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oines and villains staring back at them from the tabloid covers allows audiences to relate to them in ways they cannot relate to the political figures that grace the front pages of mainstream newspapers.

Celebrity tabloid news privileges the private rather than the public sphere.²⁶ As such, Gamson contends that the appearance of public access to the private lives of celebrities is at the cultural and economic heart of celebrity journalism:

Indeed, the professional and commercial conflicts are resolved in . . . celebrity discourse: through the intimacy-stirring circulation of the personal details of love and pain and leisure, through gossip, through the cynic-flattering focus on image making and image management themselves, through the pragmatic mix of "man" and "myth," and the continual promise to sort out one from the other, to reveal the person behind the image.²⁷

The emphasis on the "real" stories and bodies of celebrities, their personal achievements, and tragic failures function as an entertaining morality play for audiences. That is not to say that tabloid readers believe everything reported about celebrities; rather, Gamson argues tabloid readers carefully evaluate, interpret, critique, and sometimes identify with or contest the perceived authenticity of the stories they read.²⁸

To study how tabloid readers interpret, identify, or critique the content they consume, we have to understand the ideological links between the content and its audiences. Elizabeth Bird's content analysis of tabloids concludes that most depict women and white celebrities alongside human-interest, rags-to-riches, how-to, and self-help stories. Bird concludes that the tabloids' ideological world is a conservative one through its reaffirmation of the political and social status quo. Thus, although audiences engage with the tabloids in multiple ways, Bird argues that one of the dominant reading strategies for tabloid audiences is through identifying with the stories of heteronormative whiteness and middle-class respectability. For instance, in her study of tabloid readers, Bird concluded:

Examiner staff were clear in their perception that tabloid readers tend to be politically conservative, and this was generally borne out. I should stress, however, that this conservatism is not obviously party-affiliated; rather it is a tendency to be "traditional," "family-oriented," religious, and patriotic in a nostalgic, flag-waving sense.²⁹

The education, economic, class, gender, and racial demographics of entertainment tabloids place emphasis on traditional notions of family, domesticity, and citizenship. According to the 2008 *Us Weekly* media kit, 73 percent of its readers are women; 53 percent make less than \$75,000; 69 percent have attended some college; 45 percent are married; and 76 percent identify as white.³⁰ While other U.S.-based entertainment tabloids (*in Touch*, *Star*, *People*, and the *National Enquirer*) do not provide information on the racial demographics of their readers, similarities in the education, gender, and economic makeup imply a majority are white women.³¹ I am not suggesting that ethnic and racial minorities do not read the tabloids or that ethnic and racial minorities do not also engage in conservative reading strategies. Indeed, I would posit, based on audience research conducted by Jillian Báez, that ethnic and racial minorities might be more invested in conservative notions of social respectability.³² Regardless, the demographic makeup of tabloid audiences and the ideologically conservative messages of tabloid stories demand that we examine how the disciplining of femininity, domesticity, and sexuality holds specific consequences for ethnic and racial minority women, specifically Puerto Ricans and Latinas.

Booty(full) Desires . . . and the Tabloid Consumption of the Latina Body

I begin my analysis by exploring Lopez's self-conscious negotiations with her ethnoracial identity. By self-conscious I recognize that, as Gamson illustrates in his study, celebrities are knowingly invested in tabloid attention about them:

The aspirant or performer is on the one hand a *worker*, and what is developed and sold is the capacity to play a role and the actual work of playing the role. This is the entertainer's more "traditional" aspect: the aspirant's qualities and abilities (not necessarily talent, also often looks alone) are the basis for decision making. On the other hand, he or she is *celebrity*, and what is developed and sold is the capacity to command attention.³³

In other words, celebrities and their agents and managers work together to produce a sellable image that resonates as interesting, authentic, or truthful to audiences.

