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Talking Back: Hispanic Media and U.S. *Latinidad*

ARLENE DÁVILA

As Spanish-language and Latino-oriented media increasingly target Latinos, they become central to the development and conceptualization of U.S. *latinidad*. In addressing U.S. Latinos as a single group, these media initiatives certainly help shape and refurbish the existence of a common Latino/a identity. Seldom, however, do we look at the ways in which people respond to these culturally specific media and to the “Latinness” so promoted by their programming and representations.¹ Do the media forge a greater degree of self-identification with this ethnic category among the amalgams of people that are supposedly included in this group? Have they, by lumping together many different groups in one category, in effect excluded particular groups from media representations of *latinidad*? This essay explores these and other questions by providing a brief examination of the views and opinions voiced by a group of New York Latinos/as about some of the media directed at them, examining their comments to reveal how Latinos/as position themselves within the all-encompassing category of identity in which these representations are predicated. My aim is to discuss the kinds of issues that color people’s consumption of these texts and, in particular, to analyze what the opinions of different Latino subnationalities with regard to the existence of a common “Latino media market” suggest about the impact the media has on the public consolidation of U.S. *latinidad*.

My discussion is based on a year-long ethnographic investigation of the making of Hispanic advertisements for Spanish

TV, including the reactions of focus groups whose participants were considered representative of the target audience.² There were six focus groups in all, and the Latino members, male and female, differed by nationality and proficiency in Spanish, ranging from non-speakers to bilinguals to active users of “Spanglish”, that is, who code-switched between Spanish and English (Zentella 1997). The participants had lived in New York City from three to fifteen years, and many had been born there and were thus familiar with the U.S. Hispanic media environment. Last, all of my informants self-identified as Latinos/Hispanics and used these words interchangeably, alongside their national identification as Puerto Ricans, Colombians, Mexicans, and Dominicans. U.S.-born Latinos and those with many years in the United States (most of them Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Colombian), however, were more likely to call themselves Hispanics or Latinos than were the Mexican informants participating in my study. This is not at all surprising given that Mexicans represent a relatively recent immigration to New York City, making them new “entrants” into this category. The discussions were intended to focus primarily on Hispanic advertisements, but they soon turned to the Spanish TV networks, Univision and Telemundo, as well as to the city’s Latino/a-formatted radio stations, such as La Mega (97.9 FM) and Amor (93.1 FM), providing revealing insights about informants’ views on different Latino-oriented media.

What follows are excerpts of these discussions and my analysis, which I offer not as conclusive statements of how U.S. Latinos/as think about these media and their representation of “things Latino,” but rather as “positioned stories” (Ang 1996), that is, as contextualized observations gained primarily from New York Latinos/as that are suggestive of the type of issues that seldom come to light about how U.S. Latinos/as react to representations of *latinidad*. I stress “contextualized” because, as we shall see, participants’ engagements with the media were always mediated by regionally specific considerations. A particularly dominant reference in these discussions was New York City’s race and ethnic hierarchies, where the largest Latino/a subgroups (Puerto Ricans and Dominicans), are placed at the bottom. Specifically, in discussions of the media the participants would consistently refer to what they perceived as their place and those of others within such hierarchies while simultaneously expressing and communicating particularized identities along the lines of race, class, or ethnicity that reflected conventions of *latinidad* disseminated by the Spanish and Latino-oriented media. I will therefore suggest that, while the Spanish and Latino-oriented media have undoubtedly contributed to the process of Latinization, or to the consolidation of a common Latino/a identity among different Latino/a subgroups, they have also helped forge and reinforce existing hierarchies of evaluation among so-called members of the same group.

