

Keeping Betty Ugly:
Manufacturing Diversity for Network TV

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the ways ABC/Disney's *Ugly Betty* (ABC 2006-2010) manufactures diversity to create an illusion of the U.S. as a site of multiple pluralisms and equality by re-scripting the ugly duckling parable as a Latino de-racialization project and assimilation narrative. The success of the show's original version, Colombian telenovela, *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea* (RCN 1999-2001), escalated into an international franchise, licensed by and culturally adapted for television markets around the globe. The image the United States promotes of itself, as seen through its media products (especially Disney products) valorize and export discourses of The American Dream around the globe. In order to maintain this carefully crafted self-image, one that masks the ongoing racial oppression and colonial holdings, depictions of diversity are manufactured.

This study examines the Disney affiliated series *Ugly Betty* to assess how the culture and identity of Betty Suarez, its titular character, as a Mexican-American woman is manufactured. Of particular interest is how she is coded as a diverse member of U.S. workforce, and how her transformative makeover from ugly duckling can be read as an assimilation narrative from racialized ethnic invader to white American professional. Using criteria extracted from scholarship and cultural production regarding Latina identity formation, I locate Betty within what I call the spectrum of assimilation among U.S. Latinas. Because there are various ways in which one negotiates, expresses and balances the multiple cultural, racial and classed components of their self-identity, I tease out markers from existing theories to locate Betty's self-projected cultural identity within the series narrative.

Building on the evidence gathered regarding Betty's rejection of a politicized Latina identity, this project analyzes the implications of the choice of New York City as site of Betty's transformation and how the use of queer visibility and American Dream discourse inform a reading of Betty as assimilation narrative. This dissertation concludes with a brief analysis of two shows featuring Latina titular characters. Both *Cristela* (ABC 2014-) and *Jane the Virgin* (CW 2014-) are successors of *Ugly Betty* yet diverge in the way their portrayals of Latinidades include more nuanced and pluralistic representations.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memories of Virginia Cano, David Fleischer, Mary Martinez, Helen Shorter, Edilberto Ruiz, Matthew Armstrong and Owen Ellison Miller.

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CHAPTER 1

GLOBALIZED GOOD NEIGHBORS: DISNEY, BETTY AND THE AMERICAN

DREAM

"It's a world of laughter, a world of tears.
It's a word of hope and a world of fears.
There's so much that we share,
That it's time we're aware.
It's a small world after all."

--from the "It's a Small World" attraction at Disneyland

In October of 2006, *Ugly Betty* (ABC 2006-2010) debuted on the Disney-owned ABC network prime time line up and became the first show in U.S. network history to feature a Mexican-American woman as lead character. *Ugly Betty* was adapted for English language American television from the Colombian telenovela franchise, *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea* (RCN 1999-2001). The franchise updates the famed Hans Christian Andersen story, "The Ugly Duckling" about an awkward young swan who is looking for acceptance in various animal communities yet is rejected for his differences until he grows into a mature, beautiful swan and is welcomed by a group of other beautiful swans. Writing about the animated version of Andersen's story released by Disney in 1931, Douglas Brode points out that for the awkward young swan, "different means ugly, even evil" (89). For *Ugly Betty*, the young swan is scripted as an awkward millennial professional Mexican-American woman seeking acceptance and upward mobility in the offices of a fashion magazine in New York City. This raises the question, if being Mexican-American makes Betty different in the U.S. version, is it her ethnicity that makes her ugly?

Betty Suarez (America Ferrera) is a recent graduate of Queens College in her early twenties who lives with her working class Mexican-American family in the borough of Queens, New York. Betty is plucky and earnest, though socially awkward, often clumsy, wears clunky glasses and braces and severely lacks any fashion sense. Because of these attributes, publishing mogul Bradford Meade (Alan Dale) hires Betty to be his son Daniel's assistant. Anticipating Daniel (Eric Mabius) will not be sexually attracted to Betty, Bradford has recently appointed Daniel as editor-in-chief of *Mode* magazine, the top fashion magazine in the industry. A fish-out-of-water at work, Betty's cheerful and often-quixotic perseverance is often tested at the office by her snarky co-workers/frenemies, Amanda (Becky Newton) and Marc (Michael Urie). Amanda is jealous of Betty because she wanted the job as Daniel's assistant, but is the receptionist and Marc is the assistant to Daniel's nemesis and villainess to the show, Wilhelmina (Vanessa Williams).

The series episode plots and subplots are balanced between mishaps and adventures at work with those among her close-knit Mexican-American family in Queens. Betty lives with her widowed immigrant father, Ignacio (Tony Plana), a soft spoken and nurturing caretaker of the family who loves to cook for his family and whose secret status as an undocumented immigrant become the subject of a sub-plot; her sister Hilda (Ana Ortiz), the sexier sister and embodiment of the urban Latina spitfire who became a mother in high school; and her nephew Justin (Mark Indelicato), an adolescent boy who loves fashion and musicals and whose performance disrupts gender norms. Over the four-seasons the show ran, Betty's morality and work ethic are often tested by the cast

of white, black, brown, gay and transsexual characters but never falter as she is determined to achieve the success through merit and embody the American Dream.

While many demands have been made about representation on television, Christopher Andersen asserts that the Disney-owned ABC network has long "hoped to offer alternative programming in order to attract segments of the audience not being served by the other networks" (140). The recognition of a market for family programming on television that stretched across demographics became a signature of a Disney style of multiculturalism. Douglas Brode refers to this style of multiculturalism as, "the teaching of tolerance and acceptance through a heightened understanding for the full range of diversity among members of the human race" (17). In line with this notion of multiculturalism, of the many adaptations the globally successful telenovela franchise licensed, ABC's *Ugly Betty* is the only version to script Betty as an ethnic minority.

The commitment to accessing traditionally overlooked markets was evident in the twentieth century when Walt Disney and his company willingly participated in President Roosevelt's World War II era attempt to maintain market relationships with Latin American in what came to be known as The Good Neighbor Policy, which resulted in what Gary Keller describes as "a more benign depiction of Hispanics" (118). While these depictions appeared more accepting of Latino communities than other cultural products of the time, which relied on ethnic representation as villain, Shohat and Stam point out that yet in this era the "colonial/imperial paradigm" which promoted Eurocentric dominant ideals "did not die with the formal end of colonialism" rather, it was "submerged" as "the neocolonial backdrop of Disney films set in Latin America" during

this era (121). In that context, *Ugly Betty* fulfills a Good Neighbor fantasy gesture for the millennial age, a Disney version of Mexican-Americans pursuing The American Dream.

However, Bambi Haggins points out the duality of the Dream as “mythos”, when she writes, “the price could not (can not) be paid nor the promise fulfilled—for certain Americans, access to the Dream and to democracy has always been limited” (26). For Mexican-Americans and other Latino communities, immigration issues and policy, the history of the acquisition of the Southwest States and Puerto Rico, and the economic and political involvements of the U.S. in Central and South America have delivered obstacles in the pursuit of the Dream for these communities. Of the relation between television and the American Dream, Haggins states, “As the most widely accessible American medium, television is the loom upon which the thread of dream mythology is woven” (285). While The Good Neighbor era depicted Latinas as what Priscilla Peña Ovalle calls “an international Otherness,” there has been a shift to “a national project of the United States” that “serves to reify the racial and structural status quo while offering the illusion of diversity and inclusion” for those who would be “an intra-national Other—nonwhite but assimilable” (169). Therefore, ABC’s *Ugly Betty* series appears to be diverse in that it features an educated Mexican-American woman as its protagonist and moral compass as well as a diegetic gay community using semi-progressive/semi-stereotyped characters to signify difference and multiculturalism.

In order to maintain this illusion a practice I call manufactured diversity is employed. This practice cleanses the narrative and visual semiotics of any reference to the current and ongoing colonial practices, reifies a white cultural hegemony, and promotes assimilation through The American Dream myth of meritocracy. The word

manufactured denotes industrial practices in order to provide goods to consumers in a mechanical way. As John Caldwell points out, "In order to talk adequately about television style or narrative, one needs to at least recognize that *television is manufactured*" (7). Caldwell also reminds that within the industrial production of programming, "television's technological and production base is smart—it theorizes, orchestrates, and interprets televisual meanings—and is partisan" as it shifts to meet "cultural and economic needs" (7). Thus, the demand for multicultural representation on televisual is met with manufactured diversity. For me, the word diversity refers not only to a variety of ethnic and racial differences, but also to the myriad of values, worldviews and belief systems present within them, including queer, gay, and transexual cultures and communities. My use of the term queer throughout this dissertation refers to sexual identities and attitudes outside of hetero-normative constructions within mainstream U.S. culture. Television is an industry, and, therefore, images of diversity depicted within this televisual space are fabricated in order to promote the self-image of the United States.

Ziauddin Sardar calls the U.S. and its self-image "a consciously created artefact" and states "the manufacture of this self-image must be sustained through its cultural products to imprint itself on a heterogeneous population" that becomes one nation "by passing them through not just a social melting pot but an ideological forge" (108). *Ugly Betty* was released amidst various moments that complicated and favored this self-image. Debuting after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 saw the nation rally together in solidarity toward a common enemy, and before the election of Barack Obama, the nation's first African-American president that led to the misguided belief that the U.S.

had become a post-racial space, the series featured a Mexican-American family in New York City during an era that also produced a wave of anti-immigrant legislation.

Global Betty: From Telenovela Franchise to Network Prime Time

Yo Soy Betty, La Fea followed the traditional production model of a telenovela in that the narrative was fixed before broadcasting, rather than continuously stretched over multiple seasons. Debuting on October 25, 1999, the series aired as 335 episodes that ran in a 30-minute time slot. Inspired by the universally recognized ugly duckling parable, with sparse measures of Cinderella's fate mixed in, official adaptations were licensed in over 18 markets. Each adaptation featured a glasses and braces wearing young woman as the protagonist. In addition to going global for adaptation, a cartoon version of Betty called *Betty Toons* (Telefutura 2002-2005) was released, and featured all of the characters from the telenovela as young animated children. Another spinoff series, *EcoModa* (Univision 2002) featured most of the *Betty, La Fea* characters and picks up about a year after *Yo Soy, Betty La Fea* ends. A sequel, *EcoModa* is about a beautiful post-transformation Betty, her boss-turned husband, Armando, and their baby. The popularity of the show and its spin-offs inspired adaptations of *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea* to be created in several other markets. Most of the official global adaptations stay close to the original version created by Fernando Gaitán for Colombian television, except for the U.S. version. As smart and capable as she was socially awkward and plain looking, each "Betty" served as the moral compass of her series, and with the exception of *Ugly Betty*, was written and performed as a member of the majority class in her society. The version

adapted for the United States market and audiences places Betty as a second generation Mexican American into the accompanying racial, ethnic, and social strata of the U.S.

The image that America has been projecting of itself through its cultural products, places middle class Anglo America as society's touchstone for what is deemed "normal." As Richard Dyer points out, "The assumption that a 'normal' face is a white face runs through the published advice given on photo- and cinematography," even the technology behind the film and video industry is constructed to this notion in that traditionally Anglos constitute the majority of television and film protagonists (94). That *Ugly Betty* disrupts this practice is a seemingly progressive move toward diversity, yet with a closer look, her ethnic construction is produced in such a way to associate her with European ethnic immigrants of the previous century.

In this way, the series can be read as a cultural project or what Hernán Vera and Andrew M. Gordon would call a "sincere fiction" which they define as "deliberately constructed images of what it means to be white" (15). Vera and Gordon argue that as sincere fictions "extol the white self, they diminish the selves of people of color, who also internalize the representations onscreen" (16). The authors also warn that within the U.S. and around the globe where the American self-image is distributed through its media products among "generations who may have never seen Native Americans, black, Latinos, or Asians can effortlessly acquire the prejudices of the dominant group" (16). The attempts to de-racialize Betty and to project her assimilative whiteness into the realm of The American Dream only underscores this carefully crafted self-image, one that masks the ongoing racial oppression and colonial holdings, and manufactures depictions of diversity.

This study examines the Disney-affiliated series *Ugly Betty* to assess how the culture and identity of Betty Suarez, as a Mexican-American woman, are manufactured. Betty is coded as a part of the diversity in the U.S. workforce, and how her transformative makeover from ugly duckling to beautiful swan is ultimately as an assimilation narrative that transforms a racialized ethnic invader to white American professional. Chapter Two provides an overview of the wealth of scholarly and critical detailing the representation of Latinos¹ in film and television, the habitual use and construction of stereotypes and negative representation. While numerous articles and book chapters address how *Ugly Betty* and the original series that created such a media juggernaut, *Yo Soy Betty*, *La Fea* are included to get an overview of the ways in which Betty is “seen” around the world, much of the foundational work regarding the representation of Latinos calls for more nuanced, dynamic depictions. Undoubtedly, there are ways in which *Ugly Betty* provided more progressive ways of seeing Latinas and for Latinas to see themselves. However, my goal for this study is to augment and expand the current scholarship by addressing not only the outcome and implications of Betty’s transformation but also providing an extended analysis of the site in which the narrative is posited, New York City, and how the construction and depiction of the city frames and supports the assimilationist tale.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical frameworks that influence my reading of the series, employing previous coursework in literary criticism combined with theories from Latino/a Studies, Film and Media Studies, and Gender Studies to contextualize the power dynamic at play in my examination of the ways in which the Betty text intersects and manipulates gender, race, ethnicity, class and place to favor mainstream dominant

culture. An extended analysis of Betty's identity as Mexican-American and as a New York based Latina uses theories regarding Latina identity formation to parse out how she self-identifies and if she maintains memberships in more politicized, hybrid Latina communities such as Chicana, Xican@, or Nuyoricanⁱⁱ. This study uses critical narrative analysis to assess how the ubiquitous ugly duckling story is rearticulated as an assimilation narrative; engages semiotics to analyze and interpret signified meanings in the televisual text; and employs historiography to contextualize meanings of projected multiculturalisms: Latinidad, Queerness, and Blackness used to reify whiteness, enforce the black/white racial binary, and promote cultural assimilation. A critical analysis of the pilot and other key episodes will be included in the case study.

Chapter Four provides a close reading of the pilot and the next to last episode of the first season, which is set in Mexico, to complicate the ways in which it introduces the titular character as a Mexican-American, and how that redefines what ugly means in this context. Using criteria extracted from scholarship and cultural production regarding Latina identity formation to locate Betty within what I call the spectrum of assimilation among U.S. Latinas. Viewing assimilation along a spectrum takes in to account individual choices, nuances and negotiations regarding identity, rather than using something such as language, religion, or class to view how one has assimilated or resisted the dominant culture. A spectrum recognizes the various ways in which individuals negotiate, express and balance the multiple cultural, racial, class and generational components of their self-identity. In this chapter, I tease out markers to locate Betty's self-projected cultural identity. These markers include how she verbally self-identifies (Mexican-American, Latin) and conversely, how she does not self-identify

(Chicana/Xican@/Nuyorican); expressions of a desire to reclaim an indigenous or a desire to rejection of that past by; and her outward expression of cultural through language, code-switching, and consumption of culturally marked products within the diegetic world of the series. The chapter concludes with a look at how Betty as cultural text is parodied within the popular media through the evocation of the discriminatory tropes the show, as cultural project, seemingly sought to alter.

Chapter Five investigates the intersections of space, place, gender, and sexuality by examining the signifiers of urban life of the production decision to set Betty and her Mexican-American family in borough in Queens, New York, which is coded as Italian and working class. Thus, it is also necessary to examine the relocation of the transformed and made-over Betty to London, England for a job opportunity in the final episode. Building upon Betty's repeated rejection of a politicized Latina identity, this chapter analyzes the implications the production choice site of New York City as site of Betty's transformation and how the use of queer characters and American Dream discourse inform my reading of Betty. By placing the Suarez family in New York, they are removed from the histories of colonization and ongoing cultural struggle present among Mexican origin communities in the Southwest United States.

Moreover, by identifying the ways that an illusion of a homogeneous Latina/o identity is manufactured through the use of acting style, speech patterns, and casting, one can unmask the symbolic annihilation of the various Latino communities existing along wide racial, assimilative, sexual, and cultural spectrums within the New York City of *Ugly Betty*. Because the producers made the particular decision to set the show in New York City, a location known more for its Puerto Rican and transnational Latino

communities than for its Mexican Latino communities, this study examines the significance of this decision and the implications of Betty's transformation in this context.

The epilogue, Chapter Six, highlights the legacy of *Ugly Betty*, which includes ratings and awards success, a strong online presence, and the visibility of more Latina/o themed or Latina/o inclusive shows, including the migration adaptation of more Spanish language telenovelas into English language scripted television shows. The chapter reiterates the ways in which the series employed manufactured diversity to promote an agenda of social equality and the de-marginalization of queer and ethnic communities as the assimilative goal within the discourses of American Dream and whiteness. This dissertation concludes with a brief analysis of how two shows with Latina protagonists, *Cristela* (ABC 2014-) and *Jane the Virgin* (CW 2014-), have built on the success of *Ugly Betty*, yet approach representation of Latinidades and Latina issues in more nuanced and pluralistic way.

If manufactured images of diversity were replaced with multi-faceted diversity and expressions of what Shohat and Stam refer to as "polycentric multiculturalism," perhaps lived experiences within the U.S. could catch up with the self-image exported in our media texts (48). The way texts are exported have shifted, allowing content to be consumed globally through streaming. Technological advancement has outpaced social advancement depicted on commercial network television, effectually democratizing access to broadcast outlets viewing streaming services and other net based services such as YouTube, Vevo and iTunes. Hopefully, this shift will include normalizing a multi-faceted version of the American Dream, with each pixel able to shine at its full potential.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“When we write about race we are always in some way writing about whiteness.”
--from the book, *The Birth of Whiteness*
by Daniel Bernardi

Ugly Betty (ABC 2006-2010) is steeped in the history of Latino/a imagery in film and television of the twentieth century. This chapter will include an overview of foundational academic work on Latino/a representation in television and film from the twentieth century that form the basis of the textual analysis in chapters four and five. Highlights from the articles and book chapters regarding *Ugly Betty* (ABC 2006-2010) and the origin series that created such a media juggernaut, *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea* (RCN 1999-2001) are included to provide an overview of the ways in which Betty is “seen” around the world. Much of the foundational work regarding the representation of Latinos calls for more nuanced, dynamic depictions. In some ways, *Ugly Betty* provided more progressive ways of seeing Latinas and for Latinas to see themselves. My goal for this dissertation is to fill in the gaps with an analysis of the ways in which Betty is coded as ugly and in need of makeover; an examination of how Betty Suarez’s identity is manufactured in difference to others coded as Latino; and work regarding the ways in which images of New York City are constructed as setting works to control and contain how Betty is coded as a non-threatening Mexican-American worthy of an assimilative transformation.

The practice of manipulating media representations has been a subject of study for many scholars. In her theory of *symbolic colonization*, Isabel Molina-Guzmán defines

this process as an ideological one that “contributes to the manufacturing of ethnicity or race as a homogenized construct” and “a storytelling mechanism through which ethnic and racial differences are hegemonically tamed and incorporated through the media” (9). Molina-Guzmán also offers *symbolic rupture* to address the process of audience reception “that allows audiences...as cultural readers to disrupt the process of symbolic colonization” (9). While the act of this analysis may fall under Molina-Guzmán’s definition of symbolic rupture, I argue that the ways in which diversity is manufactured in media and then disseminated into cultural and social interpersonal exchange and performance are evidence of ongoing attempts to assimilate colonized subjects.

Juan Piñón points to Molina-Guzmán’s theory of “symbolic colonization,” when he discusses the use of celebrity producers Salma Hayek and Silvio Horta on the production team of *Ugly Betty* as “cultural translators” not to achieve “cultural authenticity” but instead translate the “commercial value of their hybrid subjectivities” in order to achieve the desired look of non-threatening multiculturalism (208). The use of the term symbolic colonization for Molina-Guzmán refers to how race and ethnicity are sublimated in media. For Piñón this process is a marketing strategy to commodify identity by constructing “a sanitized Latinidad by mainstream media corporations has followed the distinctive cultural traits that are considered more economically and more valuable than others” (395). The “homogenized constructs” of ethnicity and race are often interrogated in the writings and performances of Guillermo Gómez-Peña. In an interview, Eduardo Mendieta asked Gómez-Peña about a statement the latter projected on a screen during a performance titled *Jurassic: Aztlán*. The statement read, “We manufacture difference”. Mendieta inquired whether it is to be read as a warning that

authentic difference or what is “different and heterogeneous” could be “extinguished and replaced by domesticated and manipulated difference” if “the discourses of difference have been already co-opted and have therefore become passé” to which Gómez-Peña laments that politicized discussions regarding difference are mostly limited to a small number of individuals within universities and theoretical journals (251). He goes on to point out that elsewhere, “realms such as the ‘international’ art world, pop culture, and the media, the new fetish is mild difference, tamed difference, stylized difference, low-cal Otherness, stripped of all political implications” (251).

Gómez-Peña suggests society is suffering from a kind of fatigue from cultural wars and identity politics, shifting the dominant discourses to one that insists we “are installed in a postracist/postsexist society” that “no longer wish[es] to discuss issues of privilege and power” and that “the new cultural impresarios want sexy images of race and hybridity, but without the political text” not have “their neocolonial positionality questioned by angry primitives and strident women” (251). He names Salma Hayek, Jennifer Lopez and other Latinos who are popular among white audiences as useful in the manufacturing process because there is a desire to “market Otherness, not understand it” (251). Gómez-Peña and Piñon’s assertion that the use of Anglo accepted celebrities and the removal of the potentially divisive political standpoints in favor of a controlled picture of difference or diversity to appear accepting of members of Latino communities and consumers is evident in my examination of the *Ugly Betty* text.

New York: Site of Ethnic Access to the American Dream

The use of Hollywood sanctioned Latino identified celebrities one the production team as well as the use of New York City as setting for a story about Mexican-American avoids reminding viewers of the history of conflicts regarding Mexican-Americans and U.S. colonial or imperial practices. Likewise, the omission of Puerto Rican characters from the New York setting also avoids similar suggestions of subversions or ruptures of U.S. colonialism and Anglo control. In this way, when looking at the ways in which diversity is manufactured and projected in the early decades of the twenty-first century, we can trace expressions of power and privilege to the ethnicom era of programming. Ethnicoms, are described by George Lipsitz as a “subgenre of ethnic, working-class situation comedies” (355). Centered on the culture, class and assimilation narratives of mostly white, ethnic immigrant families. When writing about ethnicoms, Lipsitz points out that many of these programs used New York City boroughs as their setting and “evoked the experiences of the past to lend legitimacy to the dominant ideology of the present” (356). He proposes these shows were successful due to they ways in which they tapped memories of the working class path to the American Dream during the postwar consumer boom. Placement of the Mexican-American Suarez family in New York City posits this representation as the point of entry for immigrants coming from Europe through Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. This imagery is coded as legal forms of entry for European white ethnics, such as *The Goldbergs* (CBS 1949-56), with a desire to “melt in” or assimilate into American culture. The process of assimilation is valorized through nostalgia for Ellis Island, New York City, the port of entry to The American Dream.

Ugly Betty is set in a multi-generational home and contains layers of performance of ethnic lives by the older generation set against performances of Americanness by the younger members are reminders of the “ethnicoms” of early TV. Notions of The American Dream, as Lipsitz points out, call for consumption by urban ethnic communities and functions to facilitate the “embourgeoisement of the working class” (355). In other words, television aids to assimilate potential consumers and increase markets to sell more products. While these shows promoted assimilation for ethnic whites, racialized subjectivities continue to be marginalized or ignored. The myth of the American Dream is typically at the heart of the motivation to leave one’s homeland, language, and community to pursue greater abundance in the United States. This “Dream,” which asserts that with hard work and tenacity, *anyone* can make it in the U.S. is exported around the world and attracts immigrants to the U.S. from every corner of the globe. Like any immigrant to a new land, Betty and her family must also make adjustments to gain acceptance and success in their new home.

Included in the ethnicom era, which coincides with segregation, programs are shows featuring stereotyped black characters such as *Amos and Andy* (CBS 1951-1953) and *Beulah* (ABC 1950-1953). Norman Denzin underscores the ways in which a racial order is articulated through the decades, reflecting in representation when he writes, “separate but equal social arrangements persist, even as melting-pot and assimilationist theories are debated” as he lays out social science theories regarding the various decades and trends in the first half of the twentieth century (38). These are early examples how the presence of black bodies on screen were depicted as inferior to their white counterparts and instructed to remain separate. During the early days of television,

persons of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent were invisible. Most of the ethnicoms favored white non-protestant ethnics. This included Italian Catholics or Latin Europeans, as in *Life With Luigi* (CBS 1951-1952) creating a commonality in how Latin Americans could be characterized.

Also studied by Donald Bogle (2001) and Deborah Vargas (2009), Lichter and Amundson point out how characters on shows such as *Amos n Andy* and *Beulah* began as radio products voiced by white males enacting stereotypes rooted in the legacy of minstrel black face performances, segregation and white privilege. The tradition of racialized subjectivities carried over to the way the television show was produced, despite the use of black actors (Lichter and Amundson 58) (Vargas 133) (Bogle 20). While much protest eventually shut down *Amos n Andy*, it would be nearly twenty years before activism was strong enough to make that kind of difference for Latino/as. The Lichter and Admundson study finds that much of the early representation of Latinos on TV was in the Western genres of *The Cisco Kid* (ZIV 1950-56) and *Zorro* (ABC 1957-1959) (whose title character was played by an Anglo) and while they may have featured characters that were noble, assimilated Latinos fighting for the causes in line with the American mainstream, they featured a larger number of Latino or Spanish villains and evil doers.

