

## IS UGLY THE NEW SEXY?

### The Complexities of Latina Sexuality on *Ugly Betty*

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*ABC's Emmy and Golden Globe winning television show Ugly Betty stars America Ferrera as Betty Suarez, an intelligent Mexican American executive assistant who lives in Queens, New York, but works at Mode in Manhattan. An adaptation from the Colombian telenovela, Yo soy, Betty la fea, this television show works on a fairy tale premise: the ugly protagonist with a heart of gold will eventually obtain happiness by virtue of her goodness. However, Ugly Betty offers a protagonist with multiple love interests, constantly involving her in a variety of love triangles, begging the question, "Is ugly the new sexy?" The following analysis of Betty as a sexual subject demonstrates that Ugly Betty, within the limits of Hollywood representation, offers complex subjects instead of one-dimensional types. The show's use of a Latino camp aesthetic continually introduces elements, like Betty's sexuality, that push the limits of how we perceive Latinas/os on television and in everyday life. As a result, Ugly Betty surprisingly illustrates Chicana/o and Latina/o feminist theories about identity construction.*

**ABC's Emmy** and Golden Globe winning television show *Ugly Betty* is a global iteration of the Colombian telenovela<sup>1</sup> phenomenon *Yo soy, Betty la fea* (1999-2001). *Ugly Betty*, which premiered Fall 2006 and will end Spring 2010, stars America Ferrera as Betty Suarez, an intelligent, sweet, perky young Latina<sup>2</sup> who lives in Queens, but works at *Mode*, a fictional representation of *Vogue* magazine. As the title suggests, people perceive Betty as ugly because she is not model-skinny; wears glasses, braces, and bangs; and has poor fashion sense. Despite her purported ugliness, however, Betty is always engaged in love triangles.

In the first season she is with Walter (played by Kevin Sussman), an electronics salesman in Queens, and Henry Grubstick (played by Christopher Gorham),

an accountant at *Mode*. Betty begins season two romantically involved with Henry but then develops a relationship with Giovanni “Gio” Rossi (played by Freddy Rodriguez), a sandwich shop owner. Finally, Matt Hartley (played by Daniel Eric Gold), a billionaire who meets Betty at the Young Editor Training Internship (Y.E.T.I.), falls in love with her, though their relationship experiences various ups and downs due to Betty’s ambivalence about Henry’s brief return to New York. While the series may end without any love interest for Betty, her past relationship entanglements follow the conventions of the concept of the romance, where the heroine of a tale must choose between her suitors. Likewise, the men in Betty’s life must pursue her; they must win her heart by proving their worth, their value, and their compatibility with her own desires and life goals. Coupled with a refreshingly feminist and contemporary tone, these romantic conventions reinforce Betty’s desirability and sex appeal, raising the question: is ugly the new sexy?

This is a complicated question that can only be answered in the context of Latina representation in media. Ideas about Latina sexuality perpetuated in film and television, as well as those circulating within Chicano, Latino, and Latin American cultures, are founded on virgin-whore dichotomies. These offer limited perceptions of sexual Latinas as “bad” women, or traitors. Moreover, “good” Latinas must remain asexual or constrained by maternal roles (Calafell 2001). In this case, for example, Betty embodies the caring and industrious protagonist of a fairy tale, a good girl figure that parallels stereotypes about Latina maternity, which have been challenged by Chicana and Latina feminists. But Betty also constantly juggles multiple love interests, which positions her within the stereotypical representation of the sexy Latina bombshell. Using a Latino camp sensibility, the producers of *Ugly Betty* challenge this representational dilemma by cleverly illustrating the sexism, homophobia, and racism that exist in television and the real world. As this essay will show, *Ugly*

*Betty* presents us with Latinas who refuse to remain within one fixed stereotype: Betty is Latina, but she is also a feminist; she is an aspiring professional, but she constantly functions in a maternal capacity; she has multiple love interests, but she is labeled ugly. In this way, *Ugly Betty* demands “a tolerance for ambiguity” that Gloria Anzaldúa calls for in her theory of mestiza consciousness (1987, 79). Indeed, in this essay, the term “ugly” both opposes socially acceptable standards of beauty, and stands in for the differential consciousness theorized by Chicana/o and Latina/o feminists. This essay analyzes Betty as a global text of Latina representation through Chicana/o and Latina/o theories of identity, media studies, and camp aesthetics to demonstrate the ways in which *Ugly Betty* offers a rare example of a complex, intelligent, feminist, professional, and sexual Latina subject on television.

### **Buscando a Betty: A Global Fairy Tale**

As Angharad N. Valdivia suggests, “Latina and Latin American women belong to a continuum of identity within which many occupy different positions at different times” (2000, 20). I want to briefly look at the three Betty stories, the Colombian *Yo soy, Betty la fea* (1999-2001), the Mexican *La Fea Más Bella* (2006-2007), and the U.S. version, *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010). An analysis attentive to this continuum highlights the similarities between Betty narratives, and suggests that *Ugly Betty* offers a way to study the potentially progressive aspects of previous versions of this fairy tale/romance plot that has captured global audiences.

As mentioned before, *Ugly Betty* is adapted from the original Colombian telenovela, *Yo soy, Betty la fea* (1999-2001).<sup>3</sup> In the original and Mexican versions, Betty obtains her position in the fashion industry through her exceptional educational achievements and her skills in finance. While her physical ugliness relegates her to an office space that is actually a closet

attached to the president's office, her coworkers and supervisors know that she is brilliant and that she virtually runs the company. Also, in the Colombian and Mexican versions, Betty experiences multiple heartbreaks but is eventually transformed from ugly to sexy and marries her wealthy, attractive employer. Despite their focus on the protagonist's intellectual qualifications, these telenovelas provide a classic *Ugly Duckling* or *Cinderella* plot line. Thus, telenovela audiences expect a happy ending; the female lead will end up with the male lead regardless of the small tragedies along the way.