Quandaries of Representation

Debates about the representativity of any media are not unique to Latino-oriented and Spanish-language media. Such controversy is, in fact, common to any media whose mass scope inherently excludes entire segments of its putative audience, be it on the basis of race, class, or regional background (Himmelstein 1994). In contrast to the so-called general market media, however, the Hispanic media have historically functioned and promoted themselves as the “spokespersons” for the totality of U.S. Latinos, a pretense that makes even more problematic the real biases of their representations. *The Washington Post’s* recent exposure of the “blond, blue-eyed face of Spanish TV” and how it hinders the employment of dark-skinned Latino artists (Fletcher 2000), and the debate over the Latin Grammys and their exclusion, among other issues, of regional musical rhythms, are indicative of the contentious nature of these media. Their legitimacy and profitability depend on their advocacy and accurate representation of an audience whose diversity they can never appropriately represent.

Obviously, this inability reflects larger structural trends in global advertising and marketing that emphasizes market segmentation along the lines of culture, gender, age, and lifestyles, where Latinos are positioned as both a culture and language (Spanish) specific ethnic niche (Turow 1998). Indeed, the same trends that have fragmented the so-called general market in the United States have resulted in the strengthened importance of Hispanics as a unified marketing segment. This fragmentation has reconfigured other U.S. demographic and marketing segments by subdividing “women,” “the general market” or “teenagers,” into lifestyles, age, tastes, or race, but steered clear of such tactics in the Hispanic market, defining it as a homogeneously bounded, “culturally defined” niche.

As a result, maintaining the profitability of Latinos as a market has simultaneously involved the development of essentialist and authenticating discourses of U.S. *latinidad* that constrain its intrinsic cultural heterogeneity and compel its presentation as a bounded and hence easily targetable population. Specifically, Latinos are said to constitute a “nation within a nation” with unique family values, communal disposition, traditionalism, spirituality, etc. Most important, they are seen as both dependent on and emotionally connected to the Spanish language, the primary tool for defining the

uniqueness of the Latino consumer and his/her unique need for culturally specific media and advertising.³ The Spanish media have historically been at the forefront of these constructions, sustaining the allusion that they are fully representative of Latinos as a people and a market: *Tu canal* (your channel), *El canal de los Hispanos que nos une en hermandad* (the channel that unites Hispanics in brotherhood), are discursive tools commonly used by the Spanish TV networks to equate Spanish TV with U.S. *latinidad*.

Indeed one of the most generalized beliefs advanced in different forms by focus group participants was that the Hispanic or Latino/a-oriented media⁴ are and should be representative of U.S. Latinos/as and that their growth is indicative of Latinos' achievement and enfranchisement. Again and again, participants would mirror the discourse of representation on which the U.S. Spanish language networks are so dependent, attesting to the extent to which this discourse permeated their diverse interpretations or evaluations of these media. These media were alternately praised or criticized, but always in relation to their position as ethnic- and/or culture-specific products whose growth attests to Latinos/as' growing power and visibility. This view was succinctly voiced by a Puerto Rican participant who, when recalling with pride the rapid growth of the Hispanic media in New York City, insisted that this demonstrated that "they have had to adapt themselves to us and could not survive if we stop consuming." Viewers' association of the Hispanic media with Hispanics' "coming of age" in the public eye, however, does not mean they were oblivious to the exclusions generated by these representations, and it is this much less known fact that concerns us here.

Participants harshly criticized the Spanish TV networks for their "foreign" programming, which they felt did not speak to their particular subgroups and thus made the networks irrelevant to their everyday reality. For example, one participant bemoaned the fact that there was too much Mexican programming, leaving little room for shows targeted to other nationalities. Most felt that the stations were geared only to audiences in the West, inasmuch as they featured ranchero music, Mexican artists, and soccer rather than programs from Latin American countries where they could learn what was happening "back home," or even watch baseball, which is favored over soccer by the city's Dominican and Puerto Rican Latino/a audience. To contextualize these comments, it is important to note that, though the U.S. Hispanic TV networks project and sell themselves as the representative medium of U.S. Latinos/as, they have historically functioned as a "transnational," rather than "ethnic" medium, that imports cheaper Latin American programming or else produces shows for export to Latin America. That is to say, producers primarily keep the transcontinental Latin American instead of the U.S. audience in mind.⁵ In the case of imported talent and programming, the U.S. Spanish networks have tapped the largest media exporting countries in Latin America, such as Mexico and, to a lesser degree, Venezuela, leading to a preponderance of Mexican actors and talent on the U.S. Spanish airwaves. Even shows filmed in Miami and produced with the U.S. Hispanic market in mind, such as *Despierta America* or *Primer Impacto* have tended to rely on the importation of Latin American talent to ensure the synergy between the Latin American/U.S. Hispanic market and the exportability of such shows to the Latin American media market. *Despierta América*, modeled after ABC's *Good Morning America*, imported the Puerto Ricans Giselle Blondet and Rafael José and the Mexicans Ana María Consec and Fernando Arau. For its part, *El Blablazo*, a show in which contestants are quizzed on their knowledge of Mexican soap stars and U.S. Hispanic entertainment gossip and which is advertised as the only show "where what's important is not what you know but what you've been told," imported host Omar Germanos from Mexico.

