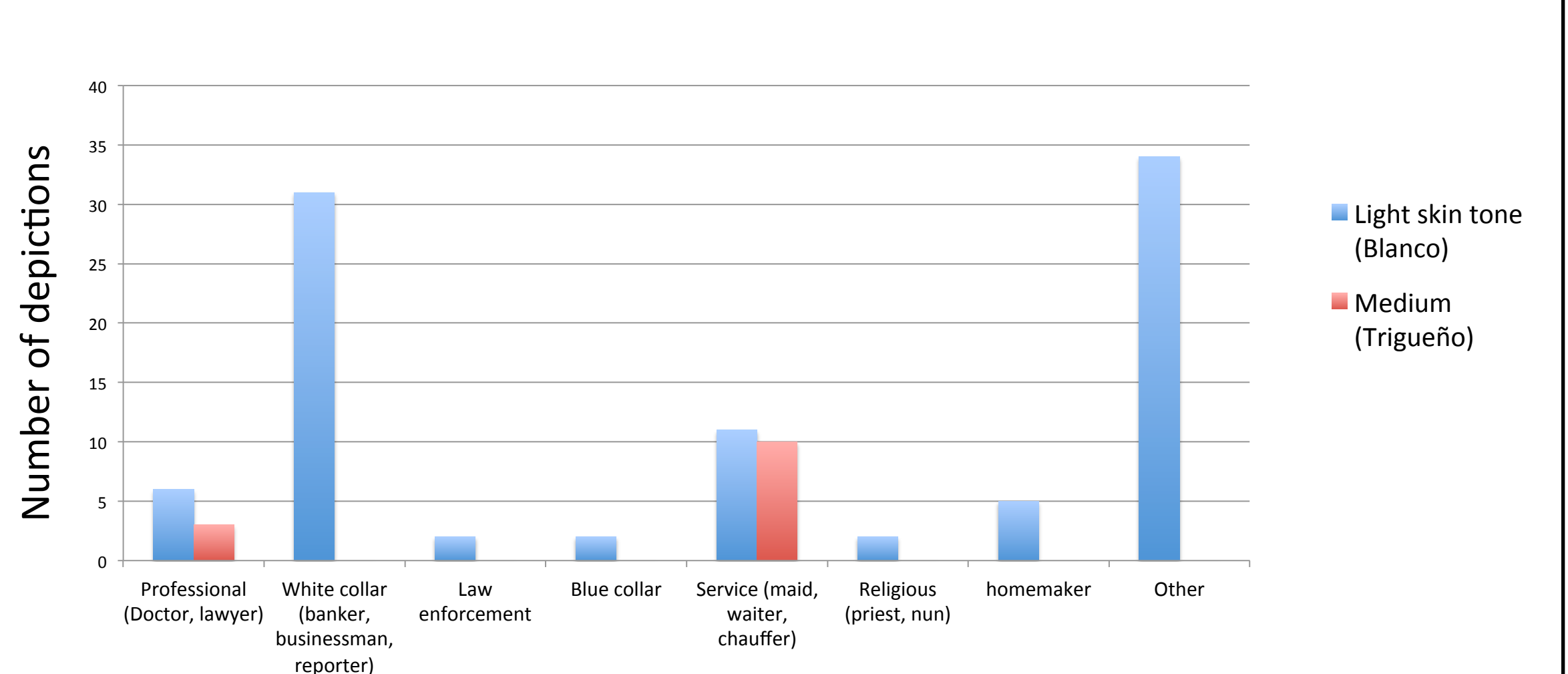

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Methods
From an initial sample of five, a content analysis of two of the most viewed *telenovelas* of 2011 in the U.S. was performed. The *telenovelas* were *Cuando me Enamoro* (When I fall in love), and *Soy tu Dueña* (I'm your owner). From this sample, two-thirds of the episodes were randomly selected, and from these episodes 20% of the scenes were randomly selected for analysis.
For the content analysis, all speaking characters were coded; characters' demographics coded included gender, occupation (Indeterminate, professional, white collar, support, law enforcement, blue collar, service, criminal, or religious), skin color (light, medium, dark), class (upper, middle, lower), dress (very provocative, provocative, average), and body shape (extremely fit, average, overweight). The questionnaire was first piloted and discussed by two coders using a different *telenovela (Eva Luna)* from those of the sample. Consensus between the coders was reached for all the variables. One coder completed the coding of the two *telenovelas* for the present study.

Results
In the two *telenovelas,* 45 different characters, and a total of 147 different scenes were coded. The analysis of the data was done at two different levels: At the character level and at scene level. Chi square test of independence were used to analyze the data.

◆ **Analysis at character level**
It was found that there were no significant differences between gender and SES, X^2 (2, N=41) = 2.391, p = .303. There were no significant differences between skin color and body shape, X^2 (2, N=45) = 3.372, p = .185. However, as hypothesized, there were significant differences for skin color and SES; lighter skin characters were more likely to belong to high class, while characters with darker skin were more likely to belong to lower class X^2 (2, N=45) = 13.806, p > .001 (see *figure 3*).

◆ **Analysis at scene level**
It was found that there were significant differences in depictions of women and men in terms of occupation; men held more white-collar professions while women had "other" as the more common occupation, X^2 (7, N=106) = 21.66, p > .05 (see *figure 1*). There were also significant differences for gender and clothing, women were more likely than men to be depicted wearing provocative clothing, X^2 (3, N=147) = 40.290, p > .001 (see *figure 2*). There were no significant differences between skin tone and clothing, X^2 (3, N=147) = 4.550, p = .208. However, there were significant differences in terms of skin color and occupation; lighter skin color characters were more likely to have "other" or white collar occupations while darker skin characters were more likely to have service type professions, X^2 (7, N=106) = 38732, p < 0.001 (see *figure 4*).

Discussion
Results of this is study partially supported the hypotheses that *telenovelas* portray characters using stereotypical schemes. It was found that darker skin characters were portrayed as having lower SES, and holding more service type professions *(figure3 and figure 4)*. It was also found that characters were depicted in stereotypical gendered roles with male characters holding mostly white collar professions and female characters holding "other" type of professions, women were also the only characters depicted as homemakers *(figure 2)*. It was found that women's bodies were more sexualized, with female characters dressed up more provocatively than men *(figure 1)*. These results become especially important when understood through the lenses of cultivation theory; Latino consumers might be internalizing these depictions of gender and race, reinforcing stereotypes, racism and sexism. Some researchers have found compelling evidences that TV exposure, and viewer engagement are correlated with endorsing more traditional gender role beliefs in adolescent girls (Latino and non-Latino). (Ward and Rivadeneyra, 2005; 2007). Since the influence of media on Latinos has not been studied enough in the past, future research should investigate the effect of the stereotypical depictions in *telenovelas* and their possible impacts on Latino consumers' attitudes, and behaviors. In the future, Professor López and I will analyze the three remaining *telenovelas* from the original sample of this project.

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