The good girl is key to the construction of romance and fairy tales. As a convention, she helps establish the audience expectation for a happy ending. Latin American telenovelas also rely on the Cinderella factor, or the notion that the female lead will somehow overcome all obstacles (wicked mothers, evil stepsisters, dastardly men, poverty, and so on) to obtain love, success, and security. In the fairy tale narratives found in the Colombian and Mexican versions, the Betty character also overcomes significant barriers of social class in order to raise her own self-esteem and to establish herself as an equal to her potential prince-figure, the owner of the company. This, too, echoes the Cinderella myth in that in order to obtain acceptance by the nobility at the ball, a working girl must be transformed. While the details vary, audiences expect a resolution to the story that presents happiness and hope because of the generic conventions of the melodrama (Escudero Chauvel, 2002, 265-66). A successful romance is thus predetermined for the protagonist, despite the factors that may derail her hopes and dreams along the way. The structure of the telenovela, the fact that they run daily for a finite amount of time, assures audiences of these resolutions. The shows establish tension by inserting obstacles along the path to happiness (Estill 2000; Mayer 2003; Rivero 2003 and 2007). In fact, the nuances of plots make telenovelas compelling dramas. A main love-interest can turn out to be a villain and vice-versa.<sup>4</sup>

Conventions of romance are the main threads running between the telenovela and U.S. version of the *Ugly Betty* storyline. In the original, we constantly see Betty writing in her diary and fantasizing (via voice-overs) about the love she feels for her employer, and other hopes and dreams she has in her life (*Yo soy, Betty la fea* 1999). In the first season of *Ugly Betty*, we understand that Betty desires romance, grand gestures, and details that might indicate someone thinks she is a princess. Her first boyfriend, Walter, cheats on her with a neighbor and then spends many episodes trying to convince Betty to return. Their lives, however, diverge; he wants to be a sales manager in Queens and she wants to run a magazine in Manhattan (“Fake Plastic Snow” 2007). The length of her relationship with Walter is a testament to Betty’s poor self-esteem, and to some extent family pressure (“Brothers” 2007). Betty eventually realizes she deserves and desires more, in part because of the other men who pursue relationships with her. We see this internal development when she fantasizes or dreams that she will be wooed, or whisked away by her love interest (“Twenty-Four Candles” 2008). The dream sequences often foreshadow events in the episode, implying that dreams do come true. These fantasies also establish Betty’s sweetness, which remains to varying degrees throughout the first three seasons of the show. Combined with her dowdy, misfit outward appearance, Betty continues to embody a potential Cinderella character, someone worthy of happiness and in need of an outer transformation to match her inner beauty.<sup>5</sup>

The original *Betty la Fea* has received some critical analysis by Yeidy M. Rivero, who analyzed the “performance and reception of televisual ‘ugliness’ in *Yo soy, Betty, la fea*,” arguing that

*Betty’s* transnational success should be examined both in terms of globalized commercial television exchanges and more importantly,

in terms of the *telenovela*'s thematic construction. In contrast to other televisual cultural products, *Betty*'s main theme revolved around discourses of female 'beauty' and 'ugliness,' depicting a principal character who might be considered the 'ugliest' of all *telenovela* heroines. (2003, 65)

Rivero notices that this televisual representation of *Betty la fea* reinforces what she calls, "colonial, gendered, class, racial, and Eurocentric dominant discourses of female aesthetics, thus, creating a trans-cultural space for debates about socially constructed ideologies of 'ugliness' and 'womanhood'" (2003, 65). Rivero suggests that *Betty la fea* can show us how society creates ideas of beauty for us, and moreover, how these ideas of beauty and womanhood affect not only Colombian women, but women, Latinas and otherwise, around the world. Comments in the popular press suggest this tendency remains. Celebrations of *Ugly Betty*'s real world heroine, for instance, still frame her appearance as "flawed" and therefore "real," indicating that standards of beauty remain fixed (Stimson 2007). Rivero's analysis of the original version of this telenovela is even more significant today because of the many versions of *Betty la Fea* that have now been produced in nineteen countries, including India, Germany, Mexico, Israel, and the United States. Clearly, the *Betty* narrative has resonated with audiences, making any study of how women are seen in these shows important to gaining insight into ideological constructions of self.

*Yo soy, Betty la fea* was an international success, airing in over fifteen Western Countries and had 80 million viewers in Latin America alone.<sup>6</sup> It was also popular with Latino audiences in the United States, which caught the attention of NBC network executives who originally acquired the rights for the show in 2001. After many failed attempts at constructing a marketable

show, in 2004 executive producers Teri Weinberg and Ben Silverman brought Cuban American Silvio Horta as creator and producer of the show and involved Salma Hayek's production company. ABC then green lighted the show for production and, as mentioned above, the pilot episode aired in Fall 2006 ("The Beautiful World of Ugly Betty" 2007).

*Ugly Betty* has avoided some of the plot devices utilized in the original Colombian and the subsequent Mexican versions. In the first episode, Betty is hired because she is ugly, not highly intelligent. Her boss, Daniel Meade (played by Eric Mabius), sleeps with all of his assistants, so his father, Bradford Meade (played by Alan Dale), hires Betty to help Daniel stay focused on his work. The pilot episode, however, establishes Betty as a competent and gifted assistant, someone dedicated to Daniel and *Mode's* success. Television producers often incorporate sexual tension between the protagonists, which keeps viewers interested in once-a-week, one-hour programming that may be canceled at any moment given network decisions about television viewership. *Ugly Betty*, however, does away with such sexual tension between Betty and her boss. Instead, by involving her with a variety of men, the show has developed the original Betty story line from a fantasy-driven, one-day-my-prince-will-come fairy tale plot to a representation of a young, sexually active, professional but working-class Latina with multiple love interests.

Despite this intervention into the romantic plots, *Ugly Betty* maintains other telenovela conventions such as the use of class and upward mobility, and a camp element that will be discussed later. However, *Ugly Betty* does make a change in the family structure. According to Claudia Milian, "In the Latin American telenovela, the poor family usually has a loving, nurturing mother...That matriarchal aspect is missing in *Ugly Betty*, perhaps because

that kind of passivity just wouldn't fly with an American viewership" (Rohter 2007). I would argue, however, that it is less about U.S. audiences' more progressive views of maternity, and more about Disney's (ABC's parent company) construction of goodness via the protagonist's replacement of her mother figure. Betty is introduced in the pilot episode of *Ugly Betty* as a mother figure within her family and at *Mode*. Executive producer Marc Pennette explains, "Betty's a caretaker, whether it be at *Mode* or in Queens. That's her role and she welcomes it. And she enjoys that she's needed" ("The Beautiful World of Ugly Betty" 2007). The connection between maternity and the good girl also evokes Cinderella, especially Disney's version of the quintessential mother figure, feeding everyone in the home, from her evil stepmother to the mice (Wood 1996, 33). As we shall see in the next section, Latina motherhood evokes other stereotypically "good" qualities, namely the pure, asexual, martyr figure critiqued by Chicana and Latina feminists.