The networks justify the dominance of Mexican programming and talent on the grounds that Mexicans constitute 65 percent of the Latino/a population, but in New York City, where Hispanic Caribbeans are predominant, the exclusion of other Latino/a subgroups ensuing from the networks reliance on exported programming was readily apparent to most participants. Also highly represented in the U.S. networks are Cubans, as a result of the early entry of Cuban actors and media entrepreneurs previously involved in Cuba's thriving media and publicity industry, who have been active in the development of the U.S. Hispanic media and marketing industry since the 1960s. Again, such dominance of some Latino/a subgroups and the ensuing exclusions of others did not go unnoticed by focus group participants, who were quick to draw a connection between the whiteness of the world of Spanish TV and the dominance of some Latino/a groups over others. Thus, revealingly, when participants bemoaned the dominance of whiter Hispanic models, they blamed "Cubans" and "Mexicans" for this trend and for "shaping these images after themselves." Not surprisingly, they did not differentiate by class, race, and background among Cubans and Mexicans; veiling the fact that it is white Cubans and artists born and bred in Mexico, not lower-class or dark-skinned Mexicans or Cubans, who dominate the airwaves.

Interestingly, the whiteness of Spanish TV surfaced as a greater concern among U.S.-born Latinos/as than among recent immigrants, reminding us that immigration and the length of stay in the U.S. are central variables affecting an individual's experience and awareness of U.S. racism, and make more likely the expression of dissatisfaction with the lack of racial representativity in the Spanish TV networks by U.S.-born Hispanics. Of all the U.S.-born subgroups, it was Hispanic Caribbeans, primarily Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, who were most concerned with issues of color. This is not surprising, given the greater African racial influence in the Caribbean—a product of the islands' history of slavery. I would suggest, however, that Hispanic Caribbeans' greater concern with this issue reflects an awareness among viewers that, when black Latinos/as are depicted on Hispanic TV, the reference is to Hispanic Caribbeans (mostly Puerto Ricans and Dominicans and, to a much lesser degree, Cubans) who are made to stand for "color." As examples, readers may recall that dark-skinned maids who appear in Mexican soap operas tend to be from the Caribbean (such as in *La Usurpadora*). Consider also the casting of the black Puerto Rican actor Rafael José for the multinational team of the morning news program *Despierta America*. Yet another example is provided by the short-lived Spanish version of *Charlie's Angels* by Telemundo, featuring a multiracial and multinational team of angels—a blonde, a brunette and a black Latina played by an Argentinean, a Mexican and a Colombian actress, respectively. Echoing a common trend in representations of *latinidad*, the actress originating from the country closest to the Equator is darkest in skin color. Spanish TV consistently leaves us with the impression that there are no blacks in Mexico, blondes in Dominican Republic, or brunettes in Argentina.