The Lichter and Admundson study found that by 1964, only one character in fifty was Latino/a, and call attention to celebrity status and Hollywood success achieved by Desi Arnaz due to the show, *I Love Lucy*, and the production company, Desilu Productions, that he co-owned with wife, Lucille Ball. In an series of case studies of Latino movie and TV stars, Mary Beltrán “interrogate(s) the dynamics of star production

and promotion” to examine the construction and “evolution of Latina/o and national identities in the American imagination” and echoes Arnaz’s importance to TV and Hollywood industrial history as well points out his use of “spice” and the stereotype of Latino temper explosions in Spanish when scripted, but through his characters and celebrity persona becomes the “role model of Latino assimilation” and by extension, success (1). Both of which, Beltrán writes, “rested on the vehicle of marriage” and argues that in a time when Mexican Americans and other Latino/as experienced racialization, Arnaz was “promoted as a white Latino star and experienced greater opportunity as a result” (60-61). Despite Arnaz's successes in television production and his celebrity status, Lichter and Admundson point out that this “did little for Hispanic characters” (59).

The blending of ethnicities into blanket categories such as Latino and Hispanic go far in the manufacturing of televisual Latinidad, a word I employ to refer to indicators of a Latino ethnicity. Because the character of Betty Suarez and her family is labeled as Mexican yet set in New York City, a space traditionally associated with Puerto Ricans and other Latino communities, largely, Afro-Caribbean and transnational communities, it is important to consider work on Puerto Rican representation as the Betty text engages these signifiers, intentionally or not. Frances Negrón-Mutaner’s book, *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* examines the ways in which Puerto Rican identities and bodies have carried the shame of colonization and racial mixing in their relationships with American artistic and media representation (xi-xii). Her chapter on *West Side Story* proves helpful in extrapolating existing views regarding the ways in which viewers read portrayals of Latinos in New York City. Her analysis of Puerto Rican/Latino queerness as essential to the establishment of a distinctly New York

art aesthetic create an entry point for reading *Betty* as both a queer text and a New York based Latino text. It also provides ground work to tease out the ways in which Betty relies on the conflation between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in order to manufacture an assimilable Latina subject. Negrón Mutaner's work is especially useful in helping to tease out the seams where the ethnicities are fused together to create Betty's identity. This conflation and an analysis of the use of New York City in *Ugly Betty* are further discussed in Chapter Five.

The conflation of Puerto Rican with Mexican-American were the subject of heavy debate during the age of "relevance television programming" dominated by shows created by Norman Lear with multi-racial casts and neo-liberal storylines. These shows aired in the waning days of the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, contentious periods in U.S. popular and social culture. While the presence of black and brown bodies on screen as characters began to increase, the narrative focus continued a white power bias. Political happenings may have made their way into minor subplots or jokes into prime time programming this era, but they remained minor. As Todd Gitlin writes about this period, "the hegemonic ideologies is maintained in the Seventies by *domesticating* divisive issues where in the Fifties it would have simply *ignored* them" (256). Ignoring issues and removing bodies from televisual view, also known as symbolic annihilation, are expressions of power and dominance. Who appears and how they may appear is a result of hegemony.

Chico and the Man (NBC 1974-1978) debuted in 1974 and as Chon Noriega points out, "it was the first network television series centered on a Chicano character" (70). He also points out that this was in part due to protest from newly formed Chicano

media groups who sought better representation both on the television screen and in the industry itself (69). The Chicano media group, *Justicia*, negotiated a position to consult the networks regarding their representations and put their leader, Ray Andrade, in a position as associate producer, a relationship which would not last the duration of the show. The show received criticism for the casting of Nuyorican comic Freddie Prinze as well as criticism of the writing, which Oguss points out, contradicts the intention of relevance TV: “On a narrative level, numerous plot lines of the show did confirm Andrade’s and the protester’s suspicions that issues of subjugation to a white paternalistic order revolved at the show’s core in much the same way as Ed Guerrero theorizes that the black image is often in the ‘protective custody of a White lead or co-star, and therefore in conformity with dominant, White sensibilities’ in the biracial buddy film of Hollywood cinema.” (8). Oguss points to the pilot of *Chico and the Man*, when Chico (Prinze) affirms his place in the hegemonic order, by “playing dead” after Ed (Jack Albertson) responds to Chico’s request and subsequent begging for a job with a, “Drop Dead,” and falls “on his back to the grease-covered garage floor like a dog doing a trick for a master” in attempt to “prove himself” and affirm Ed’s position of power in the relationship and economic structure (6).

Prinze’s Puerto Rican physical performance and affectations in the characterization of an East L.A. Chicano identified character serves to remove the very real codes of the Chicano Civil Rights Movement happening at the time of broadcast. Throughout American television history, there have been few primetime network programs that show a complex and varied population within the United States, or as Greg Oguss points out in his article about the cycle of shows that emerged in the 1970s

highlighting the “Otherness” of America, or, “relevant” programming to reflect the diversity in the American viewing and spending public (7). He also points out that this “diversity” was shown as an “integrated ghetto” (7). Rather than having Latino members of the activist community as *Chico* did on the production team, *Betty’s* team was comprised of a cosmopolitan group of internationally affiliated industry professionals. As a group, they fit the label Latino/a but with local, national, socio-economic, cultural factors, and relationship to American citizenship that differed greatly from that of the characters in *Ugly Betty*. For the viewers that are not privy to the meanings made within the code-switching between Puerto Rican or Chicano identity performance one may only perceive only “Latino Brown”, a de-ethnicized conflation of various Latino ethnic identities that fit into a category congruent with the binary racialized categories of black and white. Further discussion of the binary, and how Latinos form a buffer within it as well as the conflation of colonized individuals as a means to maintain cultural hegemony, is present in upcoming chapters.

A collection of studies across mass media commissioned by The National Council for La Raza (NCLR) presents data assessing the way Latino/as are portrayed on network television and how often they were omitted. They contend that the power the media wields shapes “Americans’ attitudes toward each other and the world” and this power and the disparate ways that Latinos have been portrayed across the scope of American mass media have remained “largely unscrutinized by the press, the federal government, or other independent groups” (21). Studies from the late 1970s concluded that the Hispanic/Latino populations were vastly underrepresented and one of them reported that “out of 3,549 characters, the study found only 53 Latinos—or 1.5% of the total

population of TV characters—with speaking roles” (22). While the reports find that the numbers of African-American characters increased, it does not verify if these portrayals have improved as well as increased.

It also asserts, “Hispanic American females were especially scarce, and that no Hispanics appeared on Saturday morning shows” (22). The NCLR also points out a 1993 study of Latinos in prime TV from 1982-1992 by the Annenberg School found that “Latinos averaged only 1.1% of prime-time characters over the ten years of the study” (23). Side by side, the studies show that for nearly three decades, Latino characters stayed at or below 1.5% of total characters on prime time, “suggesting that underrepresentation of Latinos on television was a chronic, essentially permanent condition over this decade” (23). As far as portrayals of Latinos on television, the study surmised that they “are more likely to be portrayed negatively, and less likely to be portrayed positively than any other group” and that those portrayals “tend to reinforce derogatory stereotypes of Latinos as people who are poor, of low status, lazy, deceptive, and criminals” (29).

When writing about the relationships between situation comedies, African-American identity, and the American Dream, Haggins mentions how NAACP president, Kweisi Mfume “blasted networks for ‘a virtual whitewash of programming’ in the network line up” in a call for more televised diversity in the programming in 1999 (308). This resulted in pledges by the big four networks to increase diversity. *Ugly Betty* debuts after this and follows from this notion in that has just enough ethnic American characters to make it relevant or diverse. Molina-Guzmán points out that *Ugly Betty* “is about more than a Latina or Mexican woman from Queens trying to fit into white corporate culture,” rather it rekindles the notion of the American Dream, a familiar trope “grounded in the

ideological belief that free choice, individualism, equality, and hard work under limited government intervention will all to succeed according to their abilities” (120). The key here is that the American Dream is available to those who are willing to subscribe to that measure of success, placing the individual as fully responsible for the outcome of their achievements. Despite the show’s amount of racial otherness as highly managed, or as Molina-Guzmán terms, its “careful production”, the show fits the discourse circulating at the time of the U.S. as a post-racial project.

However, as Jennifer Esposito warns, such labels as colorblind or post-racial work to “silence the talk of white privilege or minority disadvantage” as well as mask any present colonizing practices, territorial occupations, or other indicators of empire power relationships either within or outside of U.S. borders, thereby creating an environment where each group is perceived as its own consumer demographic and potential market (529). In her book about how media spins meanings regarding Latinos to satisfy market trends, Arlene Davila asserts, by the time *Ugly Betty* is introduced to the U.S. prime time in 2006, “contemporary marketing thrives on difference, be it along the lines of age, gender, or race, that can be targeted, turned into a market, and sold to corporate America and beyond” (73). In this way, Latinidad is manufactured as a marketing device to sell products, not to represent the realities of the actual members of diverse Latino communities living in the U.S.

In the introduction to the seminal anthology, *Latin Looks: Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media*, Clara Rodríguez points to the word play in her title, combining the signification that a "look" is something that can be altered, adjusted, and assembled (4). A "look" signifies a “looker”, creating an awareness of being seen, will see it and

therefore able to manipulate or produce what is seen in this look, and points out the power is in the not seen. Her meditation on the power of looking and being looked at contextualize the empirical data and historical analysis regarding representation of Latinos and other nonwhite characters in mass media with particular attention to prime time network television included in her anthology. Rodríguez emphasizes her attention to focusing on the similarities of experiences that Latinos have as she studies representation (6). The upcoming chapters depart from this focus to disrupt the commonality of this approach as an attempt to halt the conflation, or removal of cultural specificities, into a single homogenous notion of Latinidad.

Lillian Jiménez offers an analysis of the ways stereotypes and tropes become common texts, “Through popular culture, distorted images of spitfires and Latin lovers (oversexed and irresponsible Latinos), brutish farm workers (substandard intelligence), bandidos (untrustworthy), petty tyrants, welfare recipients or drug addicts (undisciplined children) had burned their place into the collective consciousness of Puerto Ricans and the broader society. In effect, the dominant ideology and its cultural machinery indicated to Puerto Ricans as responsible for their own conditions” (188). Like Jiménez, Charles Ramírez Berg includes studies of Latino/a stereotypes. Ramírez Berg’s own book, *U.S. Latino Images in Film* contains work regarding stereotyping including eleven theses as to how stereotypes are created and function (15-23). He maps out the process of stereotypes and identifies and explains many of them and provides analysis as to when they have been used. While he is inclusive regarding the effects of stereotypes on Puerto Rican communities, he is writing from a Chicano/a or Mexican-American standpoint.

In contrast, Richie Pérez examines the “more than a dozen Hollywood films, made between 1949 and 1980 alone, that had come to dominate the print media that deal with the Puerto Rican reality or in which Puerto Rican characters play a significant role” and the “cumulative impact” these images have played on Puerto Ricans on and off screen (153). Puerto Rican associations with stereotypes of juvenile delinquents and young criminals grew and with it characters that were either victim or perpetrator, adding to society’s view that Puerto Rican in NY, like Chicanos of LA were a group of over-sexed women and criminal men were reproducing at astronomical rates (154). During the era of liberal viewpoints and “relevant” television programming, a cycle of ‘urban missionary’ films shifted to a more sympathetic view, though, while Puerto Ricans were shown as victims it is only under the white protagonist that agency is given to Latinos (154). Many of the scholars mentioned above discuss the ways in which stereotypes function, how they are produced, and which ones are applied to Latinos. While *Ugly Betty* does use stereotypes, the analysis regarding the series draws from and builds on the existing scholarship regarding stereotypes to explore how they are used to manufacture and manipulate images of Latinidad. In the upcoming analyses, stereotypes therefore become known signifiers that add to the way meanings are read and ruptured within the *Betty* text.

Negotiating the Message: Perceptions and Formations of Latina Identities

In a study that measures the connection between the television representations of Latino/as and the actual perceptions of Latino/a communities held by viewers, researchers from the University of Arizona found that media depictions guide real-world

perceptions. The authors of the study, Dana Mastro, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, and Michelle Ortiz, examined research regarding portrayals of Latinos. The research proved representation to be largely infrequent or unfavorable, and in contradiction to U.S. census reports (348). In addition to the marginal portrayals, the research turned up the repeated use of negative stereotypes. Mastro, Behm-Morawitz, and Ortiz conducted a study to measure how participants viewed the ways Latinos were represented and their proximity to non-white contact and communities. Their findings exposed that “the more television White viewers consumed, the more their evaluations of Latinos reflected their TV characterization—markedly so when viewer’s real world contact with Latinos was not close, resulting in a greater reliance on televised images when decision making (362). Published in 2007, this study confirmed the notions shared by the aforementioned scholars in their studies regarding how stereotypes impact perceptions of Latinos by the White audiences that view them.

Also concerned with the perception of Latino/as by White audiences, Leo Chavez underscores the mainstream rhetoric regarding “the alleged threat to the nation posed by Mexican and other Latin American immigration and the growing number of Americans of Mexican descent in the United States” in his book, *The Latino Threat Narrative* (21). This argument asserts that unlike non-Anglo white immigrant groups from Europe, “Latinos are unwilling or incapable of integrating, of becoming part of the national community” (2). Instead they form “part of an invading force from south of the border that is bent on reconquering land that was formerly theirs (the U.S. Southwest) and destroying the American way of life” (2).

Reinforcing many of the elements of Chavez's theory, *Ugly Betty* and other shows with manufactured diversity seek to reify colonial power relations while incorporating code switching elements to appeal, attract, and maintain Latino viewers while satisfying a social culture built on Anglo hegemony. Chavez's theory of Latinos as a threat to Americans "posits that Latinos are not like previous immigrant groups, who ultimately became a part of the nation" (Chavez 2). *Ugly Betty* departs from this notion by stressing the ways in which the titular character is more like the white ethnic immigrants that came through New York (see chapter five) and therefore less threatening than other Mexicans and Latinos immigrating to the U.S. The discourse of the fear of a Latino invasion has its roots in the history of immigration in the U.S. as each wave of immigrant has had its period of rejection by the greater assimilated population. While the fears associated with Latino immigration and the Latino Threat Narrative remain "part of a grand tradition of alarmist discourse about immigrants and their perceived negative impacts" on U.S. society, it also recognizes that Latinos are different from other immigrant groups in that they are indigenous to the Americas and have been colonized by Europeans (3). Placing Chavez's Latino Threat alongside Richard Dyer's study on Whiteness provides a clearer picture of the context in which televisual representations of Latino/as have remained so negative for so long.

When writing about genre and verisimilitude, Steve Neale reminds that genre can extend past television and film and "consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them..." (46). Neale points out that cultural verisimilitude, which refers to the most probable properties of the culture or appears close to actual lived experiences outside the world of the narrative, while generic

verisimilitude, which refers to conventions used to signify meanings and satisfy perceived expectations within the “fantasy” of genre. The two are often blurred and “merge also in public discourse, generic knowledge becoming a form of cultural knowledge, and component of ‘public opinion’” (48). It is in this prescribed presentation of the verisimilitude of “Americanness” or “Americana” that whiteness is written, directed, lighted, and broadcast. As a means of social instruction, images of whiteness as “Americanness” promote the myth of the American Dream, and functions to market or brand the U.S. as a place of meritocracy, hard work, upward social mobility, and an intrinsic sense of justice, thereby manufacturing an appearance of diversity when non-white characters emerge that reinforces that the existing cultural hegemony.

Telenovelas as Cultural Export

Telenovelas are among the most widely consumed television products throughout the Americas. Traditionally a melodramatic series descending from the radio-drama tradition, the novela format uses a set number of episodes to tell its story. Telenovelas are usually broadcast daily with each episode ending with a cliffhanger in order to hook viewers into tuning in the next day. Often compared to the soap opera in the United States, the narrative of a telenovela tends to center around romantic relationships or a “hidden identity” as the motive for the plot. As with American soaps, issues of class often come up in the plot. In her article, “Tackling the Issues: Meaning Making in a Telenovela,” Carolina Acosta-Alzuru examines the telenovela genre for narrative and cultural signifiers from which meaning is made and identifies gendered archetypes that make up the characters in the telenovela genre: Women who represent strength,

sensibility, romanticism, rebelliousness, determination, idealism, and redemption; and men who represent the machismo, corruption, or honesty (200).

Acosta-Alzuru explains the most implicit differences between the Latin American telenovela and an American soap opera: “(a) Telenovelas have a finite number of episodes (120-200); therefore, viewers expect a definitive conclusion to the story; (b) they are financed by television network and broadcast both in prime time and in the afternoon block; (c) telenovelas determine the stardom system for Latin American actors; and (d) because they perform in various telenovelas, the identities of the actors are not tied to the characters they portray, as in the case in the American soap opera system (Matelski, 1999) (Acosta-Alzuru 194). The narrative formula of the telenovela is the generic convention which most productions adhere to and most viewers expect. Acosta Alzuru makes a distinction between what is known as a telenovela rosa or “traditional model of telenovela” and a telenovela de ruptura which signals a break with the traditional model and offers more progressive views or even critiques of society. The traditional model “is characterized by a central story of a heterosexual love in which obstacles and intrigues plague the main couple who have overcome these impediments and schemes to achieve happiness together” (194). The non-traditional telenovela tends to take on social and cultural issues taken from Latin American reality. In this way, these telenovelas present complex characters that are both ambiguous and unpredictable. In addition, these serials combine personal and social problems in a narrative fiction that speaks to the audience in terms of shared reality (Martín-Barbero & Rey, 1999) (Acosta-Alzuru 194). Considered a telenovela rosa in its original form, *Ugly Betty* employs a comedy-drama hybrid form to bring the melodramatic elements to American viewers.

Writing About Betty

Calling attention to the process of adapting *Ugly Betty* from telenovela to ABC prime time dramedy, Juan Piñon points out the participation of the many “segments of the television industry, and stakeholders participated in the translation of *Betty La Fea* into *Ugly Betty*,” including top ranking producers, writers, and agencies looking to markets outside of the U.S. for entertainment commodities (399). Interest in *Ugly Betty* as ugly duckling story seemed to appeal to non-Latino executives, as it had worked before in popular media and the show originally began development for NBC resulting in the project being shelved, eventually being picked up by ABC. Piñón explains that the “production of Betty, a globally recognized television show, faced the challenge of being adapted by the incorporation of familiar U.S. narrative and genre rules, from a telenovela into a comedy, with the double purpose of targeting mainstream audiences and attracting bilingual and English speaking Latina/os” (401).

Madeleine Shufeldt Esch’s argument that the popular message of self-assurance behind the ugly duckling metaphor pushes against the male gaze and Burgess-Wilkerson and Thomas’ claim that Betty’s refusal to conform to mainstream views of fashion in the office can work to emphasize her value as an employee. Shufeldt Esch points out that *Ugly Betty*’s rearticulation of ugly “no longer equals physically unattractive” (181). Echoing Mary Beltrán’s assertion in a 2006 *Flow* article that Betty’s inner beauty is highlighted over her ethnicity when Schufeldt Esch writes “audiences are discouraged from considering how Betty’s exclusion from the ranks of the beautiful is also tied to her working class Mexican-American background” (181). Examining the series as narrative

text allows for a deeper reading of exactly how “ugly” is rearticulated as Mexican, factoring in Betty’s ethnicity is the goal of the upcoming chapters. Shufedlt Esch’s work explores the ways in which Betty’s inner beauty creates an entry point for rupturing traditional televisual notions of beauty. Though she mentions that ethnicity and race are left out of this rearticulation, she leaves a gap that I hope Chapter Four will fill, as it examines the ways in which ugly in the *Betty* text is rearticulated as Mexican.

Shufedlt Esch and Molina-Guzmán engage the elements John Caldwell refers to as the “conglomerating textuality” including the web sites, fan sites, and promotional universe to conduct their analyses. The textual analysis performed in upcoming chapters does not consider the web sites and promotional universe, though that area needs additional scholarship. Instead, Chapter Four examines the way in which Betty is constructed in the pilot episode as a Mexican Latina and how that construction itself becomes a popular culture text and source for parody. Chapter Five considers how the four season series is itself an expansive text, and can be read as carefully manufactured assimilation narrative, which attention given to how the final episode works to bookend her makeover-as-assimilation. None of the existing work examined for this project addressed the final episode or Betty’s eventual relocation to London, England.

In an anthology titled *TV’s Betty Goes Global*, Janet McCabe and Kim Akass assemble a collection of articles regarding the business of *Betty*. Many of the articles focus on the international markets for which the show has been adapted, with just a few focusing on ABC’s version. And while most of the articles did not directly impact my reading of the *Betty* text, they did underscore the point that ABC’s *Ugly Betty*, with its manufactured conflation of Latino ethnicities and the subtextual messages included in the

production contain a view of American Latinidad distributed globally. For instance, Jean Chalaby provides an interview with an executive from British television regarding the business decision in the purchase of ABC's *Ugly Betty*. The interview, with Jeff Ford of the UK's influential Channel 4, highlights the attraction to the show as quirky and fresh and was interesting in the colorful, slick production value (68). Chalaby ends the interview on Ford's very definitive answer of "No" when she asks him if he was ever interested in the original Colombian version, *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea*, which can be read as his rejection of it as a South American or Latino product, and *Ugly Betty* as a distinctly American product. While this could be due to the production style or the language preference, the interview does not give a reason, nor does it make any mention of Betty Suarez as Mexican immigrant in the U.S.

This brings to light that the manufactured images of Latinidad in the U.S. are circulating around the globe and these images equal big business and have the potential to influence international perspectives on Latinos living in the U.S. Building on the work reviewed in this chapter, this dissertation examines the ways ABC/Disney's *Ugly Betty* (ABC 2006-2010) manufactures diversity to create an illusion of the U.S. as a site of multiple pluralisms and equality by re-scripting the ugly duckling parable as a Latino de-racialization project and assimilation narrative.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“He makes himself the body of the signifier. But the word that is heard designates precisely this transformation. It is more than a splinter of meaning embedded in the flesh. It has the status of a concept because, in circumscribing the object of belief, it also articulates the *operation* of believing, which consists in passing from a nameless disintegrating body—a ‘rotteness’ that no longer has a name in any language to a body ‘remade’ for and by the name...”

--from the book, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* by Michel de Certeau

When writing about the ways in which the *Ugly Betty* text manufactures diversity I situate myself at the intersection of multiple disciplines. Representation is political, historical, socio-cultural, embroiled in systems of power and swimming in a sea of signifiers. Therefore, it is necessary to construct a theoretical framework to encapsulate the lenses offered across cultural studies; film, television, and media studies; literary criticism; women’s studies; and Latino/a, Chicano/a, Xican@ Studies. I do so in an attempt to bridge these voices into the single theoretical lens I call manufactured diversity. This study uses critical narrative analysis, semiotics and historiography to examine the ways in which selected multiculturalism(s): Latinidad, Queerness, and Blackness, is (are) manufactured to read as integrated and diverse, while reifying whiteness, the black/white binary, and promoting assimilation. My case study includes a critical analysis of the pilot episode, moments across key episodes throughout the series, and the series finale in an attempt to locate Betty within the discourses of Latina/Chicana/Xican@ identity formation and assess where she is positioned within the assimilative spectrum.

Much like the assimilative spectrum and the socio-economic ladder, the racial ladder is also transmutable as long as the terms of whiteness are fulfilled. Daniel Bernardi postulates “the discourse of whiteness is nonetheless historical: a shifting and reforming system of meanings, that while consistently hierarchizing physiognomic and cultural difference, moves collectives of people up and down the racial ladder” (105). His statement reminds that the waves of immigrants in the early twentieth century who came to ‘pass’ as white in order to achieve upward mobility are synonymous with The American Dream. He points out “the benefactors of racist practices, are those who count as white”(105). In this way, whiteness, class, and assimilation make up the layers of a stratified society. Therefore, Betty’s implied transformation from ugly duckling into beautiful swan is regulated by the implications of whiteness within this social construct. For racialized Latinos, their lack of whiteness often elicits questions of citizenship.

Mary Beltrán points to the potential impact this carries within the lived experiences of Latinos in the U.S. when she says,

...given the equation of whiteness with citizenship and all of its attendant rights in the United States, whether Latina and Latino stars have been constructed as white, nonwhite, or indeterminate, citizens or foreigners at various junctures arguably has had a profound impact not only on film, television, and star images but also on public attitudes. (8).

Achieving whiteness is symbolically linked to citizenship and interwoven with achieving The American Dream and therefore acceptance into U.S. society. When Betty (as product, person, or representation of person) “crosses over” (as import, immigrant, or

born in U.S. of immigrants) into the U.S. she is therefore assigned a placement in society relative to the race and power structure that exists prior to her arrival.

The immigration narrative of Latinos that is tied to American mainstream identity is, as Chavez's theory outlines, considered a threat, symbolized by a dusty border fence and tied to the racial politics of the Wild West in the American imaginary. In contrast to this, however, is the immigrant story for European Americans which is tied to a nostalgic narrative symbolized by a greeting from the Statue of Liberty, who boasts the famous Emma Lazarus poem: *Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free*. Symbols like Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty evoke what Jan Mair calls "significant metonymic devices deployed to immediately identify the ideological instrumentalities inherent in American cultural production-liberation, freedom, democracy- the peak of human civilization" (36). My goal is to parse out the ways in which the series *Ugly Betty* constructs the identity of Betty Suarez before and after her makeover within the context of the postmodern, post 9/11 fantasy of tolerance and diversity in U.S. Dream discourse.

I am interested in the ways diversity is manufactured in the *Ugly Betty* series during the postmodern liminal space following the spirit of nationalist unity inspired by the 9/11 attacks of 2001 and the post-racial fantasies inspired by the campaign and election of President Barack Obama. Of particular interest are the tensions between the meanings constructed in the globally circulated cultural product as an advertisement for U.S. ideologies of itself as a meritocracy evidenced by American Dream sales pitch for upward mobility through the capitalist labor system. This speaks towards a motivation for the show's producers and Disney, the show's parent company, to reboot a Good

Neighbor similar process of manufacturing Betty's ethnic identity to be more positive, an identity that serves as the moral compass of the show and disrupts the repeated and normalized idea of non-whites as threatening while simultaneously working to reify whiteness.