Latina stereotypes circulate throughout media, but as Bernadette M. Calafell suggests, "In order to examine current representations of Chicanas and other Latinas, historical and past media representations must be examined" (2001, 13). The virgin-whore dichotomies evident in representations of Latinas are founded in other archetypal myths, stories that Calafell analyzes in the following way:

The repression of women's sexuality and its harmfulness is a common thread that runs through the stories of La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Llorona, and La Malinche. All three images have operated together to give women limited or constrained roles.... Much in the same way, modern day Mexicanas and Chicanas are still condemned for their sexuality. The patriarchal structure that exists still maintains La Virgen as its patron saint. She is the impossible

role model Latinas must conform to in order to be accepted. All of the above images have helped to create and contribute to the images of Latinas that appear in modern media (2001, 16).

While Calafell points out these stereotypical figures to analyze representations in *Latina* magazine, these mythic images of Latinas also appear in television, affecting expectations about how Latinas should behave. Therefore, the maternal role evidenced in these global Betty narratives—these images of the “good” girl as antithetical to the sexualized and demonized Llorona and Malinche figures—potentially influence viewer behaviors in ways that are insidiously similar to the effects of *Yo soy, Betty la fea* as on perceptions of physical beauty among global viewers (Rivero 2003).

Betty is the assistant to editor-in-chief at *Mode*, a position she wins because she is ugly, and keeps because she demonstrates an archetypal goodness. In protest to his father hiring her, Daniel challenges Betty with jobs he believes will drive her to quit. In the pilot episode, Betty monitors the women revolving in and out of Daniel’s apartment, removes gum from his shoes, and separates the sauce from the cabbage in his coleslaw. Eventually, Betty quits her job. But then Daniel loses the lucrative Fabia Cosmetics advertisement account for the magazine. He finds Betty’s supplemental idea for the Fabia spread on his desk. A penitent Daniel arrives at Betty’s home in Queens and begs her to continue as his assistant. When she agrees, they use her idea to win back the account and this allows Daniel to keep his position as editor-in-chief of the magazine (“Pilot” 2007).

Daniel and Betty’s presentation demonstrates how the Latina maternal narrative circulates in *Ugly Betty* as purity, loyalty, and sacrifice. Slides of sepia-toned pictures of Betty as a little girl being helped on her bicycle

and with her mother engaged in the kitchen appear on the PowerPoint presentation. As the slides begin, Daniel speaks: “Um (clears throat), In order to show the, uh, softer side of Fabia cosmetics, we’re going to use the concept of mothers and daughters focusing on the small special moments that are usually taken for granted. The theme being, ‘It’s not the big events but the little moments that matter’” (“Pilot” 2007). Fabia (played by guest star Gina Gershon) responds to this, speaking with a vaguely Italian/European accent: “I just had a daughter. I do none of those things. But I can understand. What makes you think this going to appeal to my customers?” (“Pilot” 2007). At this point, Daniel looks befuddled and begins to lose even more confidence. Betty looks up at him, and when he continues his silence, she takes over:

Well, um, if I, if I may. (Touches her computer.) I do have the statistics here. Though one might assume that your demographic is very young, in fact there has been tremendous brand loyalty since you launched. Which means that those who began using your cosmetics since they were teenagers are now, like you, beginning to settle down and have children—58 percent to be exact (“Pilot” 2007).

Fabia is impressed with Betty’s statistics and seems to favor the magazine layout for the advertisements (“Pilot” 2007).<sup>7</sup> The sepia toned family photographs of Betty interacting with her mother imply wholesome family values that are visually juxtaposed to the fashion industry. The lights in the room dim as the characters view the photographs, for a moment erasing the stark, high-fashion world of *Mode* and replacing it with warm tones, forcing those present into Betty’s worldview.

Fabia reinforces this juxtaposition of Betty’s goodness to the hostile and cold environment of *Mode* when she says, “I just had a daughter. I do none of

those things.” And, in her parting words: “Just make sure it’s not too sappy. Do a picture where they are pulling each other’s hair or biting each other” (“Pilot” 2007). Fabia leaves the room unchanged, as she makes Daniel revert to the concepts of hair pulling and biting, instead of Betty’s idyllic family photographs. She can, however, understand the point of the advertisements, thereby conceding that Betty has a good concept.

As the scene continues, Betty demonstrates another moment of idealized maternity, sacrificing her own success and her potential to move up in the eyes of Bradford Meade, owner of the Meade publishing empire. When the meeting ends and Bradford Meade approaches his son to congratulate him, Daniel almost gives Betty credit for the idea when he says, “Actually, it was...” but Betty interjects, “...his best one. Don’t you think?” (“Pilot” 2007). Betty’s assertion that she is Daniel’s best idea, his best part, could, in effect, unman him in front of his father and colleagues in the room.<sup>8</sup> After all, Betty’s intelligence, her strength, her confidence, and her preparedness save the account. Daniel simply reads the notes on the slides. However, she attributes the idea to Daniel, protecting his position as leader. This and future acts prove Betty has no desire to leave the role of Daniel’s caregiver, eventually developing a co-dependent relationship, and establishing Betty’s goodness and her role as moral center. Betty believes what she presents in the photo spread: “It’s not the big events, but the little moments [or people] that matter” (“Pilot” 2007). This small example of martyrdom evokes one of the Latina images prevalent in film, the “faithful/moral/self-sacrificing señorita” who “could not exist in the Anglo world or her own Mexican world; therefore, she would sacrifice her life to protect her White lover” (Calafell 2001, 17). While Betty and Daniel are not lovers, Betty does inhabit that liminal space between her life in Queens and in *Mode*. And her actions in season one suggest she must negotiate her family role with her professional life, as her family does feel neglected.

More than simply embodying the sacrificing and maternal Latina, Betty's daily situation, negotiating family and work, demonstrates a displacement of her role as surrogate mother, instead performing this role for her dysfunctional coworkers. As mentioned earlier, Chicana and Latina feminists have worked hard to challenge idealized notions of femininity and such maternal models for being a "good" Latina, particularly as they reinforce stereotypes of maternal Latinas circulating in the media and within Chicano and Latino communities. Rosa Linda Fregoso, for instance, has theorized and challenged what she calls "The Chicano Familia Romance," a paradigm that maintains the kinds of heteronormative, patriarchal family structures that define women's roles as caretakers and sacred holders of the social and moral codes of family and community (2003, 71-90). These kinds of structural limits on the family mean that women cannot stray from the roles given them. Representations of the good girl or the sacrificing Latina caregiver reinforce this paradigm.