Indeed, representations of *latinidad* in the Spanish TV networks, when not revolving around generic representations that prioritize white Hispanic actors and talent, have generally reduced different Latino/a subgroups to particular cultural indexes, be it music, race, or an artist. Accordingly, appealing to Puerto Ricans becomes tantamount to showing a Puerto Rican salsa group, and the lure to Colombians is to feature Colombian model-actress Sonia Vergara. This strategy of representation, however, though it simplifies the networks' mission is still no more inclusive than their regular programming fare of white models or Mexican programming. Thus we are left with the following predicament: the dominance of white Hispanic types in Spanish TV negates

and leaves little room for acknowledging Latinos/as' racial and ethnic diversity, and diversity is accordingly reduced to iconic and essentialist representations that are presented as "belonging" neatly to some groups but not others.

Viewers were not oblivious to the networks' strict assignment of color to particular Latino/a nationalities. A particularly revealing example of this surfaced during a discussion of a JC Penney ad for the Hispanic market that presents a multiracial collage of Latino/a youths of different nationalities, who use the various Spanish words "cool" (*macanudo* in Argentina, *chévere* in Puerto Rico and Central America, *padrísimo* in Mexico, and so forth). A Puerto Rican participant in the discussion demanded to know why, when black Latinos/as were shown, if at all, they were always Puerto Rican, when in fact there are Puerto Ricans of all races and, like the Argentinean, they can also be blond. Interestingly, nothing except the word "*chévere*" marks the black kid as Puerto Rican in the ad. In fact, the same character also uses the term "*órale*", more characteristic of Mexicans, while the person responsible for the ad confirmed to me that the model had been cast as generic Caribbean Hispanic and not specifically as a Puerto Rican. The participant's comment shows how participants' own backgrounds "color" their interpretation of the ads: here it was clear that the informant was aware of his own racialization and that of Puerto Ricans both in greater U.S. society as well as within the "Latino/a" community. To put it in another way, he had seen through the ad. It pays homage to racial and ethnic integration (its punch line reads, "It does not matter who you are or where you come from. We can all be cool by dressing JC Penney"). But it is predicated on assignments of color, race and even language idioms to particular nationalities, failing to acknowledge racial diversity as intrinsic to all Latinos/as, not just some groups, be they Puerto Ricans or other Hispanic Caribbeans.

Moreover, by associating different nationalities with particular ethnic indexes, the Spanish and Latino/a-oriented media ends up negating the actual cross-fertilization that does occur among and across Latino/a subgroups. After all, Latinos/as do not live and operate from neatly defined ethnic enclaves isolated from other subgroups. Nowhere is this more evident than in New York City, which features one of the most heterogeneous U.S. Latino/a populations. In the past few decades, New York has witnessed a growing diversification of the city's Latino/a population: Puerto Ricans, who made up 80 percent the city's Latino/a population in the 1960s, now compose only 43 percent all Latinos/as. A rapid growth of Dominicans, Mexican and Central American populations has turned the city into an important "homogenizing pot" of *latinidad* (Hanson Sánchez 1996). In this context, popular culture emerges as a cross-fertilizing medium among and across Latino/a subgroups that cannot be neatly associated with any particular subgroup in the manner intended by the Spanish-language networks' strategies of customization.

Most significantly, through these types of customization, the media expose and, in so doing, help shape and naturalize essentialist conventions concerning cultural traits that are supposedly characteristic of particular Latino/a subnationalities. A good example of this trend is provided by a discussion of the city's Latino/a-formatted radio stations, a regional medium that easily lends itself to customization. The discussion revolved around La Mega (97.9 FM), which targets Puerto Ricans and Dominicans with a fare of salsa, merengue, and bachata, and Amor (93.1 FM), geared to a pan-Latino/a audience through baladas, pop tunes, and Latin soft rock. Recent programming changes adopted by the City's most popular radio station, the salsa-and-merengue-formatted La Mega were designed to target more directly the City's growing Dominican community by playing more bachata and merengue and by featuring