Beltrán argues that for Lopez, the commodification of "celebrity-self" begins with her 1997 performance in the movie *Selena*, which earned her

serious acting recognition and mainstream attention. Lopez's physical embodiment of Latinidad, in particular Selená's voice and look, catapulted her to cinematic stardom. Frances Aparicio suggests that the positive audience reception of the Puerto Rican actor's performance of a Mexican Tejana icon spoke to emerging Latina identity formations. Most Latina/o audiences are aware of the many similarities between both women. Both have similar body types, hair textures, skin color. Both were born in the United States to Latina/o parents, but neither learned Spanish until later in life. The movie provided unprecedented and celebrated visibility to both the Puerto Rican Lopez and the Tejana Selená. These similarities produced a bridge across the ethnic specific identities of Latina audiences and toward a more collective sense of ethnorracial Latina community.

By 2001, Lopez would go on to break records by becoming the third woman, and the first Latina, to hold the No. 1 album and movie spots simultaneously when her *J.Lo* album knocked a Beatles' rerelease album off the No. 1 Billboard spot and *The Wedding Planner* became the No. 1 grossing film in the United States.³⁴ Three years later, Lopez would be the most popular tabloid cover subject and highest paid Latina actor, receiving \$20 million per film.³⁵ Hailed by the U.S. popular press as the "new face" of U.S. beauty—large(r) and curvaceous—Lopez herself has commented that the world knew her butt before the public knew her face, an association she carefully cultivated through her early career in interviews and music video performances. She remains one of the world's most popular and polarizing celebrities.³⁶

The Early J.Lo Years

Media coverage during this period unequivocally emphasized her ethnically ambiguous, racially flexible, and desirable body. Because Lopez can personify multiple ethnic and racial identities, she is often coded as an ambiguously brown ethnic—rarely coded as either white or black. During her *In Living Color*/Sean Combs (Puff Daddy/P. Diddy) days, Lopez located her musical performances within the terrain of urban and black popular culture without consciously identifying as black. At the same time, Lopez's cinematic career depended on performances of ambiguously ethnic, racially undetermined characters, such as in *Out of Sight*, *The Cell*, and *Enough*. Her cinematic performances shifted her into almost-white but still ethnic territory. More recently, Lopez has settled into a more fixed ethnorracial identity through her marriage and creative collaborations with fellow Nuyorican Marc Anthony. Nevertheless, Lopez's ability to perform blackness, whiteness, and brownness

throughout her career opened the representational spectrum through which her body and identity circulated within global popular culture.

Claiming that Lopez is racially flexible is not the same as stating that she is racially unmarked. Rather, I argue the opposite. Lopez consciously negotiates the ways in which she is racialized by shaping how she is coded in the media through transforming signifiers such as clothing, hair color, hair style, skin color, body weight, music and, of course, her paramours. These practices allow a racialized transformation into ambiguity that other Puerto Ricans and Afro-Cuban women, such as Rosie Perez and Rosario Dawson, have not been able to achieve. While Lopez's film career depends on her ability to perform an ethnically ambiguous whiteness, such as in *Out of Sight* (1998), *The Wedding Planner* (2001), and *Angel Eyes* (2001), her music career relies on the ability to marshal a more racially ambiguous ethnic identity. The strategy of racial flexibility and ethnic ambiguity has proved successful for Lopez's management team. To date her most globally successful movie, *Shall We Dance?* (2004), featured Lopez playing "Paulina," an ethnically ambiguous white character. On the other hand, Lopez's more successful music singles, "If You Had My Love" (1999) and "I'm Real" (2001), have been hip-hop tinged remixes featuring Lopez in African-style braided hair side by side with established rap artists Ja Rule and LL Cool J, among others. Together, her cinematic and musical performances illustrate Lopez's facile and deliberate moves across ethnic and racial identities. It is this facile border crossing through established U.S. racial categories, specifically whiteness, that the tabloids and bloggers respond to later in her career.