By utilizing the stereotype of the self-abnegating Latina, the pilot episode of *Ugly Betty* establishes that which Chicana/o and Latina/o theorists of identity, media studies, and camp aesthetics have written against. Thankfully, *Ugly Betty* eventually suggests that being good is highly overrated, a refreshing message given the historically limiting representations of family, and particularly maternity, described above. Betty is not rewarded for her good deeds by obtaining a prince, or a promotion, for that matter. Betty works hard on this show. She has a *Puritanisima* work ethic that continually saves the day. But she is held back professionally at almost every turn. Even when she takes other jobs that would advance her career, they are quickly stripped away because of some moral or ethical dilemma, leaving her by Daniel's side. For instance, her latest promotion at the end of season three was determined by a coin toss between Daniel and the magazine's creative director Wilhelmina

Slater (played by Vanessa Williams), and was left precariously uncertain (“The Fall Issue” 2009). Season four begins with a series of troubles for Daniel in which Betty must intervene. On *Ugly Betty*, being good rarely pays off, which offers a space for interventions in representation beyond those seen on the pilot episode.

**Betty’s Beneficent “Bombshells”: Latina Sexuality on T.V.**

If being stereotypically good is not an entirely productive option for Betty, one must ask if it is more acceptable to be the opposite. The other side of the stereotypical virgin/whore dichotomy suggests that sexuality is connoted as bad. According to various critics, American<sup>9</sup> television and film has traditionally relied on stereotypes when representing Latinas (Ramírez-Berg 2002; Fregoso 2003; Valdivia 2000; Beltrán 2009). In fact, there is a need to negotiate Latina sexuality, which hinges on the ideological reproduction of the virgin/whore dichotomy. U.S. advertising clients will suggest dowdy representations for Latinas in commercials that they think are more representative of “good” (read virginal) mothers. Arlene Dávila asserts,

This dual portrait of Latina women as virgin or whore epitomizes the range of representations of women in Hispanic television and explains the dominance of the mother figure featured in most Hispanic advertisements. This dichotomy reflects the dual stereotype of Latin women as either the traditional señorita or the overly sexualized, loud, and hot-tempered Latin spitfire that has dominated stereotypes of Latin women in mainstream media. (2001, 131)

The “Latin spitfire” also known as the “Latina Bombshell” is a popular representation of the sexy Latina. William A. Nericcio suggests that the “Mexican spitfire” extraordinaire, Lupe Vélez, “Had a lot to do with the

manufacture of this trope, and she profited handsomely from it as well... [S]he had managed, with her handlers, to perfect a loopy, sexy, hot persona that would hold her in good grace with American audiences for decades” (2007, 83). Some have read this simultaneously titillating and non-threatening Latina sexuality as a resistant or subversive performance. Rosa Linda Fregoso recuperates Vélez as a “model of a modern ‘new woman’... not the dominant image of Mexican femininity lodged in cultural memory” (2007, 55). Fregoso suggests, “In the embrace of sexual liberalism, financial independence, and personal meaning derived from something other than motherhood, Lupe Vélez subverted the prevailing gendered framework and rejected dominant tropes associated with Mexican femininity” (2007, 55).

Like Fregoso and Nericcio’s interpretations of Vélez, the manipulation of the “bombshell” stereotype is evidenced in the *Ugly Betty* character, Sofia Reyes (played by the show’s executive producer Salma Hayek). Representations of Latina sexiness are particularly difficult to overcome, as Mary C. Beltrán shows:

Although for actors of all ethnic backgrounds, ‘sex sells,’ Latina/o actors appear to have the most difficulty escaping publicity that labels them as exceptionally and innately sexy, or as having excessively sexy and/or voluptuous bodies....Latina/o performers in this manner have been promoted to the non-Latino public primarily as passionate, inviting bodies with little intellectual or moral substance. (2009, 10)

Indeed, Hayek’s sexuality is central in analyses of these bombshell types. As Calafell writes, responding to a 1997 magazine interview with Hayek in *Latina*, “Hayek is seen by many as a throwback to the stereotypical spitfire vamp or whore of the dichotomy because she is said to have built her career on the image

of the luscious Latina,” and the writers of the article are ambivalent, as the title of the article suggests: “Hollywood’s Mexican box office sensation now says she wants to shed her bombshell image. But is she really trying?” (Calafell 2001, 20). Hayek’s position as executive producer on *Ugly Betty*, with significant input into actors, story, and other financial matters, suggests that, like Vélez before her, Hayek self-consciously manipulates sexuality to create more nuanced representations for herself and for other Latinas on television.<sup>10</sup> A look at her recurring guest role as magazine editor, Sofia Reyes, supports this.

Sofia represents a fulfillment of an American dream narrative as a feminist Latina, first-generation college graduate, famous author, and editor-in-chief of her own magazine by virtue of always going after what she wants (“Sofia’s Choice” 2007). This suggests her character is the “model of a modern ‘new woman’” as Fregoso says of Vélez (2007, 55). In fact, Sofia’s feminist magazine, *Modern Young Woman (MYW)*, was designed, as Sofia states, to “make the modern woman empowered” (“Sofia’s Choice” 2007). Sofia’s rags-to-riches story makes her an acceptable love interest for Daniel, because she has worked for her success. For this reason, Bradford Meade suggests that Daniel can learn from Sofia’s example. Of course, Sofia’s beauty and sex appeal are established immediately. In her first scene alone with Daniel, she stops the elevator they ride, removes a stained blouse, replaces her suit jacket in its stead, and exchanges sexually charged banter. Daniel is smitten. Indeed, they become engaged to be married two months after this meeting. Sofia also recruits Betty to join *MYW*. However, Betty finds out that Sofia is simply using Daniel for a cover story titled, “From Fling to Ring in 60 Days: Techniques to Get the Man You Want in Sixty Days” (“Sofia’s Choice” 2007). Here then, we see Sofia manipulate the sexy bombshell image to facilitate her position as a sexually liberated, feminist Latina succeeding at the white, heterosexual, male-dominated publishing industry via strength and assertive behavior.

Of course, Betty rejects Sofia's job offer and her *modus operandi*. However, *Ugly Betty* does not let its protagonist sit comfortably in a space of moral and righteous purity, or total self-abnegation until she is handed her reward. The show is not called *Saint Betty*, after all. Betty expresses her desire to succeed professionally, aspiring to an editor position at a magazine, even if this hope is not fulfilled until the fourth and final season. Sofia's scenes with Daniel play off of the spitfire or bombshell image. She self-consciously utilizes her sexuality but also subverts the stereotypes associated with it. Her position as the creator of a feminist magazine again forces audiences to deal with ambiguity.