Dominican language mannerisms in spoken segments. The overall tone of the stations is irreverent—imagine a Latin Howard Stern—and it was this irreverence, in tandem with DJs’ use of Dominican slang and accent when speaking to *mamis* (sweeties) that was meant to appeal to Dominicans. In a discussion among a group of Spanish-dominant Latinos/as, mostly South American (Colombian and Ecuadorian) but including one Cuban and one Dominican, not surprisingly La Mega and the Dominican participant were soon turned into the embodiment of Dominican culture and hence stereotypes of Dominicans and Hispanic Caribbeans. One of the Colombian women denounced the sexual innuendo that pervades the dialogue between the DJs and the call-in public, to which an Ecuadorian man responded by evoking the stereotype of the hot Dominican male and the more open and eroticized Caribbean culture: “That’s Caribbean culture for you. Change the station to Amor and you’ll see that they speak different because they are not from the Caribbean.” The Dominican female participant in this group had previously explained, in relation to a similar insinuation of Dominicans’ unrepressed sexuality, that Dominican culture is not the way it is represented in the Latin media and that such profanities would not be heard in the Dominican Republic, where, she claimed, a Commission of Public Entertainment would prohibit them from being aired. Such objections notwithstanding, the issue continued to surface, with the salsa-merengue radio station serving as the indisputable proof of Caribbeans’ lustfulness versus South Americans’ more “restrained” sexuality, which one would encounter on another station. Again, I stress that distinctions concerning the so-called morals and sexual dispositions of different Latino/a subgroups were made by contrasting the merengue-and-salsa formatted La Mega with the pop-formatted Amor, and through associations that were predicated on strict and essentialist equations between different types of music and particular Latin countries and nationalities.

Notably, women in the group distancing themselves from La Mega’s sexually oriented content, including the Dominican woman mentioned above, tended to be middle-class college graduates whose views are not representative of all Latinas. The nighttime “Mega Jacuzzi” segment, where a male DJ takes calls from women as he supposedly lies naked in his Jacuzzi, attracts numerous Latina women eager to join the DJ in his sexual-play as he details how he undresses and caresses them. This exercise requires both the caller’s submission as sexual object and their agency. After all, these women represent a direct challenge to the demure sexuality that dominates Spanish media images of Latinas, such as that of novela heroines, who are invariably sexy and attractive, but virginal, maternal, and pure or, in other words, beauty to be seen. Of course, here the challenge is all the more shocking since the caller is openly displaying, or rather broadcasting, her desire and sexuality. Such traits are normally reserved for villains, the reverse side of the dual portrait of Latina women as virgin or whore. This is not at all different from the dual stereotype of Latin women as either the traditional *señorita* or the overly sexualized, loud, and hot-tempered Latin spitfires that have dominated depictions of Latin women in mainstream media (Rodríguez 1997).

Additionally, such strict associations of nationality with particular types of music are in fact inaccurate. The same participants who shunned La Mega would later reveal that they did in fact listen to salsa and merengue and appeared to be quite familiar with the station’s programming—as did most participants, irrespective of their nationality. Obviously then, peoples’ negative judgement of La Mega did not necessarily reflect their listening habits, but rather their generalized association of salsa-merengue stations with Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. These groups were viewed by other New

York Latinos as embodiments of low culture, and the reference against which they defined themselves to be more moral, respectable, and authentic. Moreover, such comments were also intertwined with issues of class, which were similarly indexed and negotiated in relation to various media and in reference to particular nationalities. Specifically, their actual listening habits notwithstanding, it was common for focus group informants to make claims about their status and class for themselves and others by shunning or taking issue with the station's vulgar and offensive content, or expressing an openness to listening to this station. Again, the former stance was embraced by many irrespective of nationality, although relative to Puerto Ricans and Dominicans informants, who constitute the station's main target groups, Central and South Americans were more likely to shun the station, as evident in the above discussion.