If History is Written by the Victors, Television is Written by their Benefactors

It would be impossible to omit a Marxist reading from an analysis of *Ugly Betty* as it is part workplace comedy, part domestic drama. There are clear and visible class indicators in the show and many characters are alienated in a variety of ways. As a part of his character line, Betty's father takes on a literal alienated position as the narrative reveals him to be undocumented, then on house arrest, and then deported to Mexico before having his issues removed through a deal with the show's primary antagonist, herself, a marginalized figure, clinging to a power position. Most clearly in the *Betty* text, Betty is labor. She is a young degree-holding woman, hired for her looks, in this case because she is unattractive. Because this version is the only one to adapt Betty into an immigrant minority figure, that she is selected for her lack of sexual desirability to a white hetero-normative male gaze isn't surprising.

Betty's labor is low paying with long hours and her job duties are not clearly delineated, ranging from magazine-related professional tasks to her boss's personal life-related private tasks and problematically flirts with domestic labor. Betty is alienated from the product her job facilitates the creation of, the fashion magazine, because she possesses neither the body type, nor the budget to wear the clothes promoted in the magazine. Therefore, she cannot be a consumer of the very product that without her body

contributing to the labor involved in “producing” it could not be made. Betty believes in the myth of meritocracy, and therefore sacrifices herself in order to access upward mobility.

The self-sacrifice and the self-discipline it requires in the context of trying to fit into American society, the work place and into the construction of mainstream models of success call forth Foucault’s notion of self-imprisonment. This asserts how humans employ self discipline in order to self police one’s own relationship and acquiescence or resistance to the power class to read or decode the signifiers within these performances of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, religion, and privilege. Position in the power structure, then, influences such performances and the way they are interpreted outside of those fluent in the varying systems of codes. These codes or signifiers in a given text, such as the narratives and tropes discussed regarding indigenous women of the Americas and women of the African diaspora in the next chapter, inform and make up national historical narratives. To fully understand historical narratives, one must consider power.

Examining power relationships in a text requires one to factor Gramsci’s theories regarding cultural hegemony into the lens. Gramsci’s idea instructs that power is retained at the civil or institutional level and is enforced and patrolled at the social level. Thus, the illusion of an America that is a post-racial egalitarian utopia with an adventitious white majority in which all citizens are welcomed in an attempt to portray America and Americans as “not racist”, preempts any debate or criticism regarding U.S. imperialism. The function of creating an illusion of plurality serves to declare that society has purged itself of discriminatory behaviors and attitudes. Under Gramsci’s notion, the controlling power creates a national ‘master narrative’ to maintain the power structure and shut down

attempts to interrogate it. Betty's location along an assimilation spectrum, therefore, is impacted by adoption and adherence to this master narrative.

Gramsci and Foucault point out that systems of power are flexed through representation, cultural control, unequal enrichment, and control of physical space. The representation delivered to audiences about Mexican and Mexican-Americans via the physical space of the television screens in the U.S. and across the globe are tied to the existing rhetorical systems regarding issues of illegal immigration, unwed mothers, and power-based relationships. In this highly managed and manipulated stratum, Betty is unable to complete an "ugly duckling" transformation within this social construct and keep her ethnicity or cultural markers intact. In order to be considered an American without a hyphen, Betty must fully adapt the master narrative. To do this she completely transforms and relocates to England for a job advancement, physically leaving her family and birth country (the U.S.), reminders of the power structure to which she is still bound.

When applying the notion of cultural hegemony and control of a national master narrative to the location of the *Betty* text, as well as to the theme of transformation, one must include de Certeau. Transformation, through this lens, must be needed and in order for it to be needed, it must be aware of this need. This awareness comes from a sensation of not belonging or a notion of ineptitude as decided by whoever designates the master narrative. Therefore, according to de Certeau, this ineptness or lack, "also articulates the *operation* of believing, which consists in passing from a nameless disintegrating body—a 'rottenness' that no longer has a name in any language to a body 'remade'," to potentially gain acceptance into the hegemonic domain, or least in a place to upkeep it (39). He uses as example the use of the word 'harlot' to remake, or to be "formed according to the

specifications of the signifier of the other” with a signified meaning that “oscillates between decomposition and slut” (39). Such is the outcome as long as stereotyping and the use of reductive labeling of heterogeneous communities continue to go unchallenged.

In his extension research on the formation and circulation of stereotypes, Charles Ramírez Berg identifies the most common stereotypes for Latinas being: the harlot, the female clown, and the dark lady (70-77). Ramírez Berg also discusses the ways in which some films and television products attempt to counter stereotypes with practices such as constructing characters that are partly stereotype and partly progressive and casting Latinos to play Latinos (78). While ABC’s *Ugly Betty* series appears to be progressive in that it features an educated Mexican-American woman as its titular character and moral compass, semi-progress/semi-stereotyped characters feature as a way to signify ethnic difference or multiculturalism. When ‘reading’ the *Betty* text it is necessary to employ various tools, semiotics being the most widely used to flesh out meanings within language and mise-en-scene.

Bearing in mind Derrida’s notions of time altering meanings within various signs and signifiers, and therefore the subjectivity of the signs to meaning relationship, my reading of *Ugly Betty* considers the various positions and context from which she can be viewed. Derrida asserts that new meanings are constantly being created as time ticks by. Thus, the *Betty* text itself works to create a system of new meanings that can then be built upon in the future attempts to cast versions of what Frances Aparicio and Susan Chávez Silverman would call “Latinidades”, or the range of identities within the berth of Latino communities, on screen (16). This range of identities registers factors along the dynamic spectrum of assimilation. Latinidad, as described by Angharad Valdivia, is a “process of

being, becoming, and/or performing belonging within a Latina/o diaspora” (53). She asserts this process “challenges many popular and academic categories of ethnicity, location, and culture” (53). Regarding Latinidad as a conceptual framework, Valdivia states, “Latinidad enables a more nuanced reading of the disjuncture between the lived realities and commodified constructions of hybridity” (53). Thus, the recognition of a larger diaspora and networks of communities is an integral component of Latinidad. Manufactured diversity homogenizes diaspora or eliminates them altogether. In Betty’s case, a larger Latino/a community is eliminated in order to promote her as assimilative.

Borrowing from post-colonial theory characterization of marginalized groups that occupy the liminal space between a colonized subject and an assimilated citizen, Latina communities can be viewed as subaltern. Gayatri Spivak points out, members of subaltern groups, are “educated in the colonizer’s schools, fed on the colonizer’s theories,” consume the colonizer’s cultural products and do not see themselves represented as fully recognized members of the colonizers’ society (65). Rather, these marginalized groups, have endured systematic omission and stereotyping. Spivak highlights the dilemma of the privilege an academic or TV producer writes from when discussing the identities and variables of “third world women” and the complication such a label may induce. Grounded in my observations of Betty Suarez, which uses the theories discussed here to construct my framework of manufactured diversity, I have deduced that Betty does not consider herself as a “third world woman.” Rather, she is an exemplary of an ethnic white in the transition to assimilation into the American white majority.

Spivak's writings regarding the subaltern are helpful in examining the way in which the colonizer (mainstream U.S.) has influenced the perceived self-representation or in Betty's case, the illusion of the subaltern 'speaking' (U.S. Latinas/Mexican-American women). Thus, keeping in mind that viewing racialized Latinas as subaltern subjects acknowledges participation in an assimilative process that favors whiteness. To echo Bernardi, "When we write about race we are always in some way writing about whiteness" (107). Bernardi and Dyer agree that whiteness is "hard to see" as it is set as the tare from which we weight most everything else (107). Bernardi splits from Dyer, however, when he asserts that "whiteness is not 'everything and nothing,'" rather whiteness is "a very particular something: a representational and narrative construction with identifiable properties and a specific history" (107). Using this approach, I seek to identify the ways in which ABC/Disney codes Betty with whiteness in an attempt to dilute the potency of the threat posed by Latinas within the American imaginary. These measures of whiteness along the assimilative spectrum used to construct Betty's ethnic identity are key in teasing out the ways diversity is manufactured in the world of *Ugly Betty*.

Locating Betty as a Mexican-American in the U.S.

In her reflections about the global success and different cultural adaptations of the *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea* series, mass communications scholar Carolina Acosta-Alzuru noted on her blog,

The success of Fernando Gaitán's telenovela suggests that there are universal storylines that work everywhere. At the same time, each of these versions is

adapted to the local culture that produces and consumes it, making it a global product. Therefore, even though each of the adapted “Bettys” wear eyeglasses and sport braces, each one of them is a different version that is culturally acceptable in the social formation that consumes it. (telenovela-carolina.blogspot.com).

After being televised on Spanish language networks in the U.S. to high ratings, *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea* crosses over into the U.S. English language market and is adapted for ABC’s 2006 Thursday prime time line up. This marks an attempt to reach a community previously kept segregated by language and acknowledges bilingual viewers who would consume the Betty franchise, its commercials in Spanish and in English.

ABC’s adaptation is the only one within the international franchise to remake Betty as a minority. She is therefore assigned a placement in society relative to the race, language and power structure that exists prior to her arrival. *Ugly Betty* arrived in an era marked by postmodern popular culture and post 9/11 nationalism, nestled between competing media catch phrases/ ideologies regarding America’s politically correct and post-racial desires in service to an American self image or creed of inclusivity. Until *Ugly Betty* debuted, images accessible to mainstream American audiences regarding Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were most often negative portrayals traditionally regarding undocumented immigration, unwed mothers, and subordination. Because Latina subjectivities vary and cover a wide spectrum of racial, ethnic, regional, and economic variability, my first step is to read her for indicators of Latinidad.

Any coding of the Betty’s participation in or existence of actual Latina/o communities is ambiguous or minimal, usually shown to highlight Betty’s rejection of it. Meanwhile, as the forthcoming chapters demonstrate, she is manufactured to fit into the

American Dream narrative inextricably linked with European American immigrants. The marketing campaign called her Mexican-American and Latina, leading one to assume there would be signs coded within the mise-en-scene, dialogue, or narrative that would suggest a self-identified, politicized identity such as Chicana, Xican@, Latina, Tejana, or Nuyorican. However, this does not seem to be the case with Betty. The term Chicano/a signifies subversion of the colonizers and memorializes a lost indigenous past. While mostly referring to Mexican-Americans that identify with the El Movimiento Chicano of the 1960s as self-identified hybrid communities, many Puerto Ricans and other Latino specificities have identified as Chicano/a as a result of contact or membership within extended Chicano/a communities, usually in the Southwest. The Betty text avoids verbal reference to Chicano/a or Puerto Rican/Nuyorican identities.

Since Betty is of the millennial generation, and falls outside of the Hollywood indicators of Chicana identity, the next question would be to ask, is Betty is a Xican@? What I consider the offspring of the spirit of the Chicano Movement and Anzaldua's mestiza consciousness, Xican@ replaces the Ch with X in order to evoke both the indigenous past, as in Mexica, and to subvert the power structure, as in Malcolm X, or as homage to many who lost land throughout the Southwest by signing an X on a contract written in English. The @ symbol replaces the Spanish 'a' or 'o' as indicator of resistance to gender binaries, with both letters present at the same time. The two-at-once letter subverts gender labels and signifies queer subjectivities. Because it is a necessary component of internet presence as it is in every email address, the term Xican@ also asserts a twenty-first century digital identity. While honoring the advances of the Chicano/a Movement when it is spoken, as a self-determined written label, Xican@

realigns the priorities of subversion by reclaiming the term from a Hollywood genre that removed it from the politics of the Civil Rights Era and symbolically colonized it to be synonymous with a Hollywood stereotype. Thus, it is not surprising that Betty avoids self-identifying with labels that are coded with resistance.

Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Marivel Danielson, and other queer Latina and Xican@ writers often return to themes of finding home, building community, or in Moraga's words, "building familia from scratch" (75). The commonality in the writings on Xican@ identity are of owning one's sexual identity and seeking to resolve the colonial past. While there is a presence of a gay male communityⁱⁱⁱ and one transgender character (analyzed in Chapter Five), there is, as in most mainstream televisual space, a complete absence of Latina lesbians in the *Ugly Betty* text, except the word used as an insult towards a gay man in the episode, "A Tree Grows in Guadalajara" (season 1; episode 21). Because Betty does not grapple with what Gaspar de Alba calls cultural schizophrenia or what Anzaldúa calls *mestizaje* (a desire to reclaim an indigenous past), nor does she carry any signs or codes from Chicano/a popular or academic culture, I have distinguished her as NOT a Chicana, which informs my reading. As I point out in Chapter Four, even the poncho, the one physical link to a Mexican past is a synthetic one manufactured for tourists.

The case study in Chapter Four includes an examination of the pilot and the next to last episode of the first season, set in Mexico, to read how Betty is coded as a Mexican-American, and how that redefines what ugly means in this context. This process uses criteria extracted from scholarship and cultural production regarding Latina identity formation to locate Betty within the spectrum of assimilation among U.S. Latinas.

Because there are various ways in which one negotiates, expresses and balances the potential multiple cultural, racial and classed components of their self-identity, I tease out markers from existing theories to locate Betty's self-projected cultural identity. These markers include how she verbally self-identifies (as Mexican-American, Latin) and conversely, how she does not self-identify (as Chicana/Xicana@/Nuyorican); expressions of a desire to reclaim an indigenous or a desire to rejection of that past; and her outward expression of culture through language, code-switching, and consumption of culturally marked products within the diegetic world of the series. Subversive signs are removed from Betty and her embodiment of diversity is depoliticized. Her integration and mobility in the white world her representation is manufactured to reify a racial binary and an assimilationist agenda. In this sense, manufacturing diversity requires signs that de-tropicalize or perhaps re-colonize her, while simultaneously offering the illusion of hybridity. Because the show was marketed as a mainstream product, I examine the signifiers of Latinidad through a mainstream/dominant reading to connect the symbols of Betty's Latinidad to Hollywood guided meanings. The way Betty's Latinidad is scripted and visualized fails as a rupture, but offers perforations to maintain the interest of viewers from a wide Latino diaspora.

Similar to the ways in which Acosta-Alzuru uses the tool the "circuit of culture" (du Gay, Hall), to examine how "meanings are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes or practices..." (Hall 3), I examine sites within the text for their meanings. These sites or moments provide "a multiperspectival approach to the study of communication and culture" (Acosta-Alzuru 210). This project takes a similar approach to examine selected "moments" for the meanings of

representational signifiers within *Ugly Betty* as it fits into the landscape of American television, social, and political history of Latino communities in the U.S. These “moments” are in how the televisual text uses systems of representation, notions of identity, and production practices to ascribe meanings in that are made through coding within the mise-en-scene, dialogue, costuming, and narrative of the series.

Stuart Hall defines representation as “a symbolic practice which gives meaning or expression to the idea of belonging to a national culture, or identification with one’s local community” and functions within the “language of national identity, a discourse of national belongingness” and points out that representation “is closely tied up with both identity and knowledge” (5). Hall includes work by Lidchi who shows that how meanings are produced “are “inevitably implicated in power- especially between those who are doing the exhibiting and those who are being exhibited” (8). Much of Hall’s work on representation returns to themes of power in terms of how “difference is represented as other” and continues the argument to acknowledge that these “signifying practices actually structure the way we look- how different modes of looking are being inscribed by these representational practices” (8). Hall’s point emphasizes that the practice of representation not only affects those being seen, but those looking as well.

Rosalinda Fregoso mobilizes Stuart Hall’s work on representation towards the images of Latinos on film when she asserts,

If identity can not solely be grounded in an essence but is as well a construction of ourselves as certain subjects, then one of the sites for this production is within discursive practices and forums, including cinema, for as Hall adds, cultural identity ‘is always constituted within, not outside, representation. (28)

Therefore Betty's identity acts as a social marker that identifies a specific group or how it seeks to keep Betty's identity separate from specific groups, removing cultural specificity to create a generic hybridity as a step towards assimilation. Meanings are embedded in production as "objects, products, and practices as they are designed and produced" and therefore are intentionally included or omitted to alter and manipulate such meaning (28). One such indicator to connote community and cultural specificity is space. The space depicted in the Betty text is that of New York City.

In contrast to scholarly work examining how popular culture and New York City are tropicalized, the series *Ugly Betty* projects a de-tropicalized view of the city. Set in the traditionally non-Latino, ethnic white, working-class borough of Queens, the series surgically omits existing Latino barrios and tropicalized spaces. The show positions a Mexican-American family outside of any existing larger Mexican-American or Mexican immigrant or transnational community. In stark contrast to the existing Latinidades in New York City and its outer boroughs, the show gives the impression that the Suarez family is the only Mexican family in New York. By placing the Suarez family in New York, they are removed from the histories of colonization and ongoing cultural struggle present among Mexican origin communities in the Southwest United States. Chapter Five extracts meanings from this repositioning of her location/relocation of the family to New York City and contextualizes its meanings to read the narrative as a complete text within existing cultural discourse regarding New York and Latino communities. This is to underscore how her final destination, London, informs the reading of the series as an assimilation narrative. It is my goal that this dissertation successfully demonstrates the way the series employed manufactured diversity to promote an agenda of social equality

and the de-marginalization of queer and ethnic communities as the assimilative goal within the discourses of American Dream and whiteness.

Discourses across the fields of cultural studies; film, television, and media studies; literary criticism; women's studies; and Latino/a, Chicano/a, Xican@ Studies guide my read of the Betty text and lead to the formation of my theory of manufactured diversity. When applied as a method, manufactured diversity asks if a text reinforces the binary and therefore white cultural hegemony, eliminates larger subaltern communities to promote assimilation and ignores the assimilative spectrum to homogenize ethnic identities. This can be performed by checking whether a text ignores narrative and visual signifiers of ongoing colonial practices and current struggle or resistance, reifies "the master narrative" and engages devices such as The American Dream myth of meritocracy to encourage assimilation. In contrast, a text using multifaceted diversity subverts the racial binary to promote racial and ethnic plurality, acknowledges larger diasporic communities and recognizes the complexity of individual or hybrid identities. Ways in which a text can engage multifaceted diversity is by including nuanced characterizations of nonwhite characters to depict as many ethnic or raced characters in power positions as they portray in subordinate or villainous positions; to include characters that reference or are members of heterogeneous diasporic communities; and to show a multiplicity of racial and ethnic identities.

CHAPTER 4

MAKEOVER TV: TELEVISUALIZING LATINIDAD

Welcome to the *Casa de Cambio*
foreign currency exchange
the Temple of Instant Transformation
the place where *Tijuana y San Diego se entre-*
piernan
the place where Third becomes the First
and the fist becomes the sphincter
here, we produce every imaginable change...
from Mexican to American in one generation

-- from the performance poem, *Border Brujo*
by Guillermo Gomez-Peña

AMANDA
Hi, are you the “before”?

BETTY
Huh?

AMANDA
Before and After... The photo shoot.

--*Ugly Betty*, Pilot Episode

Televsual representations of ethnic, racial, sexual, and gendered identities for U.S. consumer market exhibition are traditionally biased to favor a heteronormative performance of whiteness. The act of creating a deceptive illusion of multiculturalism, societal acceptance, and egalitarianism while veiling ongoing racial and colonial policies and practices both reifies dominant Anglo systems of power and prevents its subversion. Arlene Davila points to contradictions of neo-liberalism that assert the civil rights era solved the barriers to upward mobility created by the “pettiness of race, ethnicity, and

gender” (3). She reminds us that if Latinos remain an ethnic and racial minority, that minority will become the majority, creating a need by the dominant group to expand whiteness. It is within this cultural context that the series *Ugly Betty* was adapted for American network television and, thus, differs from other brands within the franchise. By offering critical analysis of the series’ episodes (including the pilot and the episode that marks the Suarez return to Mexico), this chapter decodes the symbolic meanings positing Betty as a Mexican-American or Latina ugly duckling in need of a makeover to beautiful All-American swan.

As de Certeau explains in his book, *Heterologies*, the dominant culture exercises the power to label a subject as rotten, and therefore regulates the transformation to remake the subject to comply with the dictates of those in the power position (39). When applied to space and to those occupying the space in ABC’s *Ugly Betty* as cultural text, we enter it knowing by the title that she has been marked as “ugly,” a stand in for what de Certeau calls “rotten.” Similarly, because it is a franchise of the Colombian telenovela, *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea* and carries the universality of the ugly duckling parable it alludes to, audience members, who expect from the onset that Betty will undergo a transformation. Thus, we enter the series expecting a makeover and therefore accept the belief that the makeover is indeed needed. For Betty Suarez, the regulator of her transformation is informed by *Mode* magazine as an institution of ideal female beauty, with the Meade men at the helm. The pilot’s opening scene not only predicts Betty’s transformation, it summons Dyer’s theory of whiteness as synonymous with power and ideal beauty. The presence of Betty Suarez at first disrupts the dominant display of whiteness on prime time network television, but does so as an image of selective

diversity on television. Diversity manufactured in such a way, to suggest a tolerance or pluralism in the United States, while simultaneously reifying the relation to the power that whiteness signifies.

The pilot episode of *Ugly Betty* opens with a teaser in which the lead character, Betty Suarez (America Ferrera) in her trademark clunky plastic glasses, bushy eyebrows, thick metal braces, tangled and unkempt black hair, paired with mismatched thrift-store clothing, is sitting on a bench in the lobby of the fictional Meade Publication's Manhattan high rise waiting to be called for an interview. The camera stays in tight close-up as she bites her lip and nervously glances around the space. After a few beats, a brightly colored title card, with the words UGLY BETTY appear onscreen. The title card disappears and we return to the extreme close up of Betty's face. She smiles and nervously moves over to make room for a tall, slender Anglo woman, looking as if she stepped out of the pages of a fashion magazine. Betty awkwardly talks about the designer poncho worn by the more fashionable woman, whose European features are the stuff of supermodels and catwalks, the unobtainable ideal by any standard. One could opine that the character's entire purpose is to highlight physical attributes that Betty does not possess.

The frame cuts between the two women. The camera keeps in extreme close up on Betty's wider face and braces-clad teeth. Her dark overgrown eyebrows and unkempt hair is juxtaposed with the model's features: slender face, lighter well-groomed eyebrows and sleek, pulled back hair. To further showcase this difference, Betty compliments the woman's designer poncho, offering that she has her own poncho, a gift from her father purchased in Guadalajara, Mexico. The other woman responds that her poncho is from the fall line of design house Dolce and Gabbana, indicating a difference in class and taste,

but failing to mention the tendency of fashion houses to appropriate ethnic traditional wear. Rather, the designer poncho represents high culture while a poncho acquired in Mexico represents a low culture and taps into existing meanings that will come to represent Betty's pre-makeover self. Ferrera and the rest of the cast register fairly light on the Latino phenotype spectrum, intentionally ambiguous to further the possible recasting of lighter skinned Mexicans as ethnic whites.

Casting actors with mostly light to medium brown phenotypes allow them to be read as Latino 'brown'. Clara Rodríguez calls this use of medium-brownness the "Latin Look". Rodríguez names an anthology of seminal scholarship regarding Latino representation in the media, *Latin Looks*, "to underscore the tendency to view Latinos as if they all look the same" (6). The tendency to conflate members of various Latino ethnic communities, their experiences, histories and physical characteristics "highlights a common experience that many have had in the United States, although many perceive their experiences singularly applicable to their group" (6). For televisual coding, however, brown or medium brown suggests the constructed social imaginary that Leo Chavez calls "The Latino Threat Narrative". According to Chavez, within this imaginary, Latinos become "virtual characters" where they exist as "illegal aliens", "illegitimate recipients of organ donations", "highly fertile invaders", and "unassimilable separatists bent on reconquest of the Southwestern United States" (42). Viewed as a threat to "the nation in which they reside," Latinos of Mexican origin are constructed as "out of place" and therefore "often considered dangerous, as pollution, threatening the purity of those in place—that is in their 'proper' category" within the American imaginary (42). Chavez applies this idea of a virtual reality from anthropologists Daniel Miller and James G.

Carrier's concept of virtualism, which critiques "contemporary capitalist society and the problems that result when virtual reality is perceived as reality and then we attempt to make the world conform to that virtual vision" and affects the ways in which the media and anti-immigration laws respond to the Latino threat that is based on the "virtual lives with which we are familiar" (43). Prior to the debut of *Ugly Betty*, televisually coded images that reinforce this threat dominated what little representation Mexican-Americans and Latinos would have on network prime time.

It is from these fear-based discursive spaces that Francis Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman draw their idea of 'hegemonic tropicalizations'. They point to "a long history of Western representations of the exotic, primitive Other" as the origin of the way in which the process they call tropicalizing inscribes "a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values" with the notion that upholds the self-image of U.S. society, "which considers itself a model democracy and represses its neo-colonial guilt, displacing colonial phenomena onto so-called developing nations" (8). Reducing the berth of nationalities, ethnicities, regionalities, and history of various South American, Central American, Caribbean, and North American differences into one label, Latino or the state of expressing Latino-ness, *Latinidad*, is problematic for Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, who offer the term *Latinidades*, an alternative to a single labeling of an expansive community, rather encouraging "the Latino/a subject's own conceptualization of self and community" (13). While the *Ugly Betty* texts bring up issues that often have a political significance to various sectors within Latino communities, the show avoids taking a clear political point and leaves out any visible Latino communities altogether in the New York setting.

During the pilot's opening, when the company's Human Resources (HR) representative sees Betty, he looks her over, furrows his brow and quickly informs her that there are no longer any open entry-level positions. To underscore Betty's naïve, almost dopey sense of the fashion and business worlds as well as her desire, or possibly desperation, for upward mobility, she chases the human resources representative up the stairs, spouting off personal attributes she believes makes her qualified for a job at Meade Publications. The HR man grabs Betty by the arm and turns her to physically escort her down the stairs and toward the door. While his hands are on her and rather forcefully swinging her toward the exit, she continues to praise the company, claiming, "I know most of your magazines inside out. I try to devour as much as I can," to which he answers, "Clearly." The insult about Betty's weight indicates her body as part of her "ugliness" in this space, a microaggression packaged as a humorous device, something the show uses excessively, to highlight Betty's otherness.