As we have seen, Betty Suarez represents the antithesis of traditional iterations of the sexy Latina. In fact, if her family's reactions to her dress, her career goals, and her genuine cluelessness to all things ethnic or popular are any indications, there may be very little that is televisually Latina about Betty at all. In contrast to traditional Latina/o stereotypes on the screen, Betty is intelligent, resourceful, hard working, and kind. Her exceptionalism is heightened by the lack of any Latina comrades at Meade publications with the singular exception of Sofia. The only other Latina regularly on the show, Betty's sister, Hilda (played by Nuyorican actress Ana Ortiz), is the opposite of Betty in many ways. Hilda and Sofia, the overtly sexy Latinas on the show, offer up foils to Betty, particularly because they strangely allow Betty to shine as a model of goodness, regardless of the fact that she is often juggling two love interests at a time.

Betty's love life is complicated, particularly as it relates to her first fully developed relationship on the show. Henry is Betty's first love and it is with him that she is first represented as overtly sexual. In the episode "Something Wicked This Way Comes," Henry and Betty sneak around because Betty does not want her family and coworkers to know she is still seeing Henry even

though he has to go back to Phoenix and his pregnant girlfriend, Charlie, in five months. Betty and Henry finally organize a dream date and go see *Wicked: The Musical* on Broadway. Her boss Daniel is there with a client and expresses disappointment in Betty's judgment. In the first part of this scene, we see Betty succumb to Daniel's disapproving "gaze." In a matter of seconds, she moves from an ecstatic escape with Henry to a moment of guilt, shame, and resentment. Daniel's authoritative challenge of Betty's core qualities subverts her initial agency and the fulfillment of her sexual desires. He clearly offends Betty by suggesting her actions are "stupid" ("Something Wicked This Way Comes" 2008). Instead of ignoring Daniel's challenge, Betty cancels her rendezvous with Henry and goes home.

Daniel's opinions ruin Betty's resolve to return to Henry's apartment to share their first night together. Betty returns to Queens, where she confesses her predicament to her sister. Hilda is in shock about the news that Betty has been secretly dating Henry, who is expecting a child with another woman. She asks Betty if they are sexually involved. She responds that they were supposed to consummate their relationship that evening and begs Hilda not to tell her she is stupid, but Hilda refuses:

Oh, no, no, no. You're stupid....You only have five months left with Henry, and you are here talking to me. You know, if someone told me I could have one more minute with Santos, do you think I would turn that down because it would hurt when it was over?...What are you still doing here? There is a man out there who loves you. Go!!  
The clock is ticking! ("Something Wicked This Way Comes" 2008)

On the one hand, Betty's desire to maintain her reputation in the eyes of her boss is commendable. But it takes Hilda to point out that the desire to retain

one's reputation is "stupid." Hilda's story of passion and loss sends Betty running back to the city and into her lover's arms. Hilda's fiancé and her son Justin's father, Santos, dies at the end of season one and she spends half of season two in mourning. By reminding her of this event, Hilda teaches Betty how to passionately feel and love. In her bedroom, Hilda transfers to Betty the ability to be sexual. She gives her permission to follow her desire, even if it is not the most practical or emotionally safe thing to do. All of a sudden, there are two sexy Latinas in the room, two women who are comfortable with their sexuality, two women who understand that they are in control of their destiny.

However, two things contain Betty's sexual freedom and her status as sexy Latina, both connected to her role as the "good" protagonist on this television show. In the parting exchange between the sisters, Betty stops at the door and says, "Oh. But Um. But maybe we shouldn't tell dad." Hilda responds, "Uh, Yeah. I'm romantic, not crazy" ("Something Wicked This Way Comes" 2008). This exchange indicates that these women are acting against the patriarchal order. Their father, Ignacio (played by Cuban American Tony Plana), would not approve of Betty's actions, just as he rarely agrees with Hilda's romantic choices. Secondly, the subsequent scene at Henry's door presents an ambivalent Betty. We do not see Betty and Henry having sex in this episode. Instead, we see a series of shot-reverse-shot close-ups of a clearly passionate Henry, and a slightly nauseated-looking Betty ("Something Wicked This Way Comes" 2008). Betty's reticence to fling herself into Henry's taut arms suggests that she cannot wholeheartedly embrace her sexuality, particularly because she is not clearly operating within her sense of right, as Henry is not free to commit to her in the long-term.

Betty's complexity is what makes her position as an "ugly" Latina, one who shirks stereotypical representation, appealing. Betty has the capacity, and opportunity, even as someone that is framed in the television show world

as impossibly good and improbably ugly, to be romantic with a variety of individuals, only choosing to be sexual with those she truly loves. Betty's romantic choices move her beyond the fairy tale world of fated love. At the very least, her agency shows the journey toward romantic fulfillment in a realistic light, changing the ways the romance genre functions on television for all women. But Betty's sexuality also offers a representational opportunity given what we have seen as traditional maternal or good expectations of Latinas and stereotypical representations of Latina sexuality on television.

These varied and complex ways of being Latina offer up interesting perspectives through which to understand *Ugly Betty*. Both Sofia and Betty are feminist characters, and even though Betty rejects working with Sofia at *MYW*, Sofia legitimately wants to offer her a professional opportunity beyond her role as Daniel's assistant. Moreover, Betty, Sofia and Hilda are Latinas who exhibit their sexuality in different ways. Even within the Suarez household, then, being Latina looks, sounds, and behaves differently. The variety of Latinidades on the screen thus illustrates the complexity of the Latina subject theorized by Chicana/o and Latina/o feminists. Betty, Hilda, and Sofia help demonstrate a "politics of Latino subjectivity without identity" (Viego 2007, 144) because their differences foreclose the possibility of a definable, analyzable, stereotypical Latina. Instead, we have a shifting, complex, never stable subject, who moves through "differential consciousness" toward "decolonized being" (Sandoval 2000, 140-1). Betty herself, in our inability to pin her down to one definable label, offers us this unstable Latina subject that releases us from the shackles of stereotype and notions of authentic identity.