To grapple with these responses we need to acknowledge the existence of particular ethnic and racial hierarchies at play among Latinos/as, informed and affected by their different histories, the specific conditions leading to their immigration, such as the prior relationships between the U.S. and the immigrant countries of origins, as well as each group's position within the city, and even regionally specific variables (Flores 1996, Grossfoguel 2000). In New York City, for instance, it is Hispanic Caribbeans, particularly Puerto Ricans, who represent the oldest large-scale Latino/a migrant and are positioned at the bottom of the city's ethnic and racial hierarchy. As a result they constitute a group from which other Latinos wish to maintain a distance as they claim a space in the city. These dynamics have been documented by Robert Smith (1996) and Philip Bourgeois (1995), who have analyzed inter-ethnic relations between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in New York. As they note, the negative perceptions of Puerto Ricans by Mexicans and, presumably, other recent arrivals, suggests, among other factors, Puerto Ricans' historical subordination in the city, which has stigmatized them as the ultimate marginal minority, as has long-time association with African-Americans, with whom they share a similar position in the city's racial and ethnic hierarchies.

I am not suggesting that New York Puerto Ricans are mere victims of these hierarchies of representation. Puerto Ricans in the focus groups asserted their standing and identity in ways that simultaneously demeaned other Latino/a subgroups. These dynamics were also communicated through focus group discussions of particular media. A general trend among U.S.-born English-dominant youth was to embrace hip-hop and rap, and the media with which they are associated, as a legitimate site of *latinidad*, one in which Latinos/as can prove their contribution to mainstream culture and that serves as a reflection of their everyday realities, which they conceive in terms of alterity and marginality vis-à-vis mainstream culture. Participants in these discussions identified hip-hop artists whom they had discovered were Latin, such as Fat Joe or Big Punisher, or African-Americans they had thought were Latin but in fact were not, demonstrating the mutability of and cross-fertilization between Black and Latino/a youth culture and highlighting the contributions of Latino/a artists to rap and hip-hop. In particular, discussions of the media by young U.S.-born Latinos/as provided clues to a definition of *latinidad* that offers an alternative to the one projected by the Spanish language TV networks, which emphasizes knowledge and mastery of the Spanish language, whiteness, and direct connections to a specific Latin American country. Some even overtly criticized the dominant Hispanophilic representations in Spanish TV networks, asserting instead an anti-Hispanic version of *latinidad* rooted in a mixed, black and mestizo culture. As one young Puerto Rican participant explained "I don't have Spanish blood, so I am no Hispanic." Their views and lack of self-recognition in the Spanish language media are evident in the discussion below, typical of other youths interviewed in my research.

Felipe: The problem is those *novelas* in Spanish Television. They are all white. It's like, I'm a dark-skinned Puerto Rican. And in these stations they are all white. They all look South American. They are racist (*all interrupt*).

Arlene (moderator): Let's hear one at a time.

Felipe: If you watched TV you would think that Latinos are all white or looking like fucking. . ., I don't know.

Triny: That we all looked Mexican.

Felipe: But Mexicans are Indian-looking. It's all ridiculous.

Triny: Yeah, we all have different elements in us; we have whites, Africans, you know, we are a mix of all those people, but even in commercials, all you see is white people eating Goya beans. It's crazy.

Jenny: Yes, we are a mix. You know.

Triny: You don't see a lot of dark skin Latino on *novelas*, just the housemaid.

Felipe: I feel that they misrepresent us. And I don't like to watch it.

Arlene: How about you Manuel, what do you think?

Manuel: No, I don't like it. It's boring; all they give is soap operas.

Herb: Just for older people.

Manuel: I was catching myself the other day. I am twenty-five, you know, and I was thinking that every time I pass my sister, [i.e., any Latina] on the subway, I catch myself looking at their ass, I just do it (all laugh).

Manuel: 'Cause all you see is women in bathing suits every time.

Sandy: Like in *No te duermas*. . . caliente and with the big butt.

Herb: No se ve más (you don't see anything else).

Manuel: Always it's like hoochy mama, you know, something like that.