Throughout her career, Lopez has carefully managed her ethnorracial identity for the English-language mainstream media while celebrating a more fixed Puerto Rican and panethnic Latina identity in the Spanish-language media.³⁷ From the beginning, U.S. Latina/o print and television news often highlighted Lopez's second-generation heritage and her achievements as a New York-born Puerto Rican, a Nuyorican. For instance, a news story in New York City's *El Diario La Prensa* about dignitaries at the 1998 Puerto Rican Day Parade mentioned Lopez's participation.³⁸ Another story in Los Angeles' *La Opinión* drew attention to Lopez's nomination at the 1999 American Music Awards by emphasizing her Latina/o flavor ("Con Sabor Latino").³⁹ In both stories, which are representative of U.S. Latina/o media practices, Lopez is identified by her Puerto Rican ethnicity. Such identification practices affirm the star's Latina authenticity and membership in an imagined Latina/o community that is racially and ethnically distinct from dominant U.S. culture.

Lopez was also one of the first actors in contemporary Hollywood to embrace the Latina label and identification with the U.S. Latina/o popular culture boom of the 1990s, unlike Jessica Alba, Cameron Diaz, America Ferrera, and Salma Hayek, who initially resisted being identified as Latinas by the English- and Spanish-language media. In 1996, Lopez posed for the first cover of the bilingual magazine *Latina* and has appeared on the magazine's cover more than any other Latina public figure. Finally, Lopez used her physicality, dark hair, light-brown skin, and curvaceous body to establish her ethnoracial difference and communality with U.S. Latina/o media audiences. In an appearance on Univision's *The Cristina Show*, Lopez responded to questions about the authenticity of her butt by happily twirling her body and exclaiming in less than proficient Spanish that indeed "it" was all hers by birthright. As Frances Negrón-Muntaner argues, Lopez successfully used the African resonances of her curvaceous body as empirical, irrefutable evidence of her Puerto Rican identity, her authentic self—proof that although she was born in New York and could not speak Spanish fluently, potential signifiers of ethnic inauthenticity, she was still a *real* Puerto Rican Latina.⁴⁰ Lopez has effectively promoted her perfectly round and larger-than-Hollywood-average backside—roughly a dress size 6—to cultivate her commitment to Puerto Rican and Latina pride in the U.S. Latina/o media.

However, for the English-language media, the early hyping of her butt focused on Lopez's exotic bodily difference, ethnic ambiguity, and racial flexibility. Warner Brothers' 1997 *Selena* specifically targeted Latin American audiences, U.S. Latina/o audiences, and young U.S. girls across all ethnic and racial categories.⁴¹ Arenas Group, an advertising and talent management firm specializing in the U.S. Latina/o market, effectively designed *Selena*'s promotional campaign with the goal of broad ethnic and racial appeal. The Arenas Group was also brought in by ABC to promote *Ugly Betty*.⁴² Part of Arenas's promotional strategy depended on Selena's all-American story as a working-class girl from Texas making it big and the ability of Lopez's ambiguous identity to captivate a broad range of audiences and crossover movie demographics. The low-production-cost movie achieved its goal, grossing a respectable \$35.3 million.⁴³ *Selena*'s cross-cultural success demonstrated to mainstream media marketers that both Latinas/os and non-Latinas/os would pay to see Latina actors and characters. If packaged effectively, Latina panethnicity could be globally commodified.⁴⁴

Subsequently, Lopez's cinematic success after *Selena* increasingly rested on her ability to land roles stripped of ethnic- and race-specific cinematic markers.⁴⁵ Before the critically acclaimed movie *Out of Sight* (1998), where she