### **Differential Consciousness in Betty's Camp**

As previously mentioned, *Ugly Betty* loosens the grip of the virgin/whore

dichotomy by representing complex Latinas that slip outside and beyond stereotypes of Latinas in the media. This maneuvering is discussed throughout feminist of color texts as a survival tactic in a difficult world. Chicana feminists like Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Alarcón, and Chela Sandoval have theorized the strategic operations of women of color feminists, or *movidás* as Anzaldúa argued. Sandoval explains, “What U.S. third world feminism thus demanded was a new subjectivity, a political revision that denied any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positioning a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to de- and recenter, given the forms of power to be moved” (59). Sandoval calls this mode of “tactical subjectivity” a “differential consciousness” that works like the clutch of an automobile, allowing one to “select, engage and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power” (58). In many ways, Betty’s negotiations between work and home, Sofia’s performances with Daniel and professional successes, and both Hilda’s and Betty’s negotiations inside the dramedy genre—a somewhat patriarchal family space—are examples of differential consciousness at work. Each woman must negotiate these spaces to obtain agency and “decolonized being” and moments of power over their representations or identities, which in this practice, are impossible to pin down (Sandoval 2000, 141).

One of the ways *Ugly Betty* manages to exhibit such differential consciousness and complexity of identity is through the show’s camp aesthetic. Larry Rohter writes,

Most telenovelas also contain a camp element—a quality that allows Latin American sophisticates to wink at bad lighting or preposterous plot developments as they watch novelas with their maids. Main characters tend to be broadly drawn archetypes acted in an over-the-top style, with the good guys and bad guys clearly signaled. Silvio Horta, a Cuban American raised in Miami who is an executive

producer of *Ugly Betty*, freely acknowledges incorporating what he calls “that cheesy element” into the import. (Rohter 2007)

Even though *Ugly Betty* is not, strictly speaking, a telenovela, as seen above, executive producer Horta has infused the show with not just cheesy elements, but also with a keen camp sensibility that José Esteban Muñoz would define as “a certain mode of cross-generational cross-cultural recycling in U.S. Latino culture” that he names “camp because [he is] interested in considering its convergences alignments, and reverberations with the camp produced by sexual minorities” (1999, 121). Muñoz also suggests links between the show and feminist and queer politics that would open it up to a possibility of a differential consciousness that stems from “emergent identities-in-difference” theorized by Norma Alarcón and Sandoval (7).

Given the show’s connection to the telenovela as an art form, and given that Silvio Horta, a gay Cuban American and Salma Hayek, a Mexican feminist bombshell, are both executive producers, it is clear that a camp aesthetic fits into formulations of the show’s look and stories. Along with Muñoz’ formulation of camp in his theory of performance, Ramón García’s definition of Chicano camp influenced my thinking about *Ugly Betty* as Latino camp. He writes:

Camp style ironizes, parodies and satirizes the very cultural forms that marginalize and exclude. By so doing, Chicano camp deconstructs the ideologies that constitute this marginalization and exclusion. However, Chicano camp style, like camp style itself, is not only and always a form of resistance...camp could have the opposite effect—that of acquiescing to the dominant ideologies through a celebration of commodification or popular consumerism. There is a critical camp and a more conventional and accommodating camp.

Chicano camp represents, and is, an example of the former. (García 2006, 211)

*Ugly Betty* simultaneously “satirizes” and “deconstructs” that which excludes and marginalizes in its focus on the fashion industry at *Mode*. But the show also does so through its representation of the Suarez family, which illustrates the marginalization and exclusion occurring to Latinas/os in the United States. The figure of Betty disrupts this marginalization by presenting a misfit who overcomes exclusion while never becoming fully integrated in *Mode*. The exaggerated set design of the Suarez home and *Mode*, the queer characters, the constant jokes about Betty’s Mexican heritage and ugliness, and the intertextual references to telenovelas contribute to this aesthetic.

Talking about Ela Troyano’s film *Carmelita Tropicana*, Muñoz writes, “Troyano’s strategic use of camp allows her film and its characters to reinhabit these stereotypes both calling attention to the inaccuracy of these representations and ‘fixing’ such representation from the inside by filling in these representation husks with complicated, antiessentialist, emotionally compelling characters” (127). *Ugly Betty* is engaged in a similar practice particularly as it relates to Betty’s relationship to coworkers Marc St. James (played by Michael Urie) and Amanda Tanen (played by Becky Newton). These characters simultaneously make Betty’s life hell at *Mode* by the constant mockery, only to be finally let into the group. The mockery always deals with her ethnic heritage and her style of dress. These campy, over-the-top representations of racial stereotypes and derogatory jabs provide humor at Betty’s expense:

The essentialized understanding of identity (i.e., men are like this, Latinas are like that, queers are that way) by its very nature must reduce identities to lowest-common-denominator terms....Socially

encoded scripts of identity are often formatted by phobic energies around race, sexuality, gender, and various other identificatory distinctions. (Muñoz 1999, 6)

Using Norma Alarcón and Chela Sandoval, Muñoz theorizes a disidentification that is part of identity performance:

The disidentificatory identity performances I catalog in these pages are all emergent identities-in-difference. These identities-in-difference emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere. Their emergence is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through this disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere. (7)

Moreover, “comedic disidentification accomplishes important cultural critique while at the same time providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies” (Muñoz 1999, 119). For instance, Betty ends season three in a truce of sorts with her ex-nemeses Marc St. James and Amanda Tanen who also work with her to accomplish their workplace aims and their personal goals. Without these characters, we would never understand how out-of-place Betty is at *Mode*, nor would Betty ever attain the same level of assertiveness we see by the final season. They push her to move beyond the Betty that appeared in a campy, hideous bright red Guadalajara poncho in the pilot episode. In turn, Betty provides maternal support for Marc and Amanda in their various times of need. Thus, it is at work that Betty is slowly transformed, in spirit and body, into a sexual being.

### **Beyond the Bombshell: A Sexy Betty that Works**

In the office, Marc and Amanda pass judgment on Betty's sex life in order to entertain themselves throughout their workday. In seasons one and two, when Betty was dating Henry, Amanda constantly made references to geek love. Betty's experiences with Henry eventually cause their separation, though he shows up at inopportune moments in seasons two and three, usually when Betty has recovered emotionally. This, too, produces countless amusement for Amanda and Marc. When Gio becomes Betty's next romantic interest, Marc and Amanda suggest that Betty is much better with Gio because he smells like salami ("The Kids Are Alright" 2008). Regardless of these campy quips, Marc and Amanda may be right, because Gio encourages her dreams and forces Betty to confront her own professional limitations. He consistently talks about his five-year life plan and encourages her to articulate the things that would make her happy. In many ways, Henry is the romantic fantasy but Gio offers her real romance, even if not in the package that Betty originally envisions ("Twenty Four Candles" 2008).