For these young people, the whiteness of Spanish TV was oppressive, while its representation of women seemed stereotypical and “tacky,” reemphasizing dominant views of Latinos as “hot” and hypersexual. Despite their criticism of these representations, some discussion participants also gave evidence that they have internalized dominant definitions of Latinos/as promoted by the networks (that Latinos speak Spanish and have some connection and roots in Latin America), by assuming that they lacked, or were perceived by others to lack, the “appropriate” cultural capital of *latinidad*. While I recruited participants for the focus groups, more than one English-dominant youth declined to participate on the grounds that he or she spoke no Spanish, until I explained that my study included all Latinos/as, be they code-switchers or Spanish- or English- dominant. Another recruit, who failed to appear at the focus group, identified herself as a second-generation Puerto Rican and a Latina, but added that she might not be the right person for this study because she neither spoke Spanish nor watched the Spanish-language channels, as if qualifying her own authenticity as a Latina on the grounds that she lacked the right language and media knowledge. It is therefore important to problematize the strict association promoted between Spanish and *latinidad* by

the Spanish media. In fact, not surprisingly, putting down the Spanish-language TV networks surfaced as a common strategy among U.S.-born and English-dominant Latinos/as, a method by which they reversed their peripheral position within this strict association. As was evident in the exchange above, they saw Spanish programming as predictable, boring, and alien to their everyday realities. This stance, however, had its own set of problems. Moreover by criticizing Spanish TV, which along with its viewers, were considered unsophisticated and tacky, that the youth implied their greater sophistication and “street-smarts.”

In conclusion, it is evident that discussions of the media leads not only to critical assessments but also to the expression of particularized forms of identification, whether along lines of race, class, or nationality, destabilizing in this manner “Latinness” as a neat and all-encompassing category of identification. It is important to recognize, however, that this category was always a central reference in all the discussions, to which participants had recourse and mobilized as needed. After all, their comments were made in terms of a generalizable Latino/a culture, bringing to the forefront the fact that despite critical assessments of the U.S. Hispanic media and its representations of *latinidad*, participants ultimately identified themselves with the same category that merged them into that “Other” Latino/a from which they had been trying so hard to distance themselves.

Additionally, separately, and collectively, participants’ responses suggest that, despite their criticisms of the category and its representation in the media, participants have in fact internalized, or made their own, the particular dynamics and conventions of *latinidad* disseminated in the media. As we have seen, participants actively used commercial representations to assert their own and others’ place and level of “belonging” to this category or to distinguish particularized forms of identification along the lines of class, race, morality, and nationality. The irony is that these insidious distinctions deployed by participants to set themselves apart, fall short of challenging, and—in fact, reinscribe—the preeminence of whiteness and of the “nonethnic” as the abiding reference against each one of them is rendered suspect. An overarching assumption in these discussions was that the Spanish and Latino/a-oriented media was beholden to and needed to be representative of all Latinos/as. This concern, as unfeasible as it may be for any type of media, is fueled by the all-too-real omission of Latinos in the “mainstream” media. My guess is that participants were well aware of this predicament; hence their abiding concern with the representativity, or lack thereof, in any self-identified Latino or Hispanic media.

These observations, as disconcerting as they may sound to readers longing for answers to the lack of Latino/a representativity in both the Spanish-language and mainstream media, are meant to be disappointing. It is apparent from the discussion above and from the informants’ comments that there are no easy or quick answers. Group participants were aware of the webs of power and capital hindering change. Not surprisingly, references to Televisa’s ownership of Univision or to images shaped by the demands of advertisers were not uncommon in these discussions. What is certain is that the mainstream media’s omission of Latinos directly feeds the entrenchment of Spanish language media as the “Hispanic” or “Latino” media, inhibiting in turn the commercial success and viability of alternatives. Latinos are, after all, a market niche whose profitability to the seller is based on their putative homogeneity, and this myth is a highly lucrative one that advertisers and media planners are not about to challenge.



NOTES

¹ Noted exceptions include Aparicio (1998) and a recent study on television by the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute (1998).