In her essay, "Our Betties, Ourselves," Dana Heller refers to Pierre's Bourdieu's work regarding the social and cultural constructions of taste and extends this to what constitutes ugliness and how this is connected to mass production and global consumption (241). She also points out that of all of the Betty franchises, ABC's *Ugly Betty* is the only one to use a curvaceous actress to embody the character (244). While Ferrera is hardly obese, her body type is not as slim as the other actresses portraying this character elsewhere. Furthermore, Heller points out the political implications of notions of fat and the ethnic body, "when we speak of the discursive history of fat in the United States we are speaking, wittingly or not, about the unavoidable confluences of racist, sexist, classist, and nationalist ideologies as they become materially and even corporally

manifest at particular historical conjunctures” (245). Betty’s perceived fatness registers as ugly and upsets what Isabel Molina-Guzmán calls “hegemonic (white) notions of beauty and good taste” (237). Because “it is a sign of the dark, incomprehensible excess,” fat, particularly a large or fat butt, projects an “excess of food (unrestrained), excess of shitting (dirty), and excess of sex (heathen)” on to racialized bodies in this hegemonic view (237). After the camera shows a close up of Betty’s dismissal of the fat joke trumped by her disappointment of not getting the job, it pans upward to focus on Bradford Meade (Alan Dale), the company owner as he watches this exchange. Once the HR man releases his grip, Betty follows him back up the stairs, continuing her plea for a job. She trips a few times in her pursuit, as clumsiness is another way in which Betty is marked as ugly, yet continues on until the man closes the door in her face. By the end of this teaser, the audience knows who is ugly as well as who is powerful in the world of the show.

Once the audience is informed of Betty’s ugliness as the cause for her to not getting hired at Meade Publications, the camera cuts to a television in the Suarez home with a telenovela playing on the screen. This novela is important because it serves two functions. First, the consumption of Spanish language television is a commonly used indicator of the family’s Latinidad. It is what they appear Latino. Secondly, when the television appears, it is on a close-up of actress Salma Hayek, one of the executive producers of *Ugly Betty*. The Mexican born star began her career in Spanish language telenovelas, before taking film roles in Spain and later, Hollywood films. Her celebrity is recognizable to both English and Spanish language viewers and her appearance in this ‘novela within the novela’ serves to indicate the family’s Latinidad. The brief scene in

the meta-novela reveals Hayek's character to be dressed as a maid and holding a gun at her lover, who grabs her for a passionate kiss causing her to drop the gun. While this moment functions as a parody of the novela melodrama, and offers a nod to the show's novela roots. It is also a display of the stereotype of Latinas as violent, oversexed temptresses.

As the camera pulls away from the television in the worn but colorful living room and gazes around the Suarez family home, it stops on a preteen boy who stands in front of the television and announces, "I hate telenovelas!" This is our introduction to Justin (Mark Indelicato), Betty's nephew. The consumption of Spanish language novelas is the first indicator of the family's Latinidad when the camera enters the Suarez home and is immediately followed by Justin's rejection of it. The camera sweeps around the table, introducing each member as they discuss topics such as Justin's preference of Fashion TV over novelas, Ignacio's birthday cake and Betty's graduation from Queens College. Through a family conversation we are provided with information and coding to see that Betty and Justin are further assimilated in to American mainstream culture than Hilda (Ana Ortiz) and Ignacio (Tony Plana) while demonstrating that each of them are committed to a particularly valorized American trait: family. Through Betty's education and use of American standard English indicate Betty's path toward assimilation, we are reminded of the characteristics that have signified her thus far as ugly. (The speaking style of each family member is further analyzed in Chapter Five.)

When Betty's boyfriend, Walter (coded as white and nerdy, and not Latino), an electronics big box store employee arrives, he brings the family a refurbished VCR. He then immediately dumps Betty for her Italian-American neighbor, who is seen waiting for

him on her stoop, filing her long bright nails, in a tight, cleavage-revealing top. Big hair, cheap, gaudy jewelry, tight clothes, and a strong Queens accent serve to indicate another version of white feminine beauty that also lies in contrast to Betty. Thinner than Betty and with more sex appeal, the neighbor also differs from the supermodel from the first scene to signify a lower-class position than the “Mode” girl. While the use of this scene allows the viewer to empathize with Betty as a young woman who is clearly having a bad day, we are also reminded again that she is ugly--even in this context, a clearly working class borough, set away from the high rises of Manhattan.

In contrast to our introduction to Betty, an “ugly” young woman with aspirations of upward mobility and young Justin, who “hates telenovelas” Betty’s sister, Hilda and father Ignacio, sign in with more expected or familiar notions of televisual Latinidad. Hilda and Ignacio use English dialogue inflected with a few Spanish words accented speech patterns that indicate class and urban Latinidad. The working-class Suarez house is set up in a style that would be familiar to viewers of the Bunker family home from Norman Lear’s social comedy, *All In the Family* (CBS 1971-79) or the home of the Conner family from Roseanne Barr’s sitcom about working class-middle America, *Roseanne* (ABC 1988-1997). The use of the worn-out furniture covered by blankets, faded or lightly yellowed walls and shelves crowded with picture frames indicate similarities between the families as working class. With these signifiers connected to similarly classed white American televisual domesticity, the Suarez family seems brown, but not too brown. Inside their multi-generational home, Betty, Justin (the “whitest” culturally, though darkest phenotypically), widowed father Ignacio, and her sister, Hilda, a single mother who became pregnant as a teenager, occupy this not quite white

transitional space within the American Dream. They are different from European immigrants before them, but not too different.

Lo-Cal Latinidad: Celebrity Sanitizing of Ethnicity

The pilot episode informs the viewer that Betty's mom is deceased, making it the only version of the franchise to kill off the mother prior to the start of the action in this series. Removing the mother, who had her children in the U.S. and is later revealed as an undocumented immigrant, further hegemonizes the familial milieu as it removes a potentially sensitive and explosive figure: the undocumented breeding immigrant woman. The pre-narrative death of Betty's mother assuages fears among white audiences connected with the belief that, as Chavez explains, "the children Latinas produce are viewed as forming the basis for a potential takeover or reconquest of U.S. territory" (108). This sanitation process and therefore the highly managed way in which identities, bodies, and power are represented in the media makes up manufactured diversity, rendering them safe for white viewership yet still marketable for Latino consumption.

This process of how 'popular' or 'mass' images of human beings are crafted and controlled to portray an illusion of plurality yet maintain societal power hierarchies masking the ongoing policies and attitudes of imperialism. Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman refer to this process as a 'tropicalization' when they write, "To tropicalize, as we define it, means to trope, to imbue a particular space, geography, group, or nation with a set of traits, images, and values" (8). They remind us that this process comes from a privileged, First World space and, "is no doubt a hegemonic move" (8). In a further display of hegemony, manufactured diversity recolonizes Latinidad as

permeable, and assimilable into white culture, while simultaneously seeking to reverse the tropicalization by appealing to Latinos as consumers with middle class potential.

The practice of manipulating media representations benefits advertisers seeking to expand their reach to a bilingual Latino consumer group. To tap into this market, scholar Juan Piñón stresses the significance of the team of Pan-Latino producers and media “power brokers” to adapt *Betty* for prime time (400). Piñón notes that the “construction of a sanitized Latinidad by mainstream media corporations has followed distinctive traits of some groups that are considered more valuable than others” (394). He points out the involvement of Mexican born Salma Hayek as both Hollywood movie star and “first-generation Latina bears the sensibilities of a Latin American accommodating to U.S. ethnoracial realities” and the involvement of openly gay, Miami born Silvio Horta, “as a second generation Latino bears the sensibilities of a generation that grew up speaking English and was educated in U.S. universities” (404).

Piñón points to these sensibilities to underscore that “the performative properties of the body within the professional environment, the racial “Whiteness” informed by class were crucial to executives and professional community in producing a bridge to mainstream White middle-class Americans” (405). Hayek’s international success and membership within the Mexican upper class and Horta’s Cuban, and the coded meanings that therefore tie his Latinidad to white Cuban exiles underscore Piñón’s assertion that the use of a group of high profile, Hollywood (therefore, Anglo) approved, Pan-Latino professionals appointed to various roles within the *Betty* project as “cultural translators,” who were “crucial to the manufacture of a product that functioned as a bridge between generations, ethnic, national, and social groups” (404). The assemblage of a production

team to facilitate the cultural “translation” to specifically appeal to the White mainstream and simultaneously attract the economic viability of the Latino community to consume *Ugly Betty* is indicative of manufactured diversity.

Piñón examines how the production of the show “is a television business-institutional process at the crossroads of an historical industrial moment, one informed by the context of the tensions between global and national markets, shifts from genres to formats, and moves away from broadcasting culture to strategies of narrowcasting and diverse ethnic cultural identities”, uses professional identities as symbolic capital, and functions to “reveal the newly gained value of Latina/o hybrid subjectivities in the production of a commoditized Latinidad...” (405-6). His observation of the Betty’s adaptation process “largely foregrounding the value of comedy for U.S. audiences’ tastes, the project was also linked since the beginning with attracting more Hispanic audiences” echoes the empirical data uncovered by the Tomás Rivera Institute’s study showing that bilingual Latinos in the U.S. were among the consumers of English language situation comedies (402).

Piñón also points to Molina-Guzmán’s theory of symbolic colonization, when he discusses the use of celebrity producers Salma Hayek and Silvio Horta as “cultural translators” not to achieve “cultural authenticity” but instead translate the “commercial value of their hybrid subjectivities” in order to achieve the desired look of non-threatening multiculturalism (208). The use of the term symbolic colonization by Molina-Guzmán refers to how race and ethnicity are sublimated in media. For Piñón, this process is a marketing strategy to commodify identity by constructing “a sanitized

Latinidad by mainstream media corporations has followed the distinctive cultural traits that are considered more economically more valuable than others” (395).

Writer/performer Guillermo Gómez-Peña frequently interrogates the “homogenized constructs” of ethnicity and race in his work. He points out that in “realms such as the ‘international’ art world, pop culture, and the media, the new fetish is mild difference, tamed difference, stylized difference, low-cal Otherness, stripped of all political implications” (251). Gómez-Peña suggests society is suffering from a kind of fatigue from cultural wars and identity politics, shifting the dominant discourses to one that insists we “are installed in a postracist/postsexist society” that “no longer wish to discuss issues of privilege and power” and that “the new cultural impresarios want sexy images of race and hybridity, but without the political text,” and to not have “their neocolonial positionality questioned by angry primitives and strident women” (251). He names Salma Hayek, Jennifer Lopez and other Latinos who are popular among white audiences as there is a desire to “market Otherness, not understand it” (251). Both Gomez-Peña and Piñon point to the use of Anglo accepted celebrities with ties to Latinos communities and the removal of potentially divisive political standpoints in favor of a controlled picture of difference or diversity. The impact of this is to veil continued U.S. colonial or imperial practices or suggestions of subversions or ruptures of Anglo control.

Reading the Red Poncho: Continuing a History of Hatred

The poncho on a hyper-idealized white body is fashion, yet the poncho on a racialized Mexican body carries many meanings from a convergence of cultural texts. As Dávila, Molina-Guzmán, and Piñon point out, *Ugly Betty*, was marketed for mainstream

network audiences, not as a specifically Latino product. Therefore, the meanings woven onto the poncho are threaded through the American imaginary where Mexicanness carries a weighty history. As a global media product, *Ugly Betty* uses the pilot episode to introduce Betty Suarez as a Mexican-American immigrant that is much like white European immigrants before her. Rather than build a textured and nuanced Mexican-American household within a larger Latino community, the adaptation connects her to ethnic white immigrants in Queens, New York. The show uses a racially ambiguous cast and relies mainly on dialogue, and the poncho, to introduce the culturally Mexican specificities of the Suarez family while visually maintaining the familiar working class identifiers of American family life. This is juxtaposed to the privilege and power across the bridge in Manhattan, represented by the Meade family's high rises and power suits.

Once the pilot introduces us to the Suarez family, the camera returns to Bradford Meade. A symbol of The American Dream success story in his tailored suit, the camera follows the magazine mogul into the office of his privileged, playboy, son Daniel Meade (Eric Mabius). The elder Meade has made Daniel the newly appointed editor-in-chief of the company's successful high-fashion magazine, *Mode*. Daniel is seated behind a large desk, as Bradford Meade approaches. As his father speaks, it becomes apparent that the supermodel from the previous lobby scene is under Daniel's desk, fellating him. After catching his son behaving badly at work, Bradford Meade hires Betty. Betty isn't hired for her impressive resume: she is hired for her ugliness. Betty's ugliness, then, becomes a guarantee that Daniel Meade will not be sexually attracted to her, which, therefore, assures that he will meet the demands of being magazine editor. Thus, with her in a position to more or less babysit him, her job, is more akin to domestic help than respected

professional. This decision by Bradford Meade to hire Betty after a brief examination looking down on her from the balcony is presented as a logical one. Betty is called at home after business hours. This suggests that her at-home time is open for interruption and not valued. She is offered the job on the phone without an interview. Following the phone call, Betty begins to question why she would be hired without an interview but ignores it as the Suarez family celebrates. They are pleased and proud of this unexpected opportunity and view it as a chance at professional success and upward mobility rather than question the motives of the sudden nighttime call.

During the phone call, Betty learns she has been assigned to *Mode*, Meade Publishing's fashion magazine. Her clothes-loving, gender-bending nephew insists she wear her most fashionable outfit. Having misinterpreted the trend of the designer poncho for any poncho, Betty shows up at her first day of work at *Mode* wearing her red poncho. It is emblazoned with, Guadalajara, the capital city of the state of Jalisco, Mexico across it in gold letters. As she stands at the reception desk on her first day of work, eager to please, she is in stark contrast to the bright white walls and fashionably snarky attitudes. Once again, we are reminded of Betty's ugliness. However, this time, the qualities that make Betty "ugly" are conflated with factors that implicate her Latinidad, specifically her Mexicanness.

The poncho contains many coded meanings, it is symbolic colonization, and becomes part of the larger cultural text regarding Betty. The poncho (and the rest of Betty's wardrobe) serves to further contrast Betty from the rest of the employees of *Mode*. Therefore, affiliations of the poncho, el serape, to its indigenous American roots are decontextualized as a tourist poncho. When placed on Betty's body within the offices

of Meade Publications, it becomes a symbol of an imagined Mexican immigrant. Before we know much about Betty, we know that she is awkward, naïve, unfashionable, and Mexican, which we are led to read as the qualities that make her ugly. In this sense, what marks Betty as ugly are her indicators of race and class when read against those of the Euro/Anglo ideal beauty as set by hegemonic American dominant culture. Thus, Mexicanness and Latinidad are coded as ugly. Betty only wears the poncho the pilot episode, yet it marks her throughout the series and persists as popular cultural text.

When Betty arrives at the office in the poncho, she is met by Amanda (Becky Newton), who immediately exclaims, “Oh My God!”, Amanda then asks if Betty is the ‘before’ in a makeover photo shoot. When Betty does not understand what Amanda is talking about, Amanda repeats herself in a much louder tone as many Americans mistakenly do when they think the other person does not speak English. Not only does this introduce us to Amanda’s shallowness and obliviousness to her own white privilege, it calls attention to Betty’s eventual makeover, reinforcing her need for one. Amanda, like the woman in the opening teaser exemplifies Eurocentric notion of female beauty while Betty does not. Whiteness is an ideal beauty trait as women of color are inscribed with an otherness that will be discussed in more detail shortly. The show’s emphasis on the racialized hierarchy of beauty reifies Betty’s position at the bottom.

Although Chicano/a and Latino/a feminisms and theories regarding identity formation and assimilation can be applied to Betty Suarez as a Mexican-American looking for acceptance into American culture, Betty is intentionally coded as ‘not a Chicana’. However, due to the thin associations to Chicanisma carried by the actress, America Ferrera, who plays the titular character, Betty Suarez, those looking for a

Chicana in Betty will be able to project one on to her. Despite her location in New York, Betty is also ‘not a Nuyorican’, nor is she a ‘New York Latina’, but instead, a racially ambiguous, hyphenated Mexican-American, with a tense emphasis on the hyphen. Identities such as Chicana/Xican@/Nuyorican/Boricua signal an ethno-political self-awareness and are *self*-identifiers. These labels assume hybridity, political awareness, determination towards agency, and a seamless identity of pluralism grown from imperial relationships with Spain, post-colonization, and U.S. indoctrination. While many scholars use the various terms interchangeably, there stands a risk that the use of interchangeable terms only perpetuates homogeneity and the institutional assimilation that is at the heart of post-racial rhetoric, while manufacturing a mood of accepted diversity. Therefore the poncho is used to mark Betty as a second generation Mexican immigrant, with her relationship to Mexico now reduced to that of a tourist consuming mass produced souvenirs, separating her from Mexican nationals, first generation Mexican immigrants, and the generations of Mexican-Americans in the United States fighting for civil rights.

Betty’s confusion over the difference between her own poncho, and the designer poncho worn by the Anglo fashion model introduce Betty’s ignorance of fashion trends as well as her Mexicanness. She is an outsider to the accepted notions of beauty promoted by the magazine and the women who work there: fashion and whiteness, signing in as class and race. When the receptionist, Amanda, leads the poncho-clad Betty, an outward proclamation of her Mexican identity, through an all white futuristic corridor, Betty’s foreignness, is pronounced. Betty clumsily drops the papers she is holding and runs into a glass window. Her foreignness and her clumsiness interrupt the meeting Daniel has just begun, diverting all eyes and cell phone cameras to her. She becomes the brunt of stares

and snickers as she makes her way to the back of the room. The rest of the episode is dedicated to showing the lengths Daniel goes to humiliate Betty to get her to quit.

With the red poncho as visual indication and confirmation of Betty's Mexican heritage, the poncho reaffirms the various layers of coding it carries. From the image of the lazy poncho wearing Mexican asleep under a spiny cactus and questions that plague Mexicans in the United States regarding citizenship status to the connotation of a nineteenth century Mexican peasantry, the poncho is a reminder of the Mexican/Mexican-American place within discursive history of the American frontier. This history is imbued with connotations of the U.S. rescuing the western frontier from the savagery of that is often found in tropicalized narratives (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman 9).

Charles Ramírez Berg writes about how stereotype of the bandito remove the historical context of fighters in the Mexican Revolution, reducing contributions of leaders like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata to Mexican nation building to a "historically inaccurate and anachronistic" threat to U.S. nation building (18). The bandito, with his ammunition slung across his chest as an "X-marks-the-bandit visual sign," is a figure that dominated Hollywood's western genre through the twentieth century (1). The poncho, however, signifies safe, unarmed Mexicans that were in need of American civility and protection. The banditos may have shot up the towns in Westerns, but the indigenous looking, serape-clad town folk, were grateful when American cowboys showed up to ironically liberate them from their oppressor. In this way, the poncho as object connotes the safe Mexican in need of American guidance.

As a word, poncho or Pancho, has appeared derogatorily in cinema. William Anthony Nerriccio writes about its use in the Orson Welles noir classic, *Touch of Evil* (1958). In the film Janet Leigh's character, Susan Vargas, is a white woman married to a high ranking Mexican government official, Mike Vargas (Charlton Heston in brownface). As the couple is crossing the border into the United States after their honeymoon, they witness a car bombing. An admirable and morally sound government agent, Vargas must investigate while his wife must wait for him to do so. In the border town, as Susan waits, she is harassed by members of a gang. When one young unnamed member of the gang engages her in a series of events intended to scare her, she calls him Pancho. He is not revealed to have any other name, as Nerriccio points out, "only the one Susan ascribes to him" (59). Nerriccio reminds how questions regarding the treatment of Mexicans by Hollywood are "anything but abstract" (53). Whether as article of clothing, visually indicating Mexicanness in a western, or spoken as an insult in a Welles film noir, the connotations of the poncho carry with it a history of symbolic colonization and very real, lived colonization and oppression.

When discussing Betty's poncho, Janet McCabe, views it more as a nostalgic expression of cultural identity when she defends the poncho as, "a gift from her (Betty's) beloved father...a man identified profoundly with family, strengthening the 'Mexican family' and keeping alive Mexican traditions and identity" (3). McCabe extends her defense of the poncho as an indicator of Betty's cultural identity when she writes, "the garment has since crossed national borders as a part of migratory movements and diasporic communities," an object that serves as a signifier of "where she has come from and where she aspires to go- similar to Charmaine in her Dolce & Gabbana poncho" (3).

While I agree with the notion that the poncho serves to mark the beginning of Betty's journey to a makeover, I interpret McCabe's assessment that the poncho is Betty's attempt to express Mexican pride, and I disagree. McCabe's assessment Betty would have an awareness or interest in recovering her cultural heritage.

The detail of Betty's red poncho being a mass-produced tourist souvenir rather than one made by hand, removes the suggestion of indigenous ties or community membership to her culture of heritage. It further removes any projected indigenous threat or mythological past as cultural rallying cry from potential readings. Consider Alurista's poem, "El sarape de me personalidad" written during the Chicano Movement of the 1960's sought to wrestle the image of the sarape (poncho) from the dominant connotation of lazy Mexican and reclaim it as a beacon for Chicano/a pride. Whereas Alurista's garment is a badge of honor, a shared item to comfort a community: "nuestro sarape/ versátil/ and masterful/ in the art of living to challenge/ and the elements of opposition/ to our self-assertion/ to the radiance of our quilted heritage/ a colores..." (8).

While Betty's family unit is three generations, its construction is one of nuclear family and they are no ties or displays of involvement in a wider ethnic community. Betty's poncho, therefore, is not "nuestro sarape," like Alurista's. Instead, it is in some ways a red billboard, advertising tourism in Guadalajara with yellow font. Betty wears her tourist poncho to show that like, Charmaine, she too fits in and wants to assert that. Betty believes strongly that her values and willingness to work hard and earn her way, the very values that make up the American self-image, will help her fit in to the workplace, and therefore the site of access to The American Dream. Though her parents were from Mexico, Betty proves in her poncho that her relationship to Mexico is tourist. In this way,

like tourists (outsiders, who are Other to the Other), the Suarez family is meticulously removed from any ethnic enclave or pan-Latino grassroots community, which thrives in both in New York, the Southwest, and throughout the rest of United States, paradoxically removing the very communities whose consumer dollars the show aims to tap.

In my reading, the poncho highlights Betty's obliviousness to fashion trends, symbolically connects Mexicanness to ugliness, and allow the viewer to project their own meanings on to the poncho, most likely filtered through the mainstream popular cultural codes. Using the poncho to reinforce her Mexicanness as the ugliness she must overcome, not to valorize it, allows it to be the punchline of a string of microaggressive jokes and making the need for a transformation obvious.

The poncho is therefore what Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman call a hegemonic tropicalization and symbolically represents a space from which Betty can be rescued. The promise of a transformation is implied to keep to the global *Betty* franchise, which depends on the ugly duckling theme. Outside her house, Betty may be viewed as Latina and therefore belonging to a group of other racialized immigrants, a foreigner with indigenous ancestry to the Americas, and colonial lineage to Spain, itself, seen as "other" to the origin of Anglo culture, England. Inside her house, Betty is the daughter of a Mexican (revealed in a later episode to be undocumented) immigrant, trying to fulfill her dream of working in the publishing world. The way ethnic, racial, sexual, and gendered expressions of human identity are represented in the media, particularly, content produced and in and for U.S. consumer market exhibition are often biased to favor a heteronormative performance of white privilege. Creating a deceptive illusion of multiculturalism, societal acceptance, and egalitarianism serves to reify Anglo dominant

systems of power and prevent its subversion or disruption. While bearing in mind Molina-Guzmán's desire to "symbolically rupture" stereotypes and iterations of "symbolically colonization" in the text by offering different meanings, Latinidad is highly managed and manufactured in the Betty text. Molina-Guzmán's theory of symbolic colonization stems from lived experiences of colonization and the genesis of the formation of the Latina identity as cultural text and the poncho serves as a symbolic marking of Betty's body as non-white.

Impure Bodies: Non-White Women and Cultural Consciousness

Manufactured diversity works to mask American atrocities such as the removal and relocations of American Indigenous people and the enslavement of African peoples in the formation of the United States. Therefore it is necessary to examine the various theories regarding continuing tropes centered on racialized women who whether by rape or marriage became participants in the formation of the mestizo or mixed populations. These tropes inform potential readings and meaning making of non-white female bodies on screen. The histories of indigenous women and those of Europeans and European-American women were joined with what Rayna Green called the "female's reputation for potential evil" (170). While racialized women share with a subordinate position with women of European descent, there is great importance in examining various differences in the ways in which women are perceived in the American Imaginary and the tropes that inform this (710). The tropes of the Pocahontas Perplex, the Malinche narrative, and the Tragic Mulatta trope prove helpful to understand the subtext in which mainstream

audiences view Betty and allow a look into how meanings are made when viewing the sign of a racially and culturally mixed (impure) body and consciousness.

Explained in Green's theory, "The Pocahontas Perplex" is the way in which representations of North American Indigenous women are arranged to favor whiteness where Princess/Squaw oppositional stand in for a racialized of the Madonna/whore dichotomy and stereotype. Of these fetishized projections onto Indigenous women's bodies, Green explains, "Both her nobility as a Princess and her savagery as a Squaw are defined in terms of her relationship to male figures. The only good Indian—male or female, Squanto, Sacagawea, Pocahontas, Little Mohee, or the Indian Doctor—rescues and helps white men" (703). Green points to work by Philip Young that connects the Pocahontas-as-Indian-Princess who saves John Smith and lives happily ever after as a Christianized wife of an Anglo man (John Rolfe) in England, to concept projected onto Native bodies to versions of an old Scottish ballad that tells of a young wealthy explorer who, having been saved by a chieftain's daughter (hence princess), chooses her dark and exotic beauty and loyalty over a bride of his own race and class (699). She also discusses how this figure is prone to suicide or other demise if her white love interest scorns her. Because her purity, loyalty, and morality is the stuff of whiteness, "the princess" had rather die than remain "Indian". Her happy ending, like Pocahontas, of course, is to become "white" and move to England to serve her white husband (master).