plays the ethnically and racially ambiguous character Karen Sisco opposite white leading man George Clooney, Lopez was confined to playing Latina characters, such as Rosie Romero in *Nurses on the Line: The Crash of Flight 7* (1993); a young María Sánchez in *My Family, Mi Familia* (1995); Grace Santiago in *Money Train* (1995); Miss Márquez in *Jack* (1996); Gabriela "Gabby" in *Blood and Wine* (1997); Terri Flores in *Anaconda* (1997); and perhaps her most famous ethnic role, Selena Quintanilla-Pérez in *Selena* (1997). *Out of Sight* allowed Lopez to showcase her body and acting abilities through a sexy and exotic character whose development was not informed by a particular ethnic or racial identity. The character never speaks Spanish, although she presumably understands the language, as evidenced in her interactions with Latina/o characters, and her last name "Sisco," which could be interpreted as a Latina/o name, is not spelled in the traditional Spanish way, "Cisco." Since her success in *Out of Sight*, Lopez has made a career of playing ethnically and racially ambiguous characters, such as the character in her most internationally profitable movie to date, the \$170 million blockbuster *Shall We Dance?* co-starring Richard Gere.⁴⁶ It is only recently that Lopez has returned to cinematic roles with more specific Puerto Rican/Latina ethnic content, such as the poor-performing movie *El Cantante* (2006)⁴⁷ and the limited release *Bordertown* (2006), both movies that she produced through her company Nuyorican Productions. By successfully managing her identity in a Hollywood industry driven by ethnic and racial typecasting, Lopez has parlayed her ethnically ambiguous and racially flexible exotic beauty and body into a marketable global success.

By 2001, Lopez's celebrity status was beginning to climb. Her increased visibility provided a potential moment of symbolic rupture for Latina/o audiences. As defined in the introduction, symbolic ruptures point to the interpretive mechanism that allows audiences (including myself as a cultural reader) the opportunity to use their subjectivity to disrupt the process of cultural commodification. For many fans and audiences, Lopez's performance of Latinidad within global entertainment points to a potentially resistant moment of ethnic and racial transformation. Barrera, Beltrán, and Negrón-Muntaner argue that Lopez's self-conscious celebration of her posterior is a form of symbolic war on dominant racialized constructions of Puerto Ricans and Latinas as culturally, socially, and politically marginal. That Lopez embraced her booty as a marketable symbol of desirable beauty points to her ethnic pride in the face of ongoing racial discrimination toward Puerto Ricans and presents an open challenge to white cultural dominance. As Negrón-Muntaner notes, "A big *culo* upset hegemonic (white) notions

of beauty and good taste because it is a sign of the dark incomprehensible excess of 'Latino' and other African diaspora cultures."⁴⁸ If, as Negrón-Mun-taner suggests, a big booty is where racialized Puerto Rican identity is stored, then the hypermedia attention on Lopez's racially ambiguous and simultaneously racially marked bountiful *derriere* provides a rare moment of visibility for the second largest Latina/o group in the United States.⁴⁹

In my own family, we regularly look out for Lopez's performances in the English- and Spanish-language media (for research purposes of course). Both my Puerto Rican mother and Dominican father, in particular, recognize Lopez's diva personality as excessive but find humor and pride in the media attention paid to the Boricua starlet and her infamous booty. In addition to celebrating Lopez's visibility as a "real" Puerto Rican woman, her ethnically ambiguous and racially flexible physicality reminds them of the women in their multiracial and multiethnic families. Through both her ethnic specificity and racial ambiguity, Lopez serves as a cultural symbol of Puerto Rican and Latina/o resilience in a nation that has antagonistically welcomed them. Lopez's media visibility creates an opening for cultural resistance because the unclassifiable nature of her identity vexes established representations of U.S. ethnic and racial identity.⁵⁰ Governmentality does not depend on violence for its power but instead draws on its ability to normalize classifications, and Lopez's conscious play with ethnic and racial classification potentially destabilized gender/race power hierarchies in the United States.⁵¹ Flexible and ambiguous bodies that rupture classifications—in this instance black/white racial hierarchies of beauty—thereby expose binary logic and essentialist identity categories, inevitably problematizing the norm.