Season three begins and ends demonstrating that Betty recognizes and realizes her self-worth. She returns to *Mode* after a month-long road trip on her own, committed to pursuing an editing position instead of remaining Daniel's assistant. Even though she accomplishes the training to move ahead, however, her opportunities are either thwarted or left to chance ("The Manhattan Project" 2008). In addition to her professional goals, Betty's sexual reticence exhibited in front of Henry's apartment is contrasted to how she approaches sexuality with Matt, her most recent love interest. In fact, Marc and Amanda help Betty overcome her shyness about communicating her sexual desire with Matt ("The Sex Issue" 2009). Amanda particularly forces Betty to disclose her sex troubles, because of Matt's status as a billionaire: "Oh my God! Are you actually saying that you haven't tapped that yet?...And he's like a billionaire.

And for some reason, he seems to be into you. What the HELL are you waiting for?" ("The Sex Issue" 2009). This prompts Betty to begin questioning why she and Matt have not had sex after dating for a month, and she determines to take their relationship to another level.

The evening after their next date, Matt moves to get Betty a cab to return her to Queens. When she stops him and suggests, "Or I can go upstairs and take a peek at your new wall color...", he laughs at her and sends her on her way, with a speed that prompts the cab driver to comment, "Heh. That guy couldn't get rid of you fast enough" ("The Sex Issue" 2009). Betty is confused because every signal indicates that he cares very deeply for her, and she is giving Matt every opportunity to be with her. Betty turns again to Amanda, who suggests that Betty, who cannot utter the complete phrase "I want to have sex," needs assertiveness training when it comes to sex: "Betty, in honor of us having been roommates, I'm going to personally teach you how to be sexy. You know—as sexy as *this* (waving her hand in front of Betty) can be. I will show you some of my no fail moves. Admit it Betty, you need a little help in that department. Get ready Betty. The sex train's a comin'" ("The Sex Issue" 2009). In this scene we see Betty's discomfort discussing sex and expressing her desire in an overt fashion. Nevertheless, Amanda, who is more in touch with her sexuality, decides to make Betty over in her image, to infuse her with expressions of desire that will purportedly seduce Matt.

When Betty arrives at her old apartment, the one she briefly shared with Amanda and that Amanda now shares with Marc, Betty is shocked to discover they are not alone. Marc enters the scene exclaiming, "Okay, we're ready for Operation Betty Sexification!" Betty protests Marc's presence: "Amanda, I thought it was just going to be us girls," to which Amanda replies, "It is," simultaneously acknowledging Marc's status as her girlfriend, a campy

play on gender and Marc's homosexuality ("The Sex Issue" 2009). In one of the most comedic scenes to date, Marc and Amanda proceed to school Betty in the art of seduction, complete with a montage of the most bizarre advice like, "Eat slow and seductively; show him your lips are available and open for business, and ignite his pleasure center with a light graze of a feather" ("The Sex Issue" 2009). Once they finish their tutorial, Marc exclaims, "I can't believe I'm saying this, but Betty Suarez is getting some strange tonight!" Then Amanda states, "Go get 'em tiger..." Marc and Amanda make a cat noise and exit ("The Sex Issue" 2009).

Clearly, Marc and Amanda function as clowns in this episode, but their roles also work to transform Betty into a vixen, or as closely as they can manage. While Betty fails completely in her mission, like a good student, she performs every "move" Amanda and Marc instruct. The next day at work, Betty communicates her frustration, articulating the fact that Matt is avoiding her with the excuse that he is working through lunch. Amanda offers additional advice: "Ummm...that does not fly with me. If I were you, I would march over to his office right now and give him a piece of my mind." Marc then offers, "Oh, Betty's not the type to do something like that." Then Betty surprises them both with, "You know what? I'm going to....I just. I can't spend another second playing last night in my head. I'm going to talk to him."

Marc and Amanda encourage Betty and are instrumental in signaling a shift in Betty's personality. Betty has gone from not being able to articulate the words *sex* to following her friends' advice and confronting her boyfriend. Marc's surprise at Betty's assertiveness and their collective embark on the plan to confront Matt signal a new stage in Betty's development. She is sassier and smarter and refuses to crumble at Matt's rejection.

Of course, what Betty does not know is that she is the first woman Matt has been in a real relationship with, even though he has had sex with hundreds of women. His status as a “born-again-virgin” makes Betty increasingly uncomfortable and insecure about her status as his girlfriend. However, when Matt finally invites her to his apartment, he proves to her that he is “worthy” of her and that she is his primary love interest. Betty states, “I just want it to be special. And I’m sorry. But right now I feel like a number,” to which Matt responds, “You are. Number one....This will be the first time I’ve ever been with a woman I’ve really cared about. So technically, you are my first.” Betty forces Matt to prove his love and be vulnerable to her. Here, Betty is not just satisfied with a sexual experience. She wants love and romance, even when she responds to his disclosure with, “Awww. That’s so corny. And sweet.” This is another way we see Betty develop as a character. In the first episode, the advertiser Fabia suggested that Betty’s idea could be too sappy. Here, Betty makes the same observation of her billionaire boyfriend. And she surprises Marc with her assertive behavior. Moreover, Betty is becoming a bit less saccharine and a bit more sexual as the seasons progress. Nevertheless, the show maintains Betty’s romantic desire to be special and not a number, and she forces her friends and lovers continually to recognize her complexity of character. Betty defies binaries used to pigeonhole her, therefore representing a hybrid, multifaceted, and shifting subject, one who is developing as the show progresses.

### **Is Ugly the New Sexy?: A Conclusion**

This essay begins with the question, “Is ugly the new sexy?” Another comparison of Betty’s sexuality to the original versions makes clear that in the Colombian telenovela, Betty was a virgin; in the Mexican telenovela she was seduced by a neighborhood hoodlum as part of a bet, and in the U.S. version, the show offers up an unprecedented number of love interests for Betty. In

fact, despite the ugly jokes at *Mode*, and the occasional hints about fashion from her own family members, everybody loves Betty and some people even think she is quite beautiful. More importantly, Betty is sexual.