For The Princess (Pocahontas) portion of the dichotomy the price for a positive image is high; "to be 'good', she must defy her own people, exile herself from them, become white, and perhaps suffer death" (704). and as far as her sexuality, Green states, "it can only be hinted at but never realized" (711). The Squaw (anti-Pocahontas), in

contrast, stands in for The Whore and is the darker, pagan, fecund, and unassimilable sister. Shamed and often cast as willing to do “what white men want for money or lust”, Green points out that depictions of The Squaw are akin to the constructed images of Indian men in that The Squaw is shown to “share in the same vices as Indian men—drunkenness, stupidity, thievery, venality of every kind—and they live in shacks on the edge of town rather than a woodland paradise.” Green illustrates the transformation of Pocahontas by describing her portrait:

the only one said to be done from life (from John Rolfe’s request), shows the Princess in Elizabethan dress, complete with Ruff and velvet hat—the Christian, English lady the ballad expects her to become and the lady she indeed became for her English husband and her faithful audience for all time” (700).

Pocahontas-as-Princess leaves behind her woodland paradise to “be remade”—once remade, she finishes her Whiteness coronation, at the source of Anglo identity formation, England, which is where Betty moves at the end of the series.

Latinas as colonized indigenous bodies stand in for Pocahontas without recalling the shame U.S. treatment of Native Peoples, and because the very component of a “Latin” identity is the presence of a Christianized subject of Spanish colonization, placing the burden of Colonial Shame on Spain, enhancing the virtue of an Anglo dominant society. The presence of Catholicism in the Latina/Latino figure allows for a foundation for which to build governance dictated by European social hierarchies and imported to the US. When considering the indigenous woman within Latinidad, and specifically within Mexican identity, a more violent trope emerges, that of La Malinche.

In her groundbreaking work on “mestiza consciousness”, Gloria Anzaldúa evokes

her, “*Malinali Tenepat* or *Malintzín*, has become known as *La Chingada*—the fucked one. She has become the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos. Whore, prostitute, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards are epithets Chicanos spit out with contempt” (44). Anzaldúa unpacks the internalized hostility Mexican indigenous women have shouldered for the results of conquest. Opposite to her Pocahontus counterpart north of the border, Malinche was not brought to Europe to be admired for her conversion. Whereas the Pocahontus Perplex argues that the indigenous female body can be an assimilated loyal subject, the Malinche narrative places the blame of conquest on her body, Anzaldúa points out how Mexican women still bear the brunt of this blame when she says, “The worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer” (44).

As indigenous women are perceived as either exotic protectors, or dark-skinned betrayers by their own communities or the Euro-dominant power structure, this bias against them shows up in the ways in which they are represented in or even removed from screen narratives. Anglo and other European “white” women, as Green points out, share with their non-white counterparts, “a potential for evil” and punished in the form of gross inequalities, dark-skinned women historically have carried this burden all the way into the twenty-first century. As Anzaludúa continues, “The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. For 300 years she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people...” (44-45).

This treatment has led to scrambled memory for many Mexicans in the U.S. and elsewhere to dismiss the complexities of identity and therefore wear the projections of fear upon their bodies, to believe themselves inferior to the Anglo or to try to deny the indigenous in favor of the European side, while, as Anzaldúa says, “When not copping out, we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and our Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S. *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas” (85). To add to this, it is time to remove the parenthesis from the Black ancestry and acknowledge it and to point out that Latino is used to connect with others caught between indigenous histories with Spanish conquest and then U.S. imperialism/colonization within grassroots movements throughout the U.S.

Molina-Guzmán examines the visibility of the Latina body in the media and popular culture and maps the ways in which the Latina body is gendered, sexualized, and racialized within the United States media, practices she places under her theory of symbolic colonization which “contributes to the manufacturing of ethnicity or race as a homogenized construct” (9). The historic hostilities towards Betty’s body are displayed in the second half of the pilot episode when Daniel’s friend, fashion photographer, Phillipe, sees Betty for the first time, he calls her “fugly”, vulgar contraction of the derogatory phrase, “fucking ugly”. The word “fugly” is used in American vernacular as an insult directed towards women who reject a sexual advance or do not meet a particular standard of sex appeal that make up the male gaze in American entertainment and popular culture. Phillipe convinces Daniel to bully Betty into quitting. To do this, Daniel requires Betty to

complete tasks that are filled with menial, degrading chores that reaffirm his power position and her subservient position.

After business hours, Daniel makes Betty wait outside his apartment late into the cold night to signal to him when one sexual conquest arrives so he can usher another out a separate door. Betty must miss her family's celebration of Ignacio's birthday in order to complete this task. She apologizes to Hilda over the phone and makes it clear she must perform her duty to her boss to "prove herself" so she can keep her job and move up in the company. Betty's naiveté, clumsiness, and willingness to ignore the micro-aggressive jokes from the other employees who represent a range of racial, gender, and class signifiers point her safety and play into her a distinction as worthy of the makeover that is expected from the franchise. While her need for a makeover is underscored, her possession of a bachelor's degree is a seemingly insignificant detail in the pilot, despite it being the only concrete attribute that validates her qualification for a job in the publishing world. Yet, her eagerness for acceptance and gratitude for the opportunity to work makes her appear non-threatening to mainstream American audiences and thus affirms her need for makeover—and suggests that she deserves one.

By this moment in the show, we are aware she is more ethical than the accepted powerful boss and more indicative of the meritocracy. The next day at work, Daniel forces Betty to done a skimpy outfit and stand with the models, once again subjecting her to a humiliating "hazing" and highlighting her fleshy brown body, again in contrast to the "beautiful" models around her. Molina Guzman does not mention this moment in her chapter on Betty, nor does other scholarship read for this project. By the end of this scene, Betty finally hits her limit and walks out of the photo shoot in the fishnets and

leather and onto the street, acquiescing to her role as outsider. She confronts Daniel and tells him she knows she was hired because of her “ugliness,” admits defeat to him, she accepts her failure and goes home.

To suggest Betty Suarez has returned home, Afro-Caribbean salsa music accompanies a quick-edit montage of B-roll of street vendors and racially ambiguous children that populate an urban park suggesting racialized Latinidad and functions to offers a contrast between the white collar world of Manhattan high rises and the working class, ethnic neighborhoods of Queens. Justin and Betty sit on the stoop of their rental house and sip chamomile tea. This is specifically chamomile tea; not tila, manzanilla, cafecito or café con leche, champurrado, horchata, or un agua fresca. With this choice, Justin and Betty sign in as “all American”. As Justin tries to console his aunt, after the humiliating way she was pressured out of her job. Betty and Justin discuss their dreams and desire for upward mobility in a version of English that marks them as consumers of American popular culture. And while their language prove their synthesis of mainstream popular culture, Justin acknowledges their marginalized position when he says to Betty, “People like us do not make it out of here unless you are like JLo or something”.

He does not say Latino, Mexican, Puerto Rican or Hispanic. Instead, he engages another celebrity code, like the use of Salma Hayek and Lupita Ferrer (a famous Venezuelan telenovela actress) in the meta-novela in the same episode, connects mainstream popular culture to Latinidad. This time, it is Jennifer Lopez (as J.Lo) that is evoked, signifying her as urban or ethnic working class member of an outer borough, and having “made it” in mainstream terms. He does not expand on how they are like J.Lo or even what that reference may imply about J.Lo culturally. The use of “like us” and “like

JLo” in place of an ethno-specific or community specific marker continues the ambiguity that makes a homogenous Latinidad possible and projects a possibility of mobility through assimilation for both Betty and Justin.

Upon realizing he has been duped by the show’s antagonist Wilhelmina Slater (Vanessa Williams), Daniel finds Betty’s idea for an ad campaign on his desk, placed there by Betty’s only friend at *Mode*, Christina (Ashley Jensen). Christina is the magazine’s closet manager and a Scottish immigrant. Without Christina’s intervention, Daniel would not have acquired the folder containing Betty’s idea. Daniel crosses over the bridge from his neighborhood into working class Queens. Despite that he is there to apologize, to ask Betty in person to come back to work, a seemingly noble gesture, his presumption that he can enter her personal and private space, signifies his position of power over her and perhaps an extreme sense of entitlement.

When Betty was at Daniel’s residence, she was made to sit outside in the cold. In contrast, he is welcomed into the house and watches as she folds a few articles of clothing creating another moment where the Meade’s blur the line between Betty’s professional/and personal space and making another allusion to Betty as domestic help rather than respected professional. He also informs her that everyone has problems, accepting his are different, yet minimizes the impact of his wealth and privilege by stating, “my problems are different than yours, but they are my problems.” Betty accepts, she allows him to use her concept for an ad for a cosmetic line headed by a very picky and eccentric fashion maven. When Daniel and Betty pitch the idea, it is an immediate hit and saves Daniel’s position as editor in chief. When Bradford Meade begins to compliment Daniel for the idea, Daniel begins to credit Betty. Betty interrupts him, and

insists it was Daniel's "best idea" giving him full credit. This signals her compliance with the power structure that exists both in the world of the magazine and parallels that of the real world, Anglo male power and the "other" or subaltern in positions that help to maintain that structure. Therefore Betty's brown gendered body is presented for Daniel's use, a necessary support system to ensure he maintains his power position.

Brown as Buffer: Negotiating the Black/White Binary

Media perpetuation of a racialized Latino Brown identity whose accented or lack of English and lo-culture or class indicators and completely contextually detached from cultural specificity. The presence of a Latino Brown identity creates a border or buffer between white and black and attempts to remove whiteness and blackness from the designation and therefore maintain clear racial boundaries, reemphasizing the relationship between perceived power and racial purity that was the goal of the segregation and anti-miscegenation laws in effect in the United States until the mid 1960's, just about a decade and a half after the beginning of television. Looking over the television record in the U.S. throughout the twentieth century, both negative and positive representations of the subaltern have been broadcast and woven into popular culture, with the "standard" position of power being constructed and occupied by embodiments of whiteness. Previous work in media and cultural studies have documented positive and negative representations that reify white/black binaries, depict gay and lesbian life as subaltern, and promote Latinos as a constant foreign presence encroaching on the idyllic white society.

The imposition of binary racial categories on a mixed race collection of ethnically diverse societies that came to be identified by a colonizer-in-common, Spain, and the

common language they now shared as a result. Once inside the colonizer created borders established by the enforcement of institutionalized racism, the media maintains that Latinos serve as a buffer between black and white. Their bodies as symbolic border, Latino brown is the common image projected on to Colonized American Latinos and Immigrant American Latinos in order to conflate the two in order to celebrate (or market) and recycle the rhetoric of the American Dream and create a connection between Latino immigrants and European immigrants of last century, while masking the ‘imperialist identity’ of the U.S. in their relation to Puerto Rico and the Southwest. It is because of this masking, or denial, of U.S. as present-day colonizer that the people occupied by the U.S. still see themselves grossly stereotyped or omitted from mainstream media in order to maintain power, despite present colonial relationships the U.S. has with Puerto Rico, various Native American and Native Mexican tribes on U.S. soil, the historical colonization of the American South West (formerly Mexico), its attempted colonization then economic sanctioning of Cuba, and involvement in other Caribbean islands and Central American countries, as well as military presence in other regions of the globe,.

The enforcement of a black, white, and brown color lines, perpetuated in the media, helps white America maintain mainstream power by creating the symbolic separation of race, white privilege, obtained in centuries past as a spoil of colonization, is still able to enjoy those privileges as long as an emphasis is placed on purity. With brown as buffer, and de facto definition for Latino in the U.S., otherwise delineated Black and White members of the various Latino communities must assimilate into the those racial categories as well. Often Afro-Latinos are encoded among African-Americans while Latinos who pass for white often assimilate into white American society or Hispanic

Whiteness. Hispanic whiteness calls on the signifier that is the term created by the US government, Hispanic, and the identification with Spain, claiming Spanish roots over the indigenous or the African ones. “By so consistently excluding and depreciating the wide diversity of Latin looks, Latino images were split into two polarities, the rich European types and the poor, often unidentified indigenous or African-descended masses” (Rodríguez 3). Angharad Valdivia points to this tension between the use of the term Latino/a as a pan-ethnic identifier of a grassroots community that operates in the margins of mainstream Anglo dominant society and the use of the term by the media to flatten the difference and ignore the national and regional complexities of the bronze or brown race that do not fit in the exclusive categories of Black and White populations and by extension the emphasis on racial purity, which contradicts Latinidad (133-4).

Racialized as brown by the media, Latino Brown identity is one of generic hybridity, and often assumed to be Mexican and therefore vulnerable to scrutiny regarding citizenship. Serving as a buffer within the binary, Latino Brown, then, is reserved for those who cannot assimilate or “pass” neatly into either American Black (AfroLatinos) or Hispanic White, as the term Hispanic is coded with markers as dominant mainstream Anglo designation and associated meanings of assimilation (Danielson 43[Anzaldúa 263]). Yeidy Rivero examines the ways in which Spanish language media remove images or depictions of Blackness. The argument in her book, *Tuning Out Blackness*, is useful when examining the way AfroLatinos communities within Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican descent are “tuned out” or “melted in” to the New York setting of to fit into the black/white binary. Rivero looks at the space in which “closeted racism” presents an undertone in the notion of “raceless” Puerto Rican identity, yet

allows blackface, marginalized depiction of blackness, “televisual invisibility”, deferring to an idea of Hispanic Whiteness (10). Richard Dyer’s argument that “the superiority of whiteness has been felt in beauty as well as morality”, a quality that is both the “explicit ideal” and “invisible norm” creating a society where “white people have long considered themselves the most beautiful of people, especially white women” as made evident in the use of the “gallant term for women in general, ‘the fair sex’, has a distinct skin colour suggestion” (70-71).

Dyer writes that white privilege is most powerful because it is unseen and that which resides in what is not seen is required for the ubiquity of whiteness to continue to function (73). As a result, mainstream representations about non-white people are depicted in ways that are constructed in deference to and in support of these notions of whiteness, and rely on a distorted understanding of what it means to be “other” than white in the Anglo dominant United States, therefore positioning non-white Americans as a disadvantaged minority, for now. Davila cautions about binaries, when it comes to majority/minority and black/white, a binary “effectively veils Latinos’ and other groups’ experiences of racialization, while blinding us to forms of racialization that take place alongside or beyond ‘race’” (17). The flexibility within the racial, cultural, and hybrid identity potentials for Latinos recalls Bernardi’s racial ladder idea. While a spectrum of assimilative possibilities seems more accurate to lived experiences, we see Betty charted on this move.

Thus, when looking at the ways in which diversity is manufactured and projected in the early decades of the twenty-first century, we can trace expressions of power and privilege to the ethnicom era of programming, which centered on the culture, class and

assimilation narratives of mainly white ethnic immigrant families in pursuit of the American Dream, emphasizing the mythology of the meritocracy. In their article regarding the adaptation borrowed directly from ABC's *Ugly Betty* (rather than Colombia's *Betty, La Fea*) China's *Ugly Wudi*, Anthony Fung and Xiaoxiao Zhang point out that Wudi differs from Betty in that she is a member of the Han (or dominant) member of China's ruling class. Since Wudi is a member of the dominant Han ethnicity, her "deficiencies" are only clothes deep, while for ABC's Betty Suarez, her "deficiency" is her Mexicanness, which carries a set of codes that, if not rearranged, could 'challenge the government's capacity to rule' and by extension the privilege of whiteness in the U.S.

Fung and Zhang cite "the more ingrained cultural prejudices" of the local modernity of Chinese audiences for removing "the potentially ethnically and sexually pluralistic narratives of the Latina *Betty*" which become "sanitized into the heterosexuality of the recognizable Han Chinese woman of *Wudi*." (275) In the original Colombian version of the show, *Betty, La Fea*, this Betty, like Wudi, is also a member of the dominant class and holds a Master's degree in economics. And, in the Mexican version of the show, *La Fea, Más Bella*, she (Leti) carries physical features no different from other popular actresses considered beautiful in that market, adhering to the preference of a more European standard of beauty over a Mexican indigenous one. The settings are modern Colombia and modern Mexico, respectively, and, while issues of class, race and superficial beauty are addressed mildly in subplots, the iterations of the show's protagonists in other countries are fully integrated members of their countries. In other versions of *Betty*, the title characters are members of the dominant culture in which they reside as fringe, or as Charles Ramirez-Berg calls "out members" of the "in group"

(60). The use of Betty Suarez as Mexican-American, allows the series *Ugly Betty* to receive praise for her mere existence on the screen, as discussed in chapter two.

Furthermore, an educated Betty Suarez on prime time also disrupts a tradition of what Deena J. González refers to as “Mexican-Woman Hating in the United States.” González traces the origins of this discrimination of Mexican female bodies in the U.S., beginning with the “dehumanization campaign against people of Mexican origin, especially women... [who] were labeled as witches or whores” beginning in the early 1800’s and continuing through the acquisition of the land that is the Southwestern states to the repetition and reuse of a song containing derogatory meanings and abusive images as a fraternity initiation rites at the end of the twentieth century (253-55). This tradition has been extended to and perpetuated by media representation, and even shows itself within the *Betty* text as she is immediately coded as “ugly” in the title and then when her boss and his friend intentionally humiliate Betty in the pilot. When writing about genre and verisimilitude, media scholar Steve Neale reminds that genre can extend past television and film and “consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them...” (46). Neale points out that cultural verisimilitude, which refers to the most probable properties of the culture or appears close to actual lived experiences in the diegetic world of the narrative. Generic verisimilitude, which refers to conventions used to signify meanings and satisfy perceived expectations within the “fantasy” of genre. The two are often blurred and “merge also in public discourse, generic knowledge becoming a form of cultural knowledge, and component of ‘public opinion’” (48).

Like most novelas, the Betty franchise contains the wealthy handsome prince, yet differing from other versions, Betty Suarez does not marry at the end of the series. Thus enabling *Ugly Betty* to avoid the ire of feminist scholars for the Colombian version's adherence to the standard fairy tale wedding endings—a staple in the telenovela rosa formula. While it was praised for criticizing superficial standards of beauty promoted by fashion industry globally, the other Betty versions across the globe cast actresses whose bodies adhere to their dominant culture's standards of physical beauty hidden underneath her performances of awkwardness. While the presence and ethnicity of Betty Suarez “ruptures” normative standards of race, class, and beauty for titular characters on American prime time network television, her lack of position and perceived need for transformation undermine any progress her presence might achieve.

Taking Off the Poncho: Betty Removes Ties to Cultural Past

If Betty is tropicalized in her poncho to underscore her difference to her “Mode” co-workers in *Ugly Betty*'s pilot episode, then she becomes the tropicalizer on a visit to Mexico to show that she is more like her co-workers, after all, or at least less like Mexicans in the next to last episode of the first season, “A Tree Grows In Guadalajara” (season 1; episode 22). In this episode, the Suarez family must travel to Mexico to obtain a visa in order to correct his immigration status. This subplot received praise for giving visibility to the plight of the undocumented, however, in the *Ugly Betty* narrative, an issue affecting many communities and that carry complicated and multiple components, is reduced to series of bureaucratic tasks, keeping out elements that make it a human rights disaster. For instance, Betty as the voice of morality convinces Ignacio to self-

deport. This eliminates any allusion to arrests, immigration raids, detainments or risk of violence often experienced. Instead, Betty and her family treat the trip as if it were it a vacation. With first class airfare provided by Betty's boss, Daniel, Betty and her sister are literal American tourists fumbling with their excess of luggage and mispronouncing Spanish words.

In this episode, Betty's styling is de-tropicalized. Her hair is subtle—not disheveled or frizzy, rather smoother and brushed. Her clothes maintain the familiar A-line shaped skirts and layered blouses congruent with previous outfits. However, the patterns used in this episode are softer and Betty's American patriotism is highlighted in the colors red, white, and blue. In contrast to Betty and Hilda's now more obvious Americanness, Ignacio's Mexican family is tropicalized. For instance, his sister's house is has a much brighter color palate than his own Queens, NY home. Ignacio's family is half drunk on alcoholic punch, and speak English with thick Spanish accents when they welcome home Ignacio and his family. Betty has an encounter with a curandera (folk healer) at the family reunion that inspires Betty to seek out more about her mother's family. This stereotyped mystical meeting also inspires her to fight for her love interest, nerdy Mode accountant Henry Grubstick (Christopher Gorham). This encounter sets into motion a plot device that at first looks like an opportunity for Betty to begin a quest connecting her to her cultural heritage, but ultimately functions as a way for Betty to sever any with a ties a cultural past, proving she is ready to move up on the racial ladder/assimilation spectrum.

As an interesting side detail regarding pro-assimilation themes is when Justin is displeased with having to travel to Mexico as he has been selected to be an understudy to

play Tony in his school's production of *West Side Story*. One way of reading this detail is that cross-casting a Latino kids to play the white lead in a play about how prejudice destroys lives may be progressive until the realization that the idea behind the play is the cultural resistance to a white and Puerto Rican mixed couple. Another way of reading this is that Justin sees himself as white, therefore it is natural he would play Tony, the white lead. If Justin sees himself as white, it is an indication of his assimilative desires. This paired the casting of Rita Moreno as Mirta, Ignacio's sister, furthers a subtext of assimilative desires as Moreno is most famous for her Oscar win as Anita and the performance of the song, "America," a pro-assimilation show stopper of a song (an extended discussion of the relevance of *West Side Story* to Betty appears in the following chapter).

Though Betty's make up and costuming are toned down to contrast her against the "real" Mexican characters, her behavior is more argumentative and aggressive. Once she decides to seek out her estranged maternal grandmother she gets her Aunt Mirta drunk to pump her for information and she tricks Hilda into going with her to locate the blue house indicated to her by the curandera. Betty and Hilda are obvious foreigners when they ride a bus over dirt roads to an outer village. The crowded bus with a food vendor and third world riders leaves them at a desolate countryside stop when Betty jumps off of the bus and runs after someone she believes to be Henry. Each time this figure appears, it is preceded by a cut to and sound of a hawk gliding in the sky, shot with a grainy bluish filter to give it a mystical appearance and hint of danger. For some viewers, the image of the back of a young dark haired woman running into empty hillside toward an unknown male figure while her sister desperately calls her to come back may

trigger memory of the hundreds of women who disappeared in the hills near the border town of Juarez and were murdered during this era.

For mainstream viewers who remained unaware of this travesty, it could be read as Betty running away from Mexico (the past) and towards Henry (the future), the character most like Betty: awkward, nerdy, glasses-wearing. The figure leads her to the house where she finds her maternal grandmother. Suffering from dementia, the grandmother mistakes Betty for her mother, Rosa, the night she fled with Ignacio to the United States and offers her blessing. This allows Betty to gain closure, not only with the questions she had about her mother's family, but also closure with the symbolic motherland. Once her father arrives to collect her, she tells him, "I want to go home," affirming her identity as American. By the end of the first season, Betty's identity has been coded primarily in what it is not. The text carefully crafts an identity for her that is not coded as Chicana, Xican@, Mexican, or Latina all of which connote a potential for membership in an ethnic minority and potential for resistance. Instead, like Justin's desire to be Tony, an ethnic white assimilating in to the U.S., Betty is coded to read less Latina and more assimilative ethnic white.

Micro-Aggressive Parody: Betty's Poncho Lives On as Cultural Text

In *Ugly Betty's* fifth episode, Marc dons the poncho with a black wig, glasses, and fake braces to dress as Betty for his Halloween costume in the episode "The Lyin', the Witch, and the Wardrobe" (season 1, episode 5). For Marc and Betty, the poncho carries vastly different meanings. First, Marc wearing the poncho as dressing as a Mexican person treads a very tense line regarding the very real occurrences of parties held by

white people in brown and black face. This potential reading is layered with Marc being in drag as Betty, with gender performance trumping a race-based performance, and imagines Betty as gay white male rather than Marc as brown Mexican immigrant. More telling of the pervasive way in which Mexican female bodies signal space that can be either feared, hated, or made safe, queer or white, is the parodies of Betty Suarez that exist in the non-diegetic televisual space.

For decades, to be parodied on the television show, *Saturday Night Live* (NBC 1975-), also known as SNL, has been a common measure of success in commercial popular and entertainment culture in the United States. As a popular training ground for up-and-coming comedy writers, performers and celebrity guests hosts, *SNL* often relies on parodies of entertainment, cultural, and political figures as easy punch lines for the skits that form the show's live broadcast, often creating pop culture texts that frequently generate infamy. If this is an accurate assessment, the symbolic inclusion into dominant mainstream American popular culture was made official for *Ugly Betty*, on October 7, 2006 just one week after the pilot debuted.

The parody of *Betty* appeared during the long running *SNL* segment, "Weekend Update". This staple sketch features comedians Amy Poehler and Seth Meyers performing the roles of news anchors delivering satirical twists on current events and interviewing actors performing parodies of cultural figures, real or imagined. It begins with Amy Poehler commenting on the rollout of the new TV season and the high ratings received by ABC's new show, *Ugly Betty*. Poehler sets up the joke by introducing the star of NBC's new rival show, "Fugly Betsy". The camera then moves over to reveal male cast member Fred Armisen dressed in a wig, glasses and braces, and a "B" necklace

like the one worn by Betty Suarez. Armisen as “Betsy” explains that her show is about an “intelligent but unattractive young girl who gets her dream job as an assistant at a fashion magazine”. Poehler responds by suggesting that NBC is “ripping off *Ugly Betty*” to which Armisen/Betsy responds that “Fugly Betsy” is different because there is a lot more sex, and that “if America is buying ugly, then we are a fugly superstore!”

Poehler then asks if Betsy had any previous television experience before this show. Betsy’s answer is a punchline: her only other role was as “a bludgeoning victim on CSI”. Poehler points out that *Ugly Betty*’s early success can be credited to its start as a Colombian telenovela, and its celebrity producer, Salma Hayek. “Betsy” then responds that they also have “an impressive executive producer” and calls for Spanish entertainer, Charo, who gained popularity among U.S. audiences in the 1970’s through her sex appeal and comedic performances, to join them. Cast member Maya Rudolph, dressed in a cleavage revealing dress and wig in an imitation of Charo’s signature sexualized style explains in a thick Spanish accent, that the show will “inspire a generation of fugly girls to a-reach their dreams” and if they cannot reach those dreams, then should “have sex with a lot of peoples.”