Moving "In" to Blackness

Having already caught the eye of Hollywood producers through her performances in *Selena* and *Out of Sight*, Lopez's ascendance into the realm of pop culture icon finally occurred in 2000, the year she presented her first Grammy music award wearing "The Dress," a green Versace gown strategically missing enough material to showcase her small perky breasts, flat tummy, shapely muscular legs, and, of course, her ubiquitous booty. A Google image search of the term "[Lopez's] Versace Dress" quickly yields images of Lopez wearing the infamous piece of couture. In an article exclusively about the dress on the *Entertainment Weekly* Web site, the commentator described the moment in these terms: "She turned herself out as the fly girl hyperversion of

postfeminist power, flaunting her control by toying with the threat of excess. In consequence, her star went supernova."⁵² Employing the "threat of excess," her performance of sexuality and style drew unprecedented attention by breaking with normative notions of white femininity and social acceptability. The dress's overt sensuality and Lopez's inescapable celebration of her body and sexuality struck a nerve for tabloid journalists who both loved and hated it.⁵³ Lopez's choice of dress communicated a confident sexual femininity that one biographer described as a transformative moment:

In the evening's highpoint, Latin beauty Jennifer Lopez wears an eye-popping Versace dress that looks like a pasted-on scarf. It barely conceals her body. The audience is visibly dumbfounded. Her co-presenter, the usually witty David Duchovny, is star-struck as he stutters his lines. A chiquita legend is born.⁵⁴

The brightly colored translucent dress became a hypersexualized spectacle. Lopez is not just a legend. She is not any woman. Lopez is a consumable Latin "chiquita" legend, a legend commonly associated with the banana-wearing Brazilian Carmen Miranda's over-the-top tropical Hollywood legacy. To the biographer, Lopez's sexuality is situated in a panethnic performance of Latinidad. The Puerto Rican Lopez echoes the Carmen Miranda legacy and becomes the latest globally popular hypersexualized Latina chiquita.

However, to understand the ethnic, racial, and sexual linkages associated with the dress, it is essential to contextualize it within Lopez's relationship to blackness and the tabloid coverage of Lopez's life at the time. Lopez attended the Grammy event with her *beau du jour*, Sean Combs, who is often credited with the early success of her music career. As a producer in three of her most successful albums, *On the 6* (1999), *J.Lo* (2001), and *J to tha L-O! The Remixes* (2002), Combs is credited with bringing hip-hop to Lopez's pop sound. The hip-hop tinged remixes and videos from these three albums proved highly popular and produced six of Lopez's nine musical hits. However, the popularity of the songs and music videos also produced a secondary effect in tabloid coverage of the celebrity. Alongside her romantic relationship with the hip-hop mogul, the videos visually situated the racially flexible Lopez within an urban Puerto Rican aesthetic, black popular culture, and racialized sexuality.

For example, the hip-hop video remix for her No. 1 Billboard hit "I'm Real" (2001) changed the original setting from a predominantly white rural countryside where Lopez is the innocent object of a young white male to a predominantly urban space where she becomes the sexualized object of

Ja Rule's black heterosexual desire. Other videos such as "Love Don't Cost a Thing" show Lopez sporting African braids, and all of them emphasize her booty through close-ups, low-cut jeans, short-shorts, and tight-fitting clothing. Black hip-hop artists, street hoops, bling, and Lopez's Puerto Rican booty work together to create an identity that is not-quite-black but clearly establishes her outside whiteness and within the domain of urban black and Puerto Rican culture.

Lopez's relationship with Combs, which spanned the release of her first and second music albums, moved her further toward "not-quite-black" blackness. She was further racialized through her implicit linkage to stereotypical associations between hip-hop culture and urban criminality when, three months before her Grammy appearance, Lopez and Combs were arrested—Lopez was eventually released without charges—on suspicion of involvement in a shooting outside a New York City nightclub. By the end of her relationship with Combs in 2001, Lopez, who began her entertainment career in 1991 as a brown-haired, curly-headed, hip-hop dancer on the black variety program *In Living Color*, was visually and musically situated within the domain of urban popular culture. The specific classed, raced, and gendered performance of identity associated with the marketing of her music and clothing line inevitably positioned Lopez as an ethnic Puerto Rican brown woman who was not white but not quite black.