There is no doubt that *Ugly Betty* maintains many of the fairy tale conventions to which audiences connect. The sense of romance and chivalry Betty experiences, and the hope for a happy ending, provide a comfort with the premise of the show. However, *Ugly Betty* also subverts the message that traditional romances present. One of the ways *Ugly Betty* produces this effect is through melodrama, evoking the telenovela's intertextuality as it relates to Betty's relationships. Another way that camps-up the good girl motif is that most characters at one point or another tell Betty she is too good, that she needs to relax and stop worrying about other people, in effect telling Cinderella to stop doing her job. The surprising message of the show, then, is quite empowering: put yourself first while still loving those around you. In one way, this counters the stereotypes and archetypes of Latinas as martyrs, virgins, or whores mentioned above.

Media studies scholar Rivero asks the question, "How many working-class, Mexican American, clumsy, allegedly 'ugly,' intelligent women with an illegal-immigrant father have been portrayed on U.S. television? Until Betty's arrival, none" (65). *Ugly Betty's* unique representation counteracts the limited ways Latinas have been viewed on film and television. Davila claims,

Studies have documented the importance of film and media stars as role models and as influential in the establishment of self-image and social attitudes toward other groups. We learn from such role models what sort of a life we can hope for, literally what to aspire to, as well as what to think of others and to expect others will think of us...

These are all powerful messages that can play determining roles in the futures of all young people and in social relations between ethnic groups. (2008, 6)

The reactions to the cancellation of *Ugly Betty* by ABC and its producers evidence this theory. For instance, in her article “10 Reasons ‘Ugly Betty’ Will be Missed,” CNN.com writer Olivia Allin writes, “Sure, it’s just a TV show, but her confidence in herself gave me more confidence in myself. And it also brought out my competitive side. If Betty can rope in intelligent, kindhearted men with jobs, why can’t I?...[S]eeing Betty get every nerd hottie that crosses her path was downright inspirational” (2010). Betty defies categorization, thus giving us a way to discuss the limits of imposing notions of authenticity on Chicanas and Latinas. The sheer diversity of the cast and the ways sexuality, gender, and class flow in complex ways combats the impulse to label individuals. *Ugly Betty* offers us mobile and strategic subjects who are comfortable with ambiguity and contradiction. These qualities position the show and its characters more closely with Chicana/o and Latina/o feminist theories than previous representations. This is perhaps why it has been so successful in its depictions of a wide range of Latina/o issues, while still appealing to mainstream audiences. To date, we have seen the show treat Latina/o immigration issues, homophobia, transgender identity, Latino masculinity and machismo, death, domestic violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, and nontraditional family structures.

And yet, *Ugly Betty* is not simply or universally subversive and political. The Latina/o camp aesthetic that it introduces to its television audiences also allows for Betty to be inundated with sexist and racist remarks during every episode, not to mention the ugly jokes. But these, too, offer opportunities to critically engage the difficult questions about identity in the United States that also help

us understand the world beyond Betty. Ultimately, *Ugly Betty's* greatest cultural intervention is that it helps us to see complex subjects instead of stagnant identity types. It suggests that the world is more complicated, messy, and ugly than the stereotypes often imposed to maintain social order. This notion of ugliness as the complexity of being, hybrid and fluid, like Chicana and Latina feminists have long theorized, is refreshing to see on television. But as those of us who live these complex and nuanced Latina lives know, this has been sexy all along.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Telenovelas (Latin American soap operas) are either produced in Latin America or the United States for worldwide Spanish-language television audiences. Unlike mainstream U.S. soap operas, these one-hour television programs are run daily during prime-time hours and are developed to last a finite amount of time. The original Colombian telenovela from which *Ugly Betty* was adapted, *Yo Soy, Betty La Fea*, for instance, ran thirty-six weeks between 1999 and 2000.

<sup>2</sup> The term Latina is used throughout this essay despite the protagonist's (Betty Suarez) Mexican American identity because none of the actors playing the Suarez family on *Ugly Betty* are Mexican American or Chicano. While it may seem that this lack of Mexican American characters reinforces Hollywood's homogenous representation of Latinas/os, *Ugly Betty* challenges the notion of an authentic Latina/o by highlighting the varieties of national heritage and the levels of comfort with Spanish within Latina/o communities.

<sup>3</sup> This essay treats the Latin American and U.S.-Latina/o versions of *Betty la fea*, even though this telenovela has been adapted globally, with nineteen versions in countries such as China, Germany, Great Britain, India, and Israel.

<sup>4</sup> For a clear and nuanced discussion of the *telenovela* genre and its effect on audiences across the hemisphere, see Estill 2000; Mayer 2003; Rivero 2003, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> The original Cinderella was thus nicknamed because of the cinders and dirt that covered her person (Perrault 1998-2005). Cinderella obtains her reward (a new style and a prince) through her good nature and her work ethic. The Betty characters follow suit, working hard and being kind in order to achieve their transformations and marry their love interest. While ABC's *Ugly Betty* has not yet fully employed this plot device, season four saw a significant shift in Betty's appearance, at least in her clothing and hairstyle ("America Ferrera Probably Gets Makeover on 'Ugly Betty' 4th Season" 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Mexico's *La Fea Más Bella* (2005-2006) included a national musical tour with the cast at the show's conclusion that was synthesized in a grand finale after the protagonists, Lety and Fernando, wed in the final episode. The famous talk show *Cristina* invited the cast for a special episode that aired directly following the finale in the U.S.

<sup>7</sup> This and subsequent quotes are not from official *Ugly Betty* scripts, but my own transcriptions.

<sup>8</sup> Special thanks to the audience members of the Popular Culture/American Culture Association Conference special session on Caribbean and Latin American Literature and Culture in San Francisco, CA. 19 Mar. 2008 for this reading.

<sup>9</sup> The term *American* here refers to Hollywood cinema, U.S. television, and Latin American representations. References to Hollywood cinema and U.S. television are marked with the adjective U.S. to acknowledge that there are other countries on the hemisphere.

<sup>10</sup> Salma Hayek's subsequent television role after Sofia Reyes on *Ugly Betty* was on six episodes of the third season of NBC's *30 Rock* where she played Elisa the Puerto Rican nurse/love interest of network executive Jack Donaghy (played by Alec Baldwin). In these episodes, Hayek self-consciously performs the Latina Bombshell as the rest of the characters perform their ignorance of Latinas/os despite their presence in New York City. A major plot device in one episode that brought in NBC's Spanish-language affiliate, Telemundo, centers on a telenovela character also played by Alec Baldwin ("Generalissimo" 2009). Such inter-industry reference notably makes visible the Spanish-language subculture within U.S. media and how foreign it seems to those not familiar with these industry connections and overlaps.

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