Parody relies on the delivery and representation of signs that are encoded and rely on the audience’s ability to decode them in order to understand the humor. However, the process of interpretation is a variable one as Rosalinda Fregoso points out, “the process of encoding particular social and cultural meanings onto images/language/sounds does not correspond neatly with decoding strategies” (51). In this parody, Arminsen’s cross-dressing performance as a female character that plays herself on a show is meant to highlight her extreme unattractiveness and blurs the line between performance and

persona. In this way, the sex in “Fugly Betsy”, and the bludgeoning in *CSI* become real to the body of “Betsy” who is to be read as a substitute for “Betty”, and by extension, Latinas in the United States. The parody also plays on the ways Latinas have been historically marginalized in U.S. media.

The parody relies on a comparison of Charo’s use of the stereotype of the oversexed Latina bombshell as a crossover comic celebrity persona with Salma Hayek’s similar characterization and crossover popularity. Isabel Molina Guzmán argues that, “In Hayek’s case, where racial and ethnic identity is cinematically undetermined, difference is usually marked by the performance of a hypersexuality that stands in opposition to white heteronormative definitions of socially appropriate feminine sexuality” (120). This functions because of the way Charo and “Hayek’s Spanish-accented English always already marks her ethnic difference, bringing to bear on her body a history of racialized and sexualized Western signifiers about Latinidad” (121). Charo, as a European woman from Spain—Mexico’s colonizer—is able to capitalize on these signifiers appropriated for the construction of her persona as a character, lending an additional layer of meaning to the relationship between the juxtaposition of Charo with Betsy and by extension Hayek with Betty, further conflating the differences among Latina national identities.

The skit calls attention to and then confuses the binary between the curvy and hypersexualized exaggeration of Latina bodies and the violent sexualization of nonstandard notions of beauty, or ugliness as represented by Betsy/Betty, couched in oblivious innocence to signify wholesomeness further problematizes the way Latinas are viewed in the U.S. The stereotype of the over-sexed Latina, therefore, is imposed on Betsy/Betty despite the Fugly/Ugly designation, equating it with Latinidad. By linking

otherness to promiscuity the parody highlights the racialized spaces Salma/Charo and therefore Betty/Betsy, must traverse. Furthermore, the acquisition of this “project” by Charo/Salma can be read as a reminder of Hayek’s earlier English language project involving “ugliness” (126), when she produced and acted the title role in a biopic about Frida Kahlo, for which she received an Academy Award nomination in the United States and criticism in her home country of Mexico (126). Molina Guzmán points out that while Hayek received much attention for performing “nontraditional femininity, she ultimately takes Kahlo into the sensual and sexual” (126). However problematic this and the many other parodies that grew out of the *Betty, La Fea* franchise as an exportable commodity are, that they are circulating around the worldwide web underscores the fact that *Betty* has secured a place firmly inside American and transnational global commercial popular culture.

One year after the pilot debut of *Ugly Betty* and the *SNL*’s “Fugly Betsy” skit, another parody emerged following the 2007 Golden Globes, where *Ugly Betty* won multiple awards. In a skit for an award show on the TVLand cable network, geriatric comedienne Betty White, best known for her most recent portrayals of innocent and often naïve characters, not too dissimilar to Betty Suarez’ persona as idealistic optimist, offered her own interpretation of *Ugly Betty* titled “Ugly Betty White”. While this parody uses a knowledge of the show itself to make jokes about culture that intersect between comparisons to TV characters from the late twentieth century, signs that reference whiteness to stand in for the use of words that directly denote Latinidad. Like Armisen, White also dons the black wig, braces, and glasses, she adds the red Guadalajara poncho that becomes a distinct signifier of the American version of the Betty coding system.

White's version amplifies *Ugly Betty's* Latinidad through the use of dialogue delivered by celebrity TV personalities from previous generations. Additionally, adding Betty White's last name to the title, "Ugly Betty White" serves a dual purpose: to comically appropriate the name with a word play, and then to satirically inject racialized meanings of whiteness to the proper name White.

Playing the role of Daniel, the playboy boss, in White's parody is George Hamilton, himself famous for playing wealthy womanizing characters, comments that Betty, dressed in her poncho, glasses, braces, and hair, "looks like the piñata at Salma Hayek's baby shower." Not only does this comparison evoke the beating with a stick a piñata receives by party goers to release the candy, as well as references the bludgeoning mentioned by Armisen's character during the *SNL* parody, the transference of Betty's body into a piñata to be beaten, and Hayek's body into a vessel of fertility plays on the fears carried by the mainstream American imaginary about Latina bodies.

Another joke in the parody features White speaking with Joan Collins in her former character, Alexis Morell Carrington Colby Dexter Rowan, the antagonist and professional ex-wife from the 80's serial *Dynasty*, as Wilhelmina, the primary antagonist in *Ugly Betty*. Collins as Alexis as Wilhelmina warns Betty White as Betty Suarez to "not tell anyone you are a Carrington," to which Betty as Betty responds, "I didn't think they discriminated as Mode", injecting the meaning that Carrington as stand in for Mexican or Latina, which implies that Betty's "status" is something commonly or potentially discriminated against. Collins extends the joke by layering another meaning to the word discriminating, alluding to the magazine as stand in for high taste and popular/mainstream culture, to call attention to Betty's class status and taste level. The

final segment of the parody takes place on a set that is meant to replicate the modest Queens home the Suarez family occupies and opens with Betty lamenting to her what appears to be her father and sister, that they should have stayed in St. Olaf, the hometown of Betty White's naïve idealistic character, Rose from *The Golden Girls* (NBC 1985-1992). Here St. Olaf becomes a substitute for Mexico. At this moment, Eric Estrada, famous for his role on *ChiPs* as one of the few Latino good guys on 70s era television, uses a thick Spanish accent to inform Betty they could not return home because he killed a man.

A far cry from the law enforcing motorcycle cop, Ponch, Estrada's lines also play on Anglo fears of Mexicans as undocumented and criminal. The parody ends with the Charo revealing herself as Betty's sister, Hilda. A complex mix of stereotypes about Latinas, Hilda's performance by Charo herself serves to punctuate this and once again signals the sexual politics ascribed to the Latina body while simultaneously referencing the earlier *SNL* skit. While the use of TV characters from the past in the parody "Ugly Betty White" works to reveal the traditional absence of Latinos on TV past, the degradation of Betty and her Latino family in the dialogue for comic effect undermine this point and reaffirm the statement Clara Rodriguez makes that, "underrepresentation and negative portrayals, have been persistent themes in film, in television, and in the news" and that these problems have "worsened with time" (13).

Since the rise of television in the United States, the issue of race has often come under critical scrutiny. The image that America has been projecting of itself throughout the U.S. and the rest of the world has been a highly managed state of affairs, placing middle class Anglo America as society's touchstone for what is deemed "normal." And

the parodies of Betty demonstrate a cultural policing, pointing out what seems different or queer. As Richard Dyer points out, “The assumption that a ‘normal’ face is a white face runs through the published advice given on photo- and cinematography,” even the technology behind the film and video industry is constructed around this notion (94). It is in this prescribed presentation of “Americanness” or “Americana” that whiteness is written, directed, lighted, and broadcast. As a means of social instruction, *Ugly Betty* promotes assimilation as the path to the mythical American Dream, and function to market or brand the U.S. as a place of meritocracy, hard work, upward social mobility, and an intrinsic sense of justice, thereby manufacturing an appearance of diversity when non-white characters emerge that reinforces that the existing cultural hegemony.

CHAPTER 5

IMPORTED UGLY, DEPORTED PRETTY: THE ASSIMILATION OF BETTY

SUAREZ

“Bernardo, you are in America now!
Puerto Rico’s in America now!

--

Your mother’s a Pole, your father’s a Swede, but you were born here, that’s all that you
need!

--

She’s given up Puerto Rico, and now she’s queer for Uncle Sam!

--

Life is all right in America, if you’re all white in America!

--

Puerto Rico, my heart’s devotion, let it sink back into the ocean.
Always the hurricanes blowing. Always the population growing.
And the money owing. And the sunlight streaming. And the natives steaming.
I like the island Manhattan.
Smoke on your pipe and put that in!

--excerpts from “America”, *West Side Story* (1961)

STATUE OF LIBERTY: I give you life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for the price of your heritage, your roots, your history, your relatives, your language ... Conform, adapt, bury your past, give up what is yours, and I’ll give you the opportunity to have what’s mine.”

-- from the play, *Simply Maria or The American Dream* by Josefina López

The climate in media and society regarding Latinos has typically been a hostile one, with tensions over racial complexities and pressure to assimilate.

Over the course of the *Ugly Betty* series, we are given signs to signify that Betty’s ugliness stems from her Mexicanness, yet she possesses qualities found in previous

generations of ethnic European immigrants that filtered through Ellis island in the early twentieth century, who successfully assimilated and became patriotic ‘Good Americans’. These qualities purposefully set her apart from her father, sister, and the show’s antagonists. Along with the character foils in the form of racially marked women assigned a potential for moral corruption, Betty’s “good immigrant” connection effectively separates her from a larger community of Latinos in order to emphasize her potential for whiteness. Here, the use of manufactured diversity creates an illusion of multiculturalism and delivers a post-racial ideology through the use of a Mexican-American female protagonist in pursuit of The American Dream. This strategy serves to block shame-inducing interrogations regarding white privilege and ongoing racial and colonial practices in the 21st century, and thus rebrand the United States as a post-racial space. However, by engaging the tensions within the existing black/white binary and the use of queer characterizations to distinguish Betty as a worthy candidate for whiteness (and therefore Americanness), the narrative articulates, not a message of post-race, but rather one of pro-assimilation.

The four-season text of *Betty* culminates with the shedding of Betty’s “Ugliness” and her relocation to England, the birthplace of American Anglo cultural and power formation. While *Betty* has been received as a progressive win in regards to the previous lack of Latina/o media exposure and representation, it manufactures diversity through the use of a fictionalized version of New York City complete with an erasure of existing and well-established pan-Latino/a, transborder, self-politicalized, and post-colonial communities. The meticulous management of the dialogue and settings function to connect Betty to the ethnic white immigrants’ narrative of achieving the American Dream

and acquiring Americanness. Through assimilationist object lessons, the privileging notions of (Hispanic) Whiteness and the elision of any connections to (Ameri-Indigenous) Brownness or (African) Blackness, or any racial ambiguities or visual reminders of the current result of the shameful past (the on-going and residual power differentials), *Betty* concocts a post-racial melting pot for mass consumption. However, for those within Latino/a communities searching for some reflection of themselves in *Betty*, there are ways of “making do.”

Remembering the Dream: Hegemonizing Latinidad for Prime Time

Although *Ugly Betty* does not go far enough as an intervention to change the bias against women of color on television or in real life, it does signal a transition and invitation for further disruption. The show appeared at a time when technology was beginning to alter and enhance the way viewers interacted with the productions, consumed media, and then communicated about it through social platforms such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, the ABC-sponsored chatrooms, and other fan-hosted sites, all facilitating the shifts regarding the addition of just enough diversity within the social fabric and the political seams of U.S. society to provide an illusion of a more inclusive and integrated citizenry. Deborah Vargas points to the relationship between “visual technology “ and the “production and circulation of racialized subjectivities” that stretches back to the films of D.W. Griffith and resurfaces in a show marketed to Latino and Queer communities (119). In the years before *Betty*, scholars of race, gender, and representation have called for better representations of diversity, and Vargas reminds of the warnings of feminist scholars warn that a “positive counter-representation” may serve

to “prioritize class whiteness, and heterosexuality,” exposing a problem in the way we use the positive/negative binary to discuss media (119).

In 2008, *Ugly Betty* was adapted for Chinese markets as *Wudi*. While most adaptations came from the original Colombian version, *Yo Soy Betty, La Fea*, *Wudi*'s licensing came from ABC's version of the franchise. Anthony Fung and XaioXaio Zhang explain that American cultural modernity emphasizes “a whole set of values including virtue, love, fairness, amicability and altruism” which make up the inner beauty both Betty and Wudi possess within “the structural opposition between ugliness and beauty” which comprise “good social values- not democratic values – the state wants their citizens to possess” (274). Therefore, in adapting the show from ABC's version, *Wudi* “possesses traces of western modernity that are not only compatible with the Chinese situation but help reinforce the state's position.” (273-274). They call this process “hegemonic modernity” and its function is to be “ideologically compatible” with the national agenda as well as meet “the consent of the public” (274). Reminiscent of Michel Foucault's theory of the self-discipline, as also discussed by Isabel Molina-Guzmán, the position of the protagonist's access to power within her locus works to coerce the masses to enforce existing systems of power upon themselves.

Despite the differences between their governments and political structures, U.S. democratic values and those of a new, more capitalist leaning China, both emphasize what Fung and Zhang call “the accountability of the individual in society” which “places the responsibility of tackling these structural problems on individuals, and the state is never culpable” and reduces “a social problem to the fault of an individual” (273). Of Betty's (and Wudi's) eventual transformation, Fung and Zhang write, “triumph of

individuals over their own personal deficiencies gives hope to those who otherwise challenge the government's capacity to rule" (273). Since China's Wudi is a member of the dominant Han ethnicity, her deficiencies are only clothes deep, while for ABC's Betty Suarez, her deficiency is her Mexicanness, which carries a set of codes that, if not rearranged and sanitized, could "challenge the government's capacity to rule" and by extension erode the privilege of whiteness in the United States (273). Fung and Zhang cite "the more ingrained cultural prejudices" of the local modernity of Chinese audiences for removing "the potentially ethnically and sexually pluralistic narratives of the Latina *Betty*" becoming "sanitized into the heterosexuality of the recognizable Han Chinese woman of *Wudi*" (275). While the American version provides enough coding to be read as an example of diversity, it positions Betty's ethnicity as a deficiency and therefore functions to reinforce the existing cultural hegemony, delivering a message of assimilation as social instruction. Fung and Zhang argue that the goal of "the Chinese government's project is to create a hybridized and hegemonic *Wudi* text" and used the phrase "potentially ethnically and sexually pluralistic" to describe the opportunity available within the U.S. version of *Betty* in an era attempting to be post-racial (274).

Fung and Zhang acknowledge the argument Yeidy Rivero makes in her article from *Ms.* magazine in 2007, that "Betty's format conceals social struggles symbolically carried by Betty's body" (Fung 273, Rivero 67-68) and therefore within this discourse, "overcoming 'ugliness' means success and happiness" (Fung 273). In this way, Betty's status as not yet possessing success or happiness and the resulting label as "ugly" is projected on her body, already inscribed as Mexican, blurring any distinction that these states may exist separate from one another. Betty's status as the daughter of

undocumented Mexican immigrants, a position sometimes referred to as an anchor baby (a derogatory term applied to undocumented women giving birth in the U.S. as those babies will be legal citizens) by passionate opponents of amnesty for the undocumented, informs her makeover. Michel de Certeau's writing on the imposition of time on place "situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts" forms an insightful lens while examining Betty's status as it intersects with the symbolic history of New York City (117). In this way, New York City, as the site of her makeover inform Betty's opportunity for transformation and upward mobility within the context of this history.

The American Dream is often associated with a sense of self-determination and the myth of meritocracy. Promoted as the only society on earth where one can be remade and accepted, New York Harbor's statue and poem serve as a beacon to the "tired", "poor", and "huddled masses" and then "allows" a person the freedom to become anything they want to be in America. That Lady Liberty and Emma Lazarus point towards Europe, not only serves as a signal to the origin of the governance and economic model in the U.S., but the continuance of an established pecking order of power among Europeans as they arrive. The emphasis on Protestant Anglo Whiteness in the U.S. created tensions when assimilating European immigrants came into New York from predominantly Catholic cultures, including the Irish and those from the Iberian Peninsula, hence, Latin, cultures of Spain, Italy, Portugal, and sometimes France.

While the statue and the poem invite in Europeans with the caveat that one is willing to work hard and demonstrate the desire to achieve The Dream enough to deserve the Dream, the American imaginary projects the idea that those who have achieved it are

successful in that they have earned it. The Dream, therefore, carries different meanings for the grandchildren of the Italian, Irish, or Polish immigrants, who passed through New York on their way to suburban American, than it does for the migrants whose relationship with the United States came through annexation, colonization, and slavery. Thus, the discourses of the Dream has different meanings for migrants arriving from various points in the world: for some, “yearning to breather free,” becoming an American is the dream while, others dream of achieving financial success can mean being able to return to their place of origin. For those within racialized communities, the process of becoming American is rooted in the nightmarish constraints of shameful elements in U.S. history. Rather than disrupt this paradigm or assert a new paradigm conscious of twenty-first century sensibilities, communities, and immigration trends, the *Ugly Betty* text reinforces earlier trends in American immigration that require assimilation by any means necessary.

European immigrants have famously become Americans arriving to a welcoming committee consisting of Lady Liberty and Lazarus, whose name itself signifies a resurrection/rebirth/renewal. This poem and statue, and a heralded leger of names, where body after body signed in to the guestbook as a newly minted American, often Anglicizing their European ethnic names are valorized as the prescribed method of immigration. Once these waves of immigrants mastered English and The Pledge of Allegiance, their European whiteness allows them inclusion in The Dream and in the use of the term, American. They were able to fit into the Black/White binary of segregation by adapting practices ascribed as white, which often meant denigrating non-whites. It is this ability of the European immigrant to sign in as a white American to fit into the binary and therefore reify it due to existing racialized hierarchies in American society.

Emphasizing the freedoms the United States offers distracts from the institutionalized race-based practices of the past and present to recast, or rebrand, the U.S. as a tolerant and pluralistic society. For racialized “others” affected by these practices and marked with hyphenated tensions and subjugated status as “rubbish” (ugly/shamed) in need of “remaking” (made beautiful/redeemed) as de Certeau’s theory implies. Setting *Ugly Betty* in the borough of Queens, New York, and blurring the eliciting a memory of Italian and other European ethnic immigrants assimilating into American whiteness, the show seems to suggest that Mexican-Americans with lighter features have a potential for whiteness, or in de Certeau’s sense, approved remaking.

Accent Off Authenticity: Conflating the Colonized

Throughout the life of the series, the action in *Ugly Betty* shifts between the ultimate indicator of high culture, the high-rises on the Avenue of the Americas, to a recognizably working class neighborhood in the borough of Queens. While, on some level, this serves to connect Betty to the possibility of Latinidad, it also positions her in relationship to earlier generations of immigrants who obtained the American Dream after arriving in New York City and becoming “white” in the working-class outer boroughs. The indicators of Latinidad present in the montage and musical choice are culturally and traditionally rooted to Caribbean (Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Cuban) cultures and communities, yet, the dialogue establishes fairly quickly that the Suarez family is Mexican. Betty’s father Ignacio (played by Cuban actor, Tony Plana) and his wife (unseen except in still images) were born and raised in Mexico, though Plana’s mostly accent-less English is more indicative of his Cuban-American identity from the

generation that was raised in the U.S.^{iv} after their families fled Castro's Cuba. Therefore, Plana lacks the more sibilant speech pattern of someone from Guadalajara, Mexico like Ignacio Suarez. The dialogue tells us Ignacio is an immigrant, although the performance indicates further assimilated identity.

In the opening of the pilot episode, it is established that Betty is in pursuit of upward mobility and seeking a job at an English language magazine in a New York City high-rise office. While the use of calculated or manufactured Latinidad is presented visually through her ethnically neutral features, it is in the dialogue where the characters confirm their cultural specificity. Throughout the series, characters either identify as Mexican or Latin, not Latino. Because Latin can include Iberian-European Catholic-centric cultures, the options for self-labeling in the world of *Ugly Betty* are limited to Mexican (racialized) and Latin (potential for European whiteness). Terminology marking communities that are rooted in resistance or de-colonization or other American Latino diasporas, including those descending from a location in the Americas once colonized by Spain, are not used in the dialogue, nor are the language and speech codes that come out of these communities.

There are often connotations between speech patterns among ethnicities to further link all Latin immigrants. While Betty and her father speak a neutral North American style English, with Betty (America Ferrera) having a soft, sibilant sound more characteristic of Southern California English, which provides subtle indicators of traits often assigned to Mexican Americans and Chicanos, yet void of grammar, signifiers, or code switching of Chicanismo or other ethnic reminders. This, and possibly the first name of the actress that plays her, America, helps Betty be read as "All American" while

connecting her to the Chicano/a and Xican@ community through her role as Ana in the film, *Real Women Have Curves*. Like Ferrera, Tony Plana had parts in pivotal Chicano/a Films, therefore both actors serve as an access point for Chicano/a, Tejano/a, Mexican-American, Transborder, and Xican@ communities of the Southwest, while avoiding any references to those communities within the dialogue or narrative.

The focus on Italian and other ethnic white characters that also populate Betty's neighborhood and/or social class such as Gina Gambino (Ava Gaudet) and Gio (Freddie Rodriguez), whose character details (owns an Italian deli), name (which is common among Latinos and Italians) conflates Roman Catholic Latin Europeans of the Italian, Portuguese, Spanish European immigrant communities with the those colonized generations before by those same groups. To conflate them in this way, projects Christianity (through Catholicism) onto the racially mixed bodies whose ancestry included European fathers and Ameri-Indigenous mothers. While Christianized subjects were seen as more assimilable, therefore acceptable to the laboring class, through the mission system, subjects with more indigenous phenotypes, often darker brown, (less or no European patrilineage) were marginalized to the lowest classes or continue to fight for sovereignty. The racial pecking order, imported from Europe and enforced through racial mixing, and the forced relocations of African slaves, replaced and often built upon the existing power hierarchies in place among Ameri-Indigenous societies.

In order to accomplish a televisual narrative of assimilation for a Mexican-American subject, removal from the Southwestern United States, where the hierarchies established by the Spanish mission and government systems were transformed by annexation and continue to serve as the physical and symbolic site of on-going struggle.

Therefore, connecting a “mestizo” to the Latin European immigrants who came through New York City and became “white” relies on this conflation and the emphasis on a connection to European signifiers and away from the reminders of the shame of colonization and slavery. As Leo Chavez theorizes, connections to whiteness pose less of a “threat” and serves to mask tense political relationships with marginalized Latino groups who share a history of colonization and occupation by both Spain and the U.S. (7). This conflation also serves to project any accountability for contact and colonization on to Spain, while the U.S. holds its reputation for modernizing the Americas, credit for which is more often given to the European immigrants coming through New York City during the Industrial era, rather than the enslaved and displaced African and Ameri-Indigenous bodies on which American capitalism is built.

In a regionally contrasting accent, the character of Hilda (Ana Ortiz) possesses a very distinct urban Latina speech and mannerism that is most associated with Urban East Coast Puerto Rican-ness. Her speech pattern differs greatly from Ignacio and Betty, is informed actress Rosie Perez, whose thick Puerto Rican Brooklyn accent undeniably links her to a racialized space within the class margins and became her calling card to fame in the 1990s. Some twenty years after her entry in American pop culture, Perez’s accent has softened, her look has matured with her age, and her projects are aimed at community development and cultural awareness. She has produced documentaries, published books, and advocated on behalf of the Puerto Rican and Latino communities in New York City. While Perez, the woman, may have transformed, her accent toned down for her short stint on the panel of daytime talk show, *The View*, and other recent work, the

characterization associated with her as urban New York Latina spitfire has remained in the media, with new faces to fill the persona.

Clara Rodriguez discusses Perez's success in the 1990s as controversial within Latino/a communities, that "the way she projects herself, her manner of speech and dress, and her general style are viewed as embarrassing to other Latinos" whereas other Latinos argue that her image "should be respected as tough" (1). The connections of the performance of Hilda to Rosie Perez work to downplay the series' complete omission of Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean Latinos with more Afro dominant features from New York and keeping with what the mainstream finds familiar that "...historically, Latinas have been portrayed as either frilly *señoritas* or volcanic temptresses, more recently with thick accents and aggressive sexual appetites" (Rodríguez 2). The use of signifiers indicating the familiar spitfire stereotype but also matching the affectation and dress of the urban Latina as characterized by images of East Harlem and other working class NYC barrios and embodies through the physicality and speech patterns evoke familiarity. By coding Hilda just enough to suggest urban Latina affectations akin to Rosie Perez or *West Side Story's* Anita, as discussed in the next section, a larger Latino community is suggested in a smoke and mirrors affect. Yet there is an absence of other characters that would signal such a community positioning the Suarez family outside of the larger Latino diaspora.

Ferrera is a Honduran-American raised in LA, and exposed to Mexican-American and Chicano culture. She has a more west coast Latina affectation, softer speech patterns, not aurally signing in as "urban" to satisfy those looking for such familiarity. With the use of Ortiz's Anita/Rosie Perez style of performance and Ferrera and Plana's recognition

factor to Chicano audiences, *Ugly Betty* seeks to market or to at least wink to those most critical and the most assimilated Latino groups so that the act of recognition would veil the annihilation of the Puerto Rican, Dominican, Afro-Cuban, Colombian, Mexican Transnationals, and others that make up New York's actual Latino demographics. By designating the family Mexican-American through dialogue only, yet attaching the deportation subplot to it, the show perpetuates the aspect of Chavez's notion of the Latino Threat Narrative, which constructs undocumented Mexican immigrants as hostiles reclaiming the U.S., by indulging the subplot. The use of this subplot also reinforces that stereotype because it fails to engage it as a politicized social issue affecting real lives, rather, the plight of being undocumented is only addressed in a relatively light manner and quickly resolves within a few episodes, ignoring the human rights issues the immigration debate raises.