² The groups included three Spanish-dominant groups whose participants ranged in age from their upper twenties to mid-sixties with a median age of 38. One was made up of South Americans, mostly Colombians and Ecuadorians, another of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, and a third made up exclusively of Mexicans. There was also an English-dominant group of youths aged eighteen to twenty five, most of whom were Dominican, Puerto Rican, and also Central American, as well as a fifth group of bilingual, English-dominant adults (Dominicans and Puerto Ricans). Within these groups, attention was also paid to the variables of class and gender. Thus, while most participants consisted of blue collar, Spanish-dominant Latinos (ranging from high school dropouts to college students mostly working in service occupations) who constitute the core of the market, there were also middle-class and college-educated (pursued mostly in their home countries) participants incorporated into each of the groups. I moderated all of the groups, with the exception of the focus group composed of Mexican informants. For a longer discussion of my use of focus groups, see Dávila (2001).

³ Good examples of these dominant marketing conventions are provided by Valdes (2000) or Sosa (1998), both of whom are marketing personalities involved in the commodification of U.S. Latinos. Both also delineate the supposedly dominant Latino cultural characterizations in relation to Anglo middle-class consumers. I discuss these issues in greater detail in Dávila 2001.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I use Hispanic and Latino-oriented media to denote media geared to the U.S. Latino population. Those media encompass a range of formats and genres, but my analysis will focus primarily on the media most popular among New York City Latinos: the nationwide Spanish TV networks, Telemundo and Univision and the FM radio stations La Mega and Amor.

⁵ The distinction between transnational and ethnic media is discussed by Naficy (1993) and the Latin American foundations of U.S. Hispanic media by Rodriguez 1999 and Wilkinson 1995.



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Latinidadâ€”you in danger, girl. Black and indigenous millennials are starting to say #LatinidadIsCancelled. Here's why.

#LatinxHeritageMonth. Latinidad is a term to acknowledge and link the collective experiences and cultures of people from Latin America. - That song was my jam! It derived from the word Latino which was first seen in California newspapers in the 1850s. Forget what you heard, the words Latino and Hispanic are completely different. According to scholars, Hispanic links Latina Americans to Spain, its cultures and traditions, with an emphasis on the language. So folks who are actually from Spain would be considered Hispanic. But this wouldn't be the case for Brazilians, for example, because they speak Portuguese. Digo Hispanic Media is a company that was born when two of the largest media companies in the Caribbean, GFR Media from Puerto Rico and Grupo Corripio from the Dominican Republic, merged to target the 9.4 million Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Dominicans in the east coast of the U.S. Augusto Romano, a digital media and marketing executive with over 20 years of experience in the field, is the CEO in charge of this new initiative. Typically, local U.S. Hispanic Media doesn't cover this type of information. [We] give brands the opportunity to connect with a neglected segment of the U.S. Hispanic population. Portada: What are DIGO's main objectives and how do you plan to fulfill them? As US-based media conglomerates compete for the estimated \$1 trillion Hispanic market, actors who are clearly categorized as Latina/o such as Sofia Vergara, who earned \$19 million in 2011, or who can perform ethnic ambiguity such as Jennifer Lopez, who earned \$52 million in 2012, are among the highest paid celebrities (Bercovici, 2012). One limitation is created by the entertainment media's ethnic homogenization of Latinidad and racialization of Latinas/os as brown and therefore outside of the dominant white-majority/Black minority binary that defines US racial formations. Talking with Oscar Nuñez. The Bergen. Retrieved from Lexus-Nexus Database. Media strategies and corporate struggles to reach the second and later generations of Latinos. International Journal of Hispanic Media. 2014 | journal-article. SOURCE-WORK-ID: 0318160136894-2. Chusmas, Chismes y Escandalos: Latinas talk back to El Show de Cristina and Laura en America From bananas to buttocks: The Latina body in popular film and culture. 2007 | book-chapter. SOURCE-WORK-ID: 0318160136895-13. The gender of Latinidad: Latinas speak about Hispanic television The Communication Review. 2004 | journal-article. SOURCE-WORK-ID: 0318160136896-10. Original language. English (US). Title of host publication. Latino/a Popular Culture. booktitle = "Latino/a Popular Culture", publisher = "New York University Press", } TY - CHAP. T1 - Shorter Version of "Talking Back. T2 - Hispanic Media and U.S. Latinidad". AU - Davila, Arlene. PY - 2016.