Like Ramirez-Berg's notion that casting Latinos to play Latinos is a way to subvert stereotypes, Clara Rodríguez questions whether casting Latino performers in Latino roles would improve the image of Latinos (3). Her examination of the arguments that better roles would improve the image and that the best actor suited to the part are the ways in which the performer can do a part in the improvement of the image (3). While Rodríguez focuses on Latino actors in Latino roles, she does not call for, nor distinguish the matter of how a Latino actor depicts a role. Some have criticized Gregory Nava for casting Jennifer Lopez as Selena, while others praised Lopez for her ability to "perform Selena" authentically, which meant removing traces of her own Nuyorican identity markers and embody the Tejana verbal, nonverbal performance and physicality. Some viewers might find these remnants of the accent and gestures peeking out here and there

as they do when an Anglo American actor plays a Brit, or vice versa. Overall, it was an exceedingly close depiction, and while this is not the place to discuss the quality of the work, it is mentioned here to point to the ways in which the casting and the story works both to unite Latina individuals into a greater community and to conflate ethnic specificities into one homogenous group.

No Place for Us: The Media Shaming of Puerto Ricans in New York City

Placing *Betty* in Queens among Italians, rather than in traditionally Puerto Rican or other Latino neighborhoods in East Harlem, Brooklyn, and Bronx eliminates ties to sites around New York City that are symbolic to the historic and current colonial relationship between the U.S and Puerto Rico. In a section of her chapter on *Ugly Betty* subtitled, “Symbolically Colonizing the Latina Dream”, Isabel Molina-Guzmán notices that the choice to “cast the characters as Mexicans living in Queens, the show acknowledges that U.S. Mexicans make up the country’s largest Latina/o population but erases the current racialized geopolitics of New York City” citing census data that shows Queens is still predominantly non-Latino white (137).

The use of the sisters as foils of each other is “carefully managed” with Hilda performing codes akin to a more Puerto Rican sounding character, but whose dialogue is free of boricua specificities, yet “hyperfeminine urban, working-class acculturated Hilda constantly wears and performs her classed and racialized identity” whereas Betty “must increasingly occupy an assimilated ethnic identity” with her “academic and cultural education” and her “inability to normatively perform neither Latina nor white beauty becomes part of a larger story line grounded in the logic of liberalism” (138). This serves

to both strengthen the connection between the fictional Suarez family and the Latin European immigrants that once passed through Ellis Island and connect Betty back to a vision of New York City of the early twentieth century. This version of New York was once romanticized in Hollywood, when segregation was still the dominant perspective in film, radio, and television differs from the version Hilda performs. Hilda's signifiers of Latinidad are connected with New York Puerto Ricanness, a racialized performance made popular by *West Side Story* and perpetuated ever since.

In his essay, "From Assimilation to Annihilation: Puerto Rican Images in U.S. Film", Richie Pérez' examines the "Hollywood films, made between 1949 and 1980 alone, that had come to dominate the print media that deal with the Puerto Rican reality or in which Puerto Rican characters play a significant role" and the "cumulative impact" these images have played on Puerto Ricans on and off screen. Puerto Rican associations with stereotypes of juvenile delinquents and young criminals grew (154). These characterizations cast them as victim or perpetrator, adding to society's view that Puerto Ricans in New York, much like Chicanos of Los Angeles, were a group of over-sexed women and criminal men reproducing at astronomical rates. Pérez points to *West Side Story* as a push for assimilation, and Betty seems to function in this way, pushing assimilation, yet Pérez then notes how in the seventies, Puerto Ricans would be again relegated to the margins as the criminal villains (156). Films like *The Warriors* and cop and crime television shows extended valorization of Irish and Italian (read White Catholic) immigrants that worked in civil service while perpetuating stereotypes of criminality of racialized urban communities. Throughout the 1980s and The War on Drugs, New York City was portrayed as corrupted by crime, drugs and underworld

criminal networks connected to the highest power positions in the city. Black and Latino faces became the symbol of the ‘trashed’ state of New York City. During the era of liberal viewpoints and “relevant” television programming, a cycle of ‘urban missionary’ films shifted to a more sympathetic view, though while PRs were shown as victims it is only under the white protagonist that agency is given to Latinos (154).

In his seminal piece regarding Puerto Rican reception of *West Side Story*, Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez points out that when looking at the representation of Puerto Ricans in New York City in *West Side Story*, what goes unseen is what shifts the blame of crime and shame onto the bodies of the Puerto Rican characters. The world’s wealth, which resides on the Upper West Side, is absent from this struggle, as is the central locus of the Puerto Rican community in New York, East Harlem. Instead, the tensions are over a couple of run down streets on the east side of the city. Sandoval-Sánchez argues that this ‘lets off the hook’ the political power and economic politic while drawing the attention to the message of assimilation delivered by both the Sharks and the Jets (74). He points specifically to the call for assimilation in the lyrics delivered by the character, Anita (Rita Moreno). One could argue that this analysis of the assimilation narrative, which posits Tony as the Polish-American Romeo to Maria’s Puerto Rican Juliet, does not go far enough in interrogating the problematic nature of the assimilation for Puerto Ricans: unlike their White Ethnic counterparts, there will not be “A Place” for them. Yet attributing these impediments to crossing over into the American socio-cultural mainstream to their status as outsiders and foreign, ignores the fact that Puerto Ricans are colonial subjects with access to the mainland as their only recompense for a second colonial coming. In contrast, someone of European descent, like Officer Krupke who

serves New York as a cop, is a reminder that immigrants coming through Ellis Island “became white” by serving as a protectorate for the unseen ruling class, thus ignoring the privilege of Whiteness they already experience.

Not only does *West Side Story* ignore the ruling class, wealthier players in the class stratification, it also ignores the racial spectrum within Puerto Rican identity by visualizing the Sharks as brown. In her book, *Boricua Pop*, Frances Negrón-Mutaner explains that because Puerto Rican racial identity can be “indistinguishable from whites or African Americans” the producers needed “to stress the difference between ethnic groups” through the use of “a shifting asinine accent” and heavy brown face make-up to create a pronounced Latino visualization, one that is distinctly brown, and perpetually persistent (66). To further the contrast between the Sharks and the Jets or the Puerto Ricans and the Whites, the producers also over emphasize the whiteness of the Jets with “unnaturally blond hair” (70).

Negrón-Mutaner argues that as the predominantly Jewish creators were updating the original text of “East Side Story” they kept the Catholic boy, but changed him from an Italian to a Polish Catholic, and removed the Jewishness from the text, turning the Jewish female lead into Puerto Rican Maria. They cast Anglo Natalie Wood in the lead due to the “prevalent taboos on interracial romance” (67). With sweeping choreography as a stand-in for violence, the homoerotic encounters of the gang members anticipate and invite these dances or “fights” between Jets (a name symbolic of technology and progress) and Sharks (a name shared with a predatory animal). Negrón-Mutaner offers that the substitution of “Puerto Rican identity not as essentially colored but superficially black, criminally stylish, and above all, queerly masculine” is to relocate “private

conflicts onto the public sphere and refashions them as a struggle over (homo) social space and performance”(70). Male bodies wearing brightly hued and tight-fitting clothing while desiring contact and dominance over other males creates a subtext of the queer male struggle in locus of New York City.

This connects the role of the police officers in superseding the tensions between the gangs to the police force as “constant enemy of New York’s gay community during the 1950s” by interfering with the opportunity for contact in the form of the danced rumble, and situates the police “as an institutional body, are akin to the gang” as “homosocial, hypermasculine, and ‘rough’ worlds” (70). More familiar Hollywood tropes often feature an Anglo man defeating the Latino “to win the female racialized object of desire” and as Negrón-Mutaner continues, “if a white woman is involved, she will triumph over the Latina, who as a result frequently becomes suicidal” (73). Where *West Side Story* departs from this is that no one triumphs and no female commits suicide and there is an absence of a successful hetero-normative coupling. Negrón-Mutaner points out that Maria gains agency as a result of “losing the two men who controlled her” and that as the song, “I Feel Pretty” highlights that Maria only “becomes visible” once seen by Tony, a white man (73). Like Maria, Betty, only becomes visible once she is “seen” by Meade men, first Bradford and then Daniel. And like *West Side Story*, *Ugly Betty* positions a queerly pronounced Latino visualization within a space controlled by whites evoking similar figures by the use of opposing virginal and sexualized spitfire Latina women in a distinctly queer space (the fashion world) within New York City as the locus for where racial and queer ‘trash’ collide.

From Studio City To Times Square: The Disney-fication Of New York City

The absence of Puerto Rican and other Latino or Afro-Caribbean communities in a television series depicting New York can be read as an attempt to rebrand New York City as a site of [re]gentrification or in the sense of de Certeau's theory, remade. Former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is credited with rebuilding/remaking New York by eliminating the qualities that marked it as trash. Even before the devastation of the events on 9/11 called for a literal rebuilding, Giuliani (himself the son of Italian immigrants) was credited for bringing Disney to Broadway, cleaning up Times Square and gentrifying other areas commonly associated with crime and, by extension, race. These policies led to a transformation marked with jumbotron television screens (which suggest a presence of cameras) and corporate chain restaurants and stores replacing porn shops and strip clubs. Television programming reflected this change during the 1990s when a cycle of that era's prime time network shows were set in New York City. Shows such as *Friends* (NBC 1994-2004), *Seinfeld* (NBC 1989-1998) and *Will and Grace* (NBC 1998-2006) centered on young white urban professional characters and though set in New York City, had no significant Black or Latino characters. While *Will and Grace* featured an asexual, masculine, verbally violent Latina maid ancillary character, queerness is depicted as New York City's otherness in the titular characters. The sitcom centers on the hetero-normative platonic coupling of roommates Will (Eric McCormack), an openly gay lawyer and Grace (Deborah Messing), a straight-identifying interior designer.

It is worth noting that these shows, as well as most episodes of *Ugly Betty* were shot on the "New York Street" set on the back lots of Paramount Studios in California. This set recreates many neighborhoods in New York City, although Harlem and East

Harlem are not replicated. It was on this set that a controversial episode of *Seinfeld* was filmed that featured Puerto Ricans. The episode, titled “The Puerto Rican Day” (season 9, episode 20) was built on a plot that put the cast, trapped in their car, amidst the annual Puerto Rican Day parade. *Seinfeld* and his friends stayed in the car, afraid to get out. They stayed separate from the parade attendees, therefore self-segregating, rather than intermixing and enjoying the festivities. This fear drew on resentments regarding events that happened at a previous Puerto Rican Day Parade, as well as falling in line with the Giuliani clean-up plan. In response to reports of sexual assault, Giuliani threatened to shut down the parade. Giving in to pressure to allow the popular event, he allowed the parade but had city workers fence off access to the park’s interior from the parade route. This meant that the parade, which runs along 5th Ave from 44th St to 86th St along the eastern edge of Central Park uptown. This forced all parade goers, who left the 5th Ave route and entered the park, onto an interior parallel roadway. This roadway contained barricades with officers stationed along it and forced elderly, families, and those who lived anywhere west of 115th Street to travel uptown towards East Harlem. The use of these barricades added to the existing tensions between the City and the Puerto Rican communities. To further these tensions, was use of the use of the parade as an episode plot on *Seinfeld*, a self-proclaimed show “about nothing” and the inclusion of the character of Kramer (Michael Richards^v) setting fire to the Puerto Rican flag reflected the continued reinforcement of stereotypes and shaming of Puerto Ricans in New York^{vi}.

The ways in which mainstream culture sees Puerto Ricans in New York was displayed during the 2013 season of *Project Runway All Stars*, the Anglo supermodel host, Carolyn Murphy^{vii} made a comment during the judging that reveals the ways in

which Urban Latinas are viewed, when she asked, “Are we in Spanish Harlem?” when a designer presented a colorful, tight fitting pair of pants and a cropped shirt. It was an outfit (quite similar to those worn by Hilda Suarez) deemed distasteful enough for Murphy to reference a working class urban ethnic neighborhood. The irony is that Murphy was speaking to Nina Garcia, *Project Runway*, a powerful magazine editor, one of the three original members of the judging panel, and Latina from Colombia. Garcia even appeared once as herself in a cameo on *Ugly Betty* prior to the *Project Runway* episode containing Murphy’s slip. That Murphy did not consider Garcia part of Spanish Harlem points to the distinction between Garcia’s performance of high-class and the low-class, racialized designation of East Harlem.

In addition to the exclusion of Puerto Rican and the greater Latino community in the New York City setting in *Ugly Betty*, there is the curious use of casting of Puerto Rican actors in other ethnicities: Ana Ortiz as Hilda, a Mexican-American character; Freddy Rodriguez as Gio, a potentially Italian-American character; and Adam Rodriguez as Bobby, another potentially Italian-American character. Both characters use speech patterns and mannerisms consistent with the actors’ own Puerto Rican identities. While many arguments have been made about using Italian actors to play Latino characters, casting a Puerto Rican actor in a character that signs in as Italian subverts that and creates a counterargument for those who would ask for the presence of Puerto Ricans on screen. Yet Puerto Rican actors hardly get to play Puerto Ricans, and Mexican actors rarely are cast in roles as Mexicans. What designates them then, is the label put upon them by the dialogue, which calls to mind an assertion from de Certeau’s *Heterologies*, “in circumscribing the object of belief, it also articulates the *operation* of believing, which

consists in passing from a nameless disintegrating body—a ‘rotteness’ that no longer has a name in any language to a body ‘remade’ for and by the name” (39). Confusing Mexican and Puerto Rican or using a sanitized conflation, therefore, help to clearly delineate brown from black, enforcing the ever persist racial binary that persists despite the neo-liberal delusion of post-race with assimilated former ‘others’, while continuing to reinforce a subordinate position of this rotteness, or shame, have stretched well into the twenty-first century.

As we see the rebranding and transformation of Betty from Mexican to American, we are offered images of New York with a diversity that is manufactured to fit the Disney image so carefully crafted in Hollywood and on Broadway, and promoted in episodes of *Ugly Betty*. In “Our Betties, Ourselves”, Dana Heller makes the observation that the series, “regularly promoted a number of products, from office equipment to cell phones to Broadway theatre productions such as *Hairspray* and *Wicked*” (250). Keeping in mind de Certeau’s discussion of the relationship between urban spaces and power in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, “the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs,” it is not surprising then to see the corporate connections between ABC, Disney, and Broadway as complicit in Betty’s transformation as well as that of New York City (117).

Offering a televisual conflation of Hollywood soundstage and footage of selected New York streets, “modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts” (117) parallels the assimilative remaking we see in Betty, as both are chosen for their

ability to participate in capital enterprise and having transformed from: “a ‘rotteness’ to a ‘remade’” (*Heterologies* 39) The use of Broadway, a space, known for its gay producers of culture and art, where there is the presence and general accepting of queer bodies, much like the fashion world in which Betty works, is used within the discourse of transformation and suggests that queerness is a portal to whiteness. If the placement of Marc as the “doorkeeper” of culture at fictional *Mode* magazine, Hilda punctuates the queerness and camp of the Mode space when she proclaims, “It looks like a gay Star Trek in here,” upon seeing her sister’s workplace for the first time in the episode, “I’m Coming Out” (season 1; episode 14). Her declarative observation of the queer style of the place combined with the camp and manufactured diversity ubiquitous with *Star Trek*, we are fed the notion that Mode, and by extension, New York, Broadway, and ABC are spaces accepting of previously marginalized bodies, if one is willing to discipline oneself.

Queer is The New Black: Regulating Permission to Assimilate

Shohat and Stam’s assertion that narratives work to form national identity, the assimilation narrative when conflated with the American Dream discourse of meritocracy ultimately reinforces formations of whiteness in the American Imaginary (38). These powerful narratives first mark the subject as “in need of change” and therefore rubbish/ugly/shameful, and then “made better” by what has been marked as superior. Shohat and Stam as well as Ramírez Berg discuss how assimilation narratives were often applied to women. The cycle of films in the early sound era known as “fallen woman films” often showed a woman who strays too far out of her role as deferent to men and punishes her with shame and threats of abandonment. This can also be seen in the

popularity of makeover shows, including the earliest television version, *Queen for a Day* (1953), a show that valorized a version of motherhood and marriage that emphasized gendered labor and hetero-normative family structure. An episode of *Ugly Betty* uses this reference as the episode title.

The “Queens for a Day” (season 1; episode 3) episode gives Betty a makeover, administered by Hilda and her friends in Queens rather than the stylists at Mode. The outcome of this makeover by Hilda and ‘her girls’ is intended to evoke a laugh in that ‘the look’ is signified as ‘trashy’ or what is considered ‘grotesque’ and coded as low-class. The makeover then becomes additional fodder for the microaggressive “jokes” uttered towards Betty by her co-workers. Rather than suggest the validity of different styles, the Queens (another meaning extrapolated from the episode title) makeover draws association with low culture, Black culture, and Puerto Rican/Latino cultures in the New York boroughs, yet eliminates direct reference to Puerto Ricans, Dominicans or other specificities within the greater Latino community in New York, therefore highlighting the racialization. In fact, Mexican, is the only specific type of Latinidad named throughout the entire series and offers it in a sanitized acculturated depiction, poised for assimilation. Formally, the reference serves to remind us that this Betty, like the Bettys before her, will get a makeover, but one approved by the dominant culture, and enforcing the belief that Betty needs this transformation to be accepted in the white world of opportunity.

Bearing in mind Foucault’s assertion that hegemony discourses are what establishes the norms for which bodies discipline themselves, and the episode functions to inform which makeover is not acceptable as Betty receives hazing and training to earn the ‘correct’ remaking, or in U.S. cultural context, the ‘correct’ assimilating. It also lets

the audience see her getting a makeover and participate in the act of believing she needs one. The emphasis on steering Betty in the direction of whiteness/high culture over racialization/low culture positions Betty to the possibility of American whiteness. As de Certeau points out in “The Institution of Rot”, that the noble/rotten binary demands that those in the power position decide what is the correct remaking (37). It is the same power structure (the noble) that also decides what or who is in need of remaking (the rotten) and mediates what is remade. (39). Piñon’s insistence on the use of Hollywood “approved” Latinos to adapt the *Betty* text function as “cultural translators” in order keep these norms in place, and to create an illusion of diversity is not limited to the production team, as it plays out within the narrative of the text itself through the use of queer and Black characters as the enforcers of the taste, class, and style that ultimately emanate from the White power structure from which they are also seeking acceptance and opportunity (394).

Betty represents the valorization of hard work and meritocracy within The American Dream discourse. These qualities are consistently and directly threatened by Marc (Michael Urie), the catty and conniving out-gay assistant to the magazine’s second in command, Wilhelmina Slater (Vanessa Williams), a scorned and power-hungry black woman who herself has undergone makeovers. The gatekeepers of Betty’s success at work, these two members of historically-marginalized communities in New York City, engage in bullying and often criminal activities. This undermines any progress their visibility and power positions on the show may yield. These stereotyped characters function to further separate Betty from their own marginalized status by testing her loyalty to her Anglo boss and his family in order to accentuate her merit. In the episode

titled, “When Betty Met YETI” (season 3; episode 9), Betty and Marc compete for an opportunity for professional development.

Marc suggest to Betty that she only received the opportunity because of Affirmative Action, hinting that the institution providing the opportunity accepted chose her over Marc to “help them meet their quotas”. While Betty never identifies herself using the label Latina, in this episode Marc labels her as Latina, and Betty labels him as a gay man. In her analysis of this episode, Jenifer Esposito points out the tensions between them and the impasse they face as marginalized bodies in a system where advancement is highly regulated, “Marc’s refusal to recognize his own privilege as well as his claim to victim status combine to position Marc as someone who believes the oppression of gays trumps race. We do not see him consider how his race creates privilege for him. Instead, we are left only to identify with how his sexual orientation creates barriers” (532). Esposito goes on to describe how Betty’s Mexicanness is “hypervisible” when her family comes to the office to celebrate her victory and making clear the binary that established “between talent and race” (531).

While Betty’s discomfort at the thought of her racialized status and not her merit having earned her the opportunity, her father and her sister minimize this concern, encouraging her to jump on any opportunity her “being Mexican helped” (season 3; episode 9). Esposito points out that Ignacio and Hilda are unbothered by the possibility of ‘meeting quota’ in contrast Betty’s acceptance of the contestation and disdain that affirmative action policies, poses a “threat to whiteness as property because it enables people of color access to education and employment previously reserved as the ‘property’ of whites” (533). The narrative focus on Marc’s sexual orientation over his white-

privilege further supports Betty's belief in meritocracy and her candidacy for whiteness. She refuses to accept the internship, instead giving it to Marc, since he had "worked harder" than she had to prepare. Esposito reminds us that, "like all light hearted comedies, by the end of the episode, all is well" when Daniel acts as white savior and makes a call to ensure Betty is accepted as well (533). Her refusal to accept an opportunity if it means she must own her racialized position and the acceptance of an opportunity if sanctioned by her white boss is further evidence of Betty's self-discipline to comply to dominant norms regarding whiteness, evidence of her assimilative process.

This episode calls attention to the oppression of queer bodies outside of the fashion world, yet ignores the white privilege of gay white men. It also seeks to separate Betty from her family, as does the scene in the episode, "The Lyin', The Witch, and The Wardrobe" (season 1; episode 5), when Betty discovers her father is undocumented. She is angry with him for withholding the truth from her and confronts him. In this scene she is positioned on the stairs, her body facing upward and her gaze literally looking down on him for his actions and status as "illegal." While the show has been praised for televising an undocumented immigrant family, the episode and the arc only function to highlight Betty's moral purity over the transgressions of her father and sister. Molina-Guzman observes that "socially awkward Betty occupies a less racialized and panethnic role," one that marks her as "the cornerstone of the show's liberal logic and universal appeal" (134).

Molina-Guzmán's chapter on *Betty* examines the ways in which the text "introduces a queer sensibility to the program that potentially troubles the homogenizing depiction of a deracialized and heteronormative Latinidad" grounded in campy performance of panethnicity (143, 121). Her argument that Betty's "exaggerated

enjoyment of gaudy colors textures and jewelry are key elements of manufacturing the show's queerness" and echo a "drag queen aesthetic" sharing more with "the gay grotesque" and remaining "grossly different from dominant mainstream signifiers stereotypically coded as Latina" (144). This comparison evokes the argument made by Negrón-Mutaner regarding the queering of New York based Puerto Rican Latinidad in *West Side Story*, but also within her discussion of Puerto Rican drag queen Holly Woodlawn, known for her role in Andy Warhol's art film, *Trash*. Woodlawn, like the *Betty* text draws on coding from the intersections of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality in the quest for upward mobility. In that sense, Betty's campy performance functions like Negrón-Mutaner's description of Woodlawn's in that both simulate "the instability of transcultural subjects and implies that all attempts to correct ethnic, racial, or gender shame through linguistic performance are a form of drag—a mask" (89).

Just as various characters within the text serve to distinguish Betty as worthy of assimilation through contrast, Betty's nephew, Justin, is coded as queer in order to place him in line for acceptance into American sympathies. Whereas Marc is often cruel to Betty, he is kind to Justin, giving him sincere advice and mentoring him through the teen's not-officially-out, yet performing pre-sexual gay affectation adolescence. Because Justin is constructed in this way, he garners much sympathy, and his fluency in American popular trends and cultural texts place him closer to mainstream Americanness. He also functions as Betty's coach when prepping her for work at the fashion magazine. Unlike the characters of Hilda and Ignacio, Justin and Betty do not use Spanish or other speech patterns akin to Latinidad, they watch "FashionTV" instead of novelas, and they drink

chamomile tea during their chats on the front porch, marking them as assimilated American youths.

In this way, Justin, in his rejection of the “bad taste” of Latinidad and his fluency in the “good taste” associated with queer culture gains access to whiteness, as Negrón-Mutaner points out, queerness “further ‘whitens’ the culture of people of color” (133). Molina-Guzmán suggests that the Betty text is one that is more queer than it is Latino through the involvement of writer-producer Silvio Horta and its use of queer camp (143). Horta, an “out gay U.S. Cuban, introduces a queer sensibility to the program that potentially troubles the homogenizing depiction of a deracialized and heteronormative Latinidad” and the show’s themes of “self-worth and social-acceptance” are ones that provide to the show’s queerness and take precedence as the politics surrounding Latinidad in the U.S. are largely glossed over. Molina Guzmán points out that the show, “negotiates the competing cultural demands of globalization by situating its Latina characters and their story lines not within the production of ethnic authenticity but through depictions informed by deracialized liberalism and grounded in a campy performance of panethnic Latina identity” (121). The use of camp, conflated Latina identities, and a heavy dose of nostalgia for the early twentieth century European ethnic immigrant nostalgia, the text further deracializes the clutch of characters inhabited by Latino actors who mostly register on the lighter side of the racial spectrum.

Heller grounds her discussion regarding Justin, culturally the most assimilated character, yet phenotypically the darkest, with the use of the episode “Derailed” (season 1; episode 16), in which Justin, excited to attend a performance of *Hairspray* flamboyantly performs a number from the musical on the subway. This embarrasses his

hypermasculinized biological father, Santos (Kevin Alejandro), who is briefly re-united with the Suarez family over a multi-episode arc. Although initially embarrassed by Justin's act, he ultimately stands up for his son when another passenger on the train insults the youth. This scene functions as product placement to promote the Broadway play, but also to provide what Heller^{viii} calls a "hopeful context for imagining his emancipation from oppressive strictures of patriarchal hetero-normativity" (251). Not only does this signify Justin as potentially gay, it distinguishes him from the hypermasculinization that is often synonymous with "macho" Latino men. For Santos, in an act of valorous machismo, his life ends while defending a convenience store clerk during a robbery. Thus, in death, he is redeemed for his earlier criminal activities and for previously having abandoned Hilda and Justin.

While the four season series anticipates Betty's makeover/transformation, it also anticipates a coming out moment for Justin. The series opens with Justin as a pre-adolescent of twelve or thirteen years of age and concludes with him at seventeen or eighteen years. Despite the recognizably gay indicators in his performance, his sexuality is not disclosed until the final season, when he is closer to sexual maturity. In the season four episode "London Calling" (season 4; episode 18) Justin's sexuality is finally confirmed when his soon to be step-dad, Bobby Talercio (Adam Rodriguez), sees him leaning in to kiss a male teen classmate. Bobby, another ambiguously coded Italian character played by a Puerto Rican actor, quickly tells the rest of the Suarez family, which confirms their suspicions (and those of the audience) about Justin's sexual orientation. In an effort to be supportive, the family plans a colorful (read both ethnic and gay) coming-out party for him, until Marc, intervenes in a teachable moment, stressing

the importance of allowing a gay youth the agency of verbalizing this information himself. The show's advocacy to rely on the self-identification of gayness is admirable, however, never does the show provide the same lesson for ethnicity, instead avoiding the various self-identifiers of Latinidad.

In this way, "the show's engagement with queer camp, sexually queer characters, and queer-themed story lines together symbolically rupture the media's homogenous commodification of Latinidad" (Molina-Guzmán 148). The show further seeks to break taboos regarding sexuality by featuring a transgender male-to-female character. The casting of cisgender, former supermodel Rebecca Romajn as the transgender Alexis Meade creates distance from the realities of transgender transitioning. The episode "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (season 1; episode 18) features the dating dilemma sometimes faced by the transgender community. In this potentially progressive scene, the producers cast Romajn's real life husband, Jerry O'Connell to play her potential love interest. Like the casting of Natalie Wood to perform a Puerto Rican in an interracial love story to prevent ruffling feathers, the decision manufactures the diversity of gender while adhering to the mainstream dominant expectations of heteronormative coupling. The episode gives a lightweight attempt at highlighting this social issue by scripting O'Connell's character to reject Alexis, and therefore leaving the transgender character without a sexual partner.

Although confirmed as heterosexual, the character of Ignacio is characterized as a soft-spoken, almost timid man, and the primary nurturer of his family. Adorned in either a working class uniform or a frilly apron, the character of Ignacio Suarez is the opposite of the macho stereotype. While the text reveals he fled undocumented to the United

States after killing his wife's abuser, the narrative positions him not as macho. Rather than subvert the stereotype of the macho Latino, the narrative and characterization, instead emasculate and feminize him. Molina-Guzmán explains that his "racialized masculinity is coded as less brown and therefore less threatening" (139). He primarily occupies the private space of the home where he dons oven gloves and aprons as he cooks for his daughters. He requires their help when dealing with institutional issues such as insurance companies, doctors and pharmacies.

Most notably and disturbing is Ignacio's relationship with his immigration officer. Ignacio's status as undocumented is made to seem less transgressive than the behavior of his Black immigration officer, Constance Grady (Octavia Spencer). The officer holds him captive in his home and forces herself on him, reversing and therefore trivializing the very real trauma of the powerlessness of the undocumented against the institution of government. The few black characters in the series all fall into the categories of villain or criminal. Spencer's character, Grady, is particularly disturbing. In addition to making light of the very real oppression faced by undocumented, it also evokes and trivializes the rape and sexual bondage faced by black women during slavery and ongoing in many parts of the world.

As the antagonist, Wilhelmina Slater (Vanessa Williams) connives, cheats, and commits crimes to gain power at *Mode*. With the exception of a cameo by Williams' former husband, retired NBA star Rick Fox, cast as her hired henchman and boy toy all of Wilhelmina's love interests are white men. In addition to that detail, besides the cameo by Fox, there is only one other brief speaking role by a black male in the series. The character of Wilhelmina's father, a senator who, it is suggested, has been involved in

unethical behavior. In the episode “Grin and Bear It” (season 2; episode 4) it is revealed that Wilhelmina’s birth name is Wanda, and that she once wore her hair in an afro or natural^{ix}. It is suggested that once she changed her name to the more Anglo sounding Wilhelmina, straightened and lightened her hair, and removed other indicators of blackness she was able to garner a power position. Her desire for assimilation and power and her morally corrupt character evoke the tragic-mulatta stereotype, which is suggestive of self-loathing and shame.

In the episode, “A Thousand Words before Friday,” (season; episode 13) Wilhelmina’s sister, Renee (Gabrielle Union) is introduced as a potential love interest for Daniel. Soon it is revealed that she, too, has tried to assimilate by changing her name from Rhonda to Renee and that she is hiding a criminal past as an arsonist. In the four season series, there are few black female characters. These characters are Wilhelmina, Constance Grady, Renee, Amelia Bluman/Yoga (to be discussed shortly) and Nico Slater. Wilhelmina’s daughter Nico (YaYa DaCosta) is a troubled young woman who constantly seeks the attention of her power hungry mother. Wilhelmina calls Nico disruptive and continually dismisses and ships her daughter off to various boarding schools, proving to be a cold and distant or ‘bad’ parent. While initially sympathetic, Nico’s negative attention seeking behaviors suggest her potential for moral corruption. All four black female characters are all villainous.

By end of series, Wilhelmina is granted conditional assimilation when she is couples with Connor (Grant Bowler) a white man from New Zealand, despite his criminality and incarceration. She also is redeemed when she takes a bullet for Daniel’s mother, Claire Meade (Judith Light) in the episode, “The Past Presents The Future”

(season 4; episode 19). To add to this dilemma is the character of Amelia Bluman AKA Yoga (Lorraine Toussaint), an inmate in the prison where Claire is being held after being convicted for the death of her husband's mistresses. Yoga is in love with Claire, who is her prison 'wife'. Yoga functions as a useful and loyal helper to Claire. Yoga assists Claire in an escape then commits a series of crimes to aide Claire as she clears her name and return to power as the mother and heiress of Meade Publishing. Once Claire is returned to power, she grants Yoga her freedom by claiming Yoga has died. In all of the work reviewed on the *Ugly Betty* series, there exists no extended scholarship on the problematic representation of black women.

Despite the issues regarding race in the series, *Ugly Betty* was highly successful and received mostly praise for featuring an educated Mexican-American woman as its titular character. Molina-Guzmán compares the praise *Ugly Betty* received on prime time to the reception of *The Cosby Show* twenty years earlier. She cites work by Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis when she states that the way the show was constructed “encouraged white viewers to ignore race in such a way that it permitted white audiences to absolve themselves of social responsibility for ongoing racial prejudices and discrimination in the United States and allowed an escapist moment for black audiences” (139). Perhaps Latino audiences may indeed look to the show for validation or for a respite from any marginalized positions they may recognize as themselves. Yet what resides within the *Betty* text is the valorization of and instructions for assimilation, reifying the white power structure that regulates such assimilation.

The setting of New York City and the emphasis on Betty's morality and work ethic over her Mexican ethnicity allows her to pass through a figurative Ellis Island into

The American Dream narrative along a path of whiteness. In this narrative, her major obstacles to achievement are not due to institutionalized racism, poverty and a broken immigration system. Instead the obstacles for Betty to overcome are the created by a black woman in a power position and her gay white male assistant, and for a brief arc, a white transgender male-to-female woman. Each of these antagonists manipulate and scheme to gain control of the magazine, which is the property of a white male heir. The invocation of these tropes, the villainous black woman and deviant homosexual, the white male heir to property, undermine any progress placing a black woman in a power position within the fictional magazine may yield. The last episode's final gesture is to remove the last bits of Betty's Mexican signifiers in order to forge a new sign by relocating her to London, signifying "a finishing" in the mother culture of America's Anglophilic psyche. By removing her transformed body away from the United States, where she exists as 'othered' within the marginal space in the national discourse of her birth nation, the United States of America. Thus, Betty arrives in Europe as an American. This removes her to a place deemed culturally elite within U.S. popular signifiers, echoing Reyna Green's theory *The Pocahontas Perplex*, in which Pocahontas becomes an Anglican Christian and follows her husband, John Rolfe, to London. It also satisfies a deportation discourse not unlike the end of the novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where Beecher Stowe implies freed slaves should move out of the U.S. and to Liberia.

Unlike most of her international counterparts, Betty Suarez does not marry her boss in the end, who, traditionally resides in the same ethno-cultural but different socio-economic class. Betty Suarez's Mexican ethnicity and working class status are coded as inextricably linked, as is Daniel Meade's whiteness and wealth. Because Betty's

relationship to work is compatible with The American Dream discourse of hard work, she is rewarded for this work with a cultural as well as a physical makeover and upward mobility. Post-transformation Betty Suarez relocates to London to accept a job in publishing, a job she earned qualification through her work at *Mode*. Like his counterparts in the international versions, as Daniel's behaviors improve, he is redeemed from his previous position as morally ambiguous or self-indulgent. Although the final episode does not end in a wedding, Daniel does travel to London and asks Betty to dinner as his date, not as his assistant, suggesting the potential for a romantic shift. She neither rejects nor outwardly accepts this invitation, while implying that they will indeed see each other, she jokingly offers him a position in her company, punctuating her success.

According to Charles Ramírez Berg, success in the assimilation narrative formula “is defined in upwardly mobile, professional, and socioeconomic terms and goes hand in hand with mainstream assimilation” (113). Thus, Betty's transformation from ugly assistant to sophisticated career woman adheres to this formula. Her narrative culminates in a type of success that Ramírez Berg says “requires compromise and the loss of identity—giving up who you are for what you want to become—few protagonists from the margin ever really achieve success and assimilation” (114). Betty does achieve both, but must leave the United States and her family in order to obtain it, thus, distinguishing the U.S. version of Betty-as-pop-culture-text as one that promotes assimilation, and, in keeping the narrative arc of the series reads as the completion of an assimilation project. In the final scene, as she walks away, a title card reading UGLY BETTY appears, and then the word ugly fades, leaving only her name: BETTY. All indicators of her ugliness and, by extension, her ethnicity have been removed.

CHAPTER 6

STREAMING DIVERSITY: TRANSCENDING THE BINARY

“So when historians of the future look back on the twenty-first century, they’ll say, ‘all the crises of the twenty-first century is obvious; there’s a direction, there’s a pattern—the birth of a Type I (planetary) civilization.’”

-- from Michio Kaku, “The Birth-Pangs of a Planetary Civilization,” BigThink.Com

Betty's sister Hilda proclaims, “It looks like a gay *Star Trek* in here,” upon seeing the *Mode* office for the first time in the episode, “I’m Coming Out” (season 1; episode 14). Her declarative observation of the queer style of the place combined with the camp and neo-liberal agenda ubiquitous with *Star Trek* are apt, because, like Betty, *Trek*'s crew have multiracial faces but the show is a sincere fiction that manufactures diversity. This dissertation examines how ABC/Disney’s *Ugly Betty* manufactures diversity by re-scripting the ugly duckling parable as a Latino de-racialization project and assimilation narrative. The show’s popularity not only helped to underscore the consumer viability of marketing to Latino communities across the U.S., it became apparent they had voting power during the 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama. The election created public discourses regarding race and ethnicity, leading to claims and fantasies of a post-racial colorblindness in the U.S.

Pundits point to Obama’s win and a more visible diversity in the media to claim that the U.S. had moved beyond the racial inequalities that had plagued its past as an attempt to shut down further discourse. Despite the fantasy of a post-race America, U.S., Arizona governor Jan Brewer signed SB1070 in April of 2010, a controversial bill that allowed for the inquisition or detainment of anyone who under “any reasonable

suspicion” was thought to be undocumented. Within conflicting messages of post-racial colorblindness and ethno-racially discriminatory immigration laws, *Ugly Betty* featured a primary character that was an undocumented immigrant. The bill, whose language invited practices of racial profiling and inspired a firestorm of controversy and copycat laws, was signed just ten days after the final episode of *Ugly Betty* aired. The final episode featured Betty’s transformative reveal from awkward ugly duckling to sophisticated successful professional closed out the award-winning series.

The show, which blended the television genres of work-place comedy with family drama, retained a devoted fan base and strong viewership across demographics in the U.S despite the challenges brought on by the 2007 writers' strike, program schedule changes and the show's subsequent cancelation. Available on streaming outlets and through syndicated reruns, *Ugly Betty* is still being consumed and remains a part of a global cultural fabric. One of the earliest shows to use social networking, blogs, and chat rooms to connect with fans, ABC encouraged fan interaction and ran multiple choice surveys to allow fans to weigh in on plans for Betty's fashion makeover. The show was among the very earliest to offer streaming from ABC's website as a way to watch, accessible to a global audience.

Around the world, the visual sign of the glasses and braces and lack of fashion sense signify some version of *Betty La Fea* in more than seventeen countries. In each of the adaptations, the glasses and braces, and “Betty’s” lack of the indicators of conventional beauty normative to her locality are accentuated by the over-emphasis of those very indicators displayed in her workplace either by co-workers and rivals or the type of business itself (most often related to fashion). Known as an ugly

duckling/Cinderella figure, for her ultimate transformation in a sophisticated beauty culminating into a marriage to the boss, audiences tune in with the expectation of bearing witness to her transformation, and for Betty Suarez, this is rearticulated into an assimilation narrative. Her pride, naiveté, and clumsiness provide fodder for jokes from the other employees who represent a range of racial and gendered signifiers yet highlight an obvious distinction between high and low culture, with Betty being the indicator of low culture. This raised a question about how representation of diversity on television is constructed: Are images of diversity on television manufactured to suggest a tolerance or pluralism in the United States, while simultaneously reifying the very power structure whiteness signifies?

As depictions of Latinos and other minorities have greatly proliferated in the twenty-first century, this fact serves to “reveal the newly gained value of Latina/o hybrid subjectivities in the production of a commoditized Latinidad, one that is consumable by U.S. mainstream audiences, but that also has global consequences” (Piñón 405). Another affect of these depictions is the promotion of the idea that America is a colorblind, post race society as indicated by the occasional presence of non-white bodies on television. Perhaps this notion is intended to draw the conclusion that gains resulting from the Civil Rights Era have ended racism and discrimination and that the U.S. is a colorblind meritocracy governed by free will, where anyone who works hard may advance their status.

Pop culture texts contribute to and often steer national discourses regarding race and power, and as Esposito points out, “have material consequences on real bodies” (526). The propagation of the idea that the United States as colorblind meritocracy only

masks racism and “allows the privileged to place blame on the marginalized for failure to achieve” therefore promoting “guilt and self blame” (525). As more media content is being consumed via streaming outlets, it is produced frequently bypassing a need for the traditional broadcast network. Streaming service providers such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon are financing and producing their own shows, allowing for more creative control and with it, more nuanced diversity. For instance, Hulu produced and released a teen-drama set in a community of Latino teenagers in East Los Angeles called, *East Los High* (Hulu 2014-). YouTube, Vine, Twitter, and personal websites allow for innovative ways to keep the production, distribution, and exhibition of programming independent. The expansion of content production and exhibition on non-network outlets has led to the networks themselves offering more programs with a multi-cultural perspective. In the space of this dissertation, I focus primarily on *Ugly Betty* and how images of Latinas are impacted by manufactured diversity. However, I offer this theory to apply to any show and hope it will be used to assess the roster of new and future shows featuring multi-cultural and multi-racial casts and storylines.

Pushing Further: Latina Centered Prime Time

With the arrival of new competition across broadcast outlets, ABC has tried to fill in the void that both *Ugly Betty* and *George Lopez* (ABC 2002-2007) left for the demand of Latina/o centered programming. Based on the comedy of stand up performer, Cristela Alonzo, *Cristela* is historical as the first network show with a Mexican-American female show runner. A fictionalized version of the comedienne, Cristela (Cristela Alonzo) is a sixth year law school student and unpaid intern, who, along with her mother, Natalia

(Terri Hoyas) lives in her sister, Daniela's (Maria Canals Barrera) house, along with Daniela's husband Felix (Carlos Ponce) and their kids. Set in Dallas, Texas, the humor is often edgy in the way it references larger Mexican and Latino communities and addresses the issues of discrimination and plurality. While the show exhibits many signs of multifaceted diversity, is confined by its traditional three-camera format. While a one-camera format allows for more nuanced depictions since it can change perspectives and allow for non-diegetic techniques such as flashback sequences or internal dialogue, the three-camera sitcom format and one-liner based dialogue shares more of a resemblance to *George Lopez* than to *Ugly Betty*. Based on the stand up comedy of George Lopez, *George Lopez* featured specifically Chicana/o coded language and humor in a family sitcom format. The themes of family, upward mobility through skilled labor, the presence of a shrewish and abusive Mexican mother/grandmother, and acknowledgement of a larger Mexican-American community are also shared in *George Lopez* and *Cristela*. Although these shows are progressive for featuring Mexican-American protagonists, they are still showed in deference to the white world and rely on stereotypes. White bosses and the pressure to fit into white America undermine any progress and reify white dominance, indicating some use of manufactured diversity.

In contrast, *Jane the Virgin* offers an alternative to this representation. Like *Ugly Betty*, *Jane* also was adapted from a Spanish language telenovela. The original Venezuelan television product, *Juana La Virgen* (RCTV 2000) is about a young woman who embodies seemingly progressive feminist views who is accidentally artificially inseminated. Juana (Daniela Alvarado), a 17-year-old ambitious student, does not want to repeat the “shame and heartbreak” of teen pregnancy like her mother, and her

grandmother. The novela makes it clear that the grandmother also became a mother young, but it is suggested this is more of a generational arrangement rather than a question of morality. In a very public explanation of why she is still a virgin at seventeen, Juana responds to an ex-boyfriend in the halls at the school, that she is a virgin because she wants to be, not because she is waiting for prince charming, or because she is ultra religious, that she is a virgin by choice and will be until she chooses not to be.

As the only adaption of the show so far, *Jane the Virgin* presents a nuanced and pluralistic representation of the Latino community despite being on English language television. While sharing a few similarities, the show is less like *Betty* and more like *The Gilmore Girls* (WB 2000-2007) in its quick pace and multi-layered references to popular culture. *Jane the Virgin* and *The Gilmore Girls* also focus on a mother-daughter relationship with both mothers having had their daughters as teens. Much of the humor is drawn from this dynamic in both shows, as teen pregnancy is a direct experience for the protagonists. At first glance, *Jane*, like *Betty*, features the trope of the virgin/whore dichotomy, the dark lady and the spitfire. Betty is good sister and the educated moral center while Hilda is the sexy streetwise spitfire. Jane (Gina Rodriguez) is a fashionable and outspoken student and writer. A virgin at 22 years old, Jane, made a promise to her grandmother to keep her virginity. This is in part because Jane's mother, mother, Xiomara (Andrea Navedo), much like her Venezuelan counterpart, entered motherhood as a teen. Jane, wants to wait until she is ready and makes the point that she is, "a virgin, not a saint." This recontextualizes the dynamic of shame attached to teen pregnancy and single motherhood as a direct experience for Jane, rather than as bearing witness or indirectly, as with Betty. In *Jane the Virgin* this serves to underscore the urgency regarding Jane's

“immaculate” conception (she is accidentally artificially inseminated, complicating her career and relationship goals). The plot calls attention to the choices one is forced to make when faced with an unexpected pregnancy whether at 17 through sex or at 23 through science. Jane ruptures common stereotypes by exposing the tension between science and faith, televisually working through her decision whether to have an abortion, choose adoption, or raise the child.

This seems to point to a common theme in Jane’s structure: to raise a common trope, and return to the context from which it was removed while acknowledging the complexities of social issues. For instance, Betty, Jane and Cristela's narratives feature multi-generational households. Where Betty’s father and Cristela’s mother are immigrants, for Jane it is her grandmother. Rather than adhering to the stereotype and giving the immigrant character a stiff and farcical, often insulting fake accent, Jane's grandmother, Alma, is scripted entirely in Spanish. This allows for a fully developed character with agency. It also gives a more realistic glimpse at life in multi-generational homes where there is more than one language spoken, acknowledging a spectrum of assimilative markers and the complexities of individual experiences. Alma speaks to Jane in Spanish, and Jane understands and answers in English. Subtitles, a self-aware bilingual narrator and dialogue with other characters are used to as translation devices.

Jane the Virgin subverts the black/white binary and breaks the trend of casting only white passing actors and uses a wide range of actors. Some characters will visually sign in as white or black Americans yet have Spanish surname and may speak or understand any level of Spanish. Set in Miami, *Jane the Virgin* acknowledges the diversity of the Latino communities as the show presents Latinos in positions of power

and wealth as well as working class. In the episode “Chapter Eight” (season 1, episode 8), it is revealed that Alma is an undocumented immigrant from Venezuela. Breaking from the worn trope that all immigrants are from Mexico, the show seeks to explain the pressures placed on a family in this situation, rather skim over it the way *Ugly Betty* did. In fact, *Jane the Virgin*’s non-diegetic narrator keeps the audience informed on where the show stands politically.

In the episode, “Chapter Ten” (season 1, episode 10), Alma is knocked unconscious after being pushed down a flight of stairs and admitted to a hospital. While she is in a coma, the hospital discovers her immigration status and begins the deportation process. When Xiomara shouts at the doctor, “You can’t do that!” that narrator answers with, “Oh yes, they can. And they do. Look it up. #immigrationreform” and flashes the hashtag across the screen to engage the viewer in the debate. This draws attention to the ongoing political struggle regarding immigration policy and its effect on families in the diaspora. In the same episode, once Xiomara finds out about the deportation threat, she talks about it on the phone with Jane in English. A black police officer is in the room, and she turns to him and asks him about the hospital food in Spanish. When he doesn’t understand her, she turns around and switches to Spanish since the police officer could not translate. A simple language check to a racially coded black character acknowledges the racial diversity of the Latino community. Acknowledgement of specifically afro-Latina/o identities is generally omitted from mainstream media. In another episode, Xiomara speaks in Spanish to hide what she is saying from Rafael (Justin Baldoni), the wealthy former playboy that is the father of Jane’s baby, assuming he does not speak

Spanish. When he answers her in Spanish, she is humbled and decides to trust him. The varying levels of bilingual proficiency signal an assimilative spectrum.

Like *Ugly Betty*, *Jane the Virgin* was adapted from a Spanish telenovela. Jaime Camil plays Rogelio de la Vega, Jane's father, and was the male lead in *La Fea Mas Bella*, Mexico's version of *Ugly Betty*. Camil and his character, Rogelio, are telenovela superstars and the show celebrates and pokes fun at the telenovela genre. *Ugly Betty* and *Jane the Virgin* also share a producer in Ben Silverman, a key player in the transformation from telenovela to single-camera dramedy. In an interview appearing in the newsletter from the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP), a leading organization dedicated to the production, distribution, and promotion of Latina/o media content, Jenny Snyder Urman, the show runner of *Jane the Virgin*, discusses the inclusion of Latinas in the writers' room and expresses the importance of a writing team that reflects the population being depicted. She candidly admits, "I didn't understand the power of representation—the power of people to see themselves on TV—until I had this job" (nalip.org). *Jane the Virgin* also features many guest appearances from Latino celebrities to exemplify a heterogeneous community. What makes *Jane the Virgin* most like *Ugly Betty* are the Golden Globe wins both shows received their first season. Unlike *Ugly Betty*, that uses manufactured diversity, *Jane the Virgin* seems to break away from Anglo-dominant themes and storylines to offer nuanced complexities that show a spectrum of Latina/o identities, therefore embodying a multifaceted diversity. Hopefully, this will be the beginning of an era where plurality is favored over assimilation.

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END NOTES

ⁱ I use the term Latino/a to refer to members of larger communities of ethnicities that were once colonized by Spain. Whereas I use the term Latino/a to denote a member of a larger community, the term Hispanic, in my usage, refers to someone who identifies more with U.S. constructions of ethnic whiteness and less with a Latino community. As a term invented by the U.S. government for purposes of the census, Hispanic connotes assimilation or alliance with Anglo and Eurocentric notions of America whereas Latino connotes grassroots pan-ethnic communal membership that often stand in resistance to Anglo and Eurocentric notions and policies.

ⁱⁱ These terms are self-identifiers conceived from resistance during the Civil Rights era movements. The term Chicano refers directly to the movement of the 1960s and 70s and is the predecessor of Xican@. I use the “o” at the end of Chicano to denote the original Chicano Movement, a movement born out of a specific generation, whereas the use of “@” in Xican@ denotes both the twenty-first century technological participation and the gender fluid politics of the millennial generation that make up Xican@ communities. Because these terms are politicized terms, I only use the terms if the subject self-identifies as such.

ⁱⁱⁱ When writing about the nuances regarding the way Justin’s sexuality is constructed for *FlowTv.org*, Hector Amaya states, “All we see or want to see is gendered behavior. This is the same schema used by fans that think that Justin is not yet gay, but will become gay. Curiously, this assumption rests on Justin having exhibited cultural stereotypes about queerness.” Throughout the series Marc mentors Justin as he matures sexually, exhibiting the point that queer communities often advocate for each other. In final episodes, Justin does come out, in his own terms. I bring this up because while this attention is paid to the construction of a queer identity in the series, there is no such portrayal of mentorship through or process of Latina self-discovery. Betty receives no such mentoring.

^{iv} This refers to the generation the sociologist Rubén Rumbaut dubbed the ‘1.5 generation’ as many of this generation were born in Cuba and brought to the U.S. as small children. Gustavo Pérez Firmat writes of the intricacies of this Cuban-American in its development as different from other Latino ethnicities, particularly those whose relationship to the U.S. is one of conquest in his book, *Life On The Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*.

^v Ironically, the actor Michael Richards was involved in an incident where he made derogatory racial comments at a heckler during one of his stand-up performances at the Laugh Factory in Los Angeles in 2006.

^{vi} The series, *Law & Order*, also used the parade as well as the reports of sexual assault as a plotline in the episode, “Sunday in the Park with Jorge” (season 11; episode 11). This episode suggests a murder, riot, and other crimes happen during the parade. *Law & Order*, like *Seinfeld*, aired on NBC. The network received many complaints about both shows and agreed to never rebroadcast the problematic episodes.

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- ^{vii} It should be noted that Carolyn Murphy was replaced with Alyssa Milano the following season as host of *Project Runway Allstars*. Milano is an Italian-American actress and former child star, who often plays Italian working class characters.
- ^{viii} Heller mistakenly calls Santos and Justin Chicanos. There is no evidence in the text that either character self-identify as a Chicano.
- ^{ix} An afro may suggest political resistance or decolonization.