Whatever else Lopez gained from her musical and romantic relationship with Combs, her association with him slowed her move toward whiteness. Lopez's conscious embrace of black popular culture and racialized class identity as an urban Latina (specifically a Puerto Rican from the Bronx) made it difficult to break from the typecasting that defined her cinematic career prior to 1997. For example, despite her critically successful performance as an ethnically ambiguous character in *Out of Sight*, director Adam Shankman resisted casting Lopez as the lead for *The Wedding Planner* because he wanted the character to be a second-generation European immigrant. Shankman thought Lopez was too ethnic and too racialized—and presumably nonwhite—to pull off a white ethnic character:

In the film, the main character, Mary, was to be Armenian, because she had to be under strong and old-fashioned parental influence. After agreeing, in principle, that she could take the role, Shankman asked despairingly: "Are you going to make me order a rewrite to make Mary a Latina?" Lopez replied: "No—I'll get rid of all my friends and get new Armenian ones." The character was eventually changed to an Italian.⁵⁵

Implicit in Shankman's assessment of Lopez's ability to play the role are two important assumptions about ethnic and racial identities: first, that Latinas are too ethnically and racially marked as brown to pass as Eastern Europeans; second, that Lopez is white enough to be Italian or that Italians are brown enough to be played by Latinas. Both assumptions recognize that Lopez is a sexualized and racialized body whose ambiguity and flexibility have limits.

Symbolic Colonization and the White Gaze

Despite the desirable transformative potential of Latina ethnic ambiguity and racial flexibility for audiences, coverage of Lopez in the celebrity tabloids points to its dangerous limits, especially about members of a Puerto Rican community historically constructed as social and political threats in the United States. Not surprisingly, as Lopez's celebrity power increased later in her career, the tabloid coverage surrounding her series of high-profile relationships became increasingly negative—first with black hip-hop mogul Sean Combs (P. Diddy), then with multiethnic (Filipino/white) backup dancer Cris Judd, and finally with one of Hollywood's most popular leading white men of Irish descent, Ben Affleck. Lopez's self-conscious celebration of her backside and careful movement from blackness toward whiteness resulted in tabloid stories and audience blogs increasingly critical of her moral values, personal behavior, and sexuality. In particular, I contend that tabloid stories from 2002 to 2004 framed Lopez through a gendered and racialized discourse of Puerto Rican hypersexuality. To define hypersexuality, I build on Celine Parreñas Shimizu's work on Asian American representations.⁵⁶ Parreñas Shimizu's study concludes that the sexualized representation of Asian American women in popular culture is informative of how the United States makes sense of race through sexuality. Discussions of media representations of ethnicity and race must therefore include an analysis of ethnicity and race as sexualized. With regard to Lopez, I argue the hypersexualization of Lopez and her body is intricately connected to how the celebrity tabloids and bloggers make sense of her ethnoracial Puerto Rican identity.

One key concept for explaining the limits of nonwhite bodies in popular culture, be it in the tabloids or the movies, is the notion of the "white gaze." Building on Laura Mulvey's definition of the male gaze, several scholars have used the term *white gaze* to describe "the power of whites to control or contain constructions of nonwhite ethnicity in U.S. popular culture."⁵⁷ In the context of Latinidad, the power of the white gaze is maintained through gendering and racialization that produces symbolically colonized media depictions.

The media practices that reproduce dominant norms, values, and beliefs about Latinidad as foreign, exotic, and consumable help “control or contain constructions” of Latinidad in the media. Tabloid stories about Lopez after her breakup with Combs illustrate how journalists’ white gaze functions to symbolically colonize Lopez as an ethnically ambiguous and racially flexible body through the racialized framing of her sexuality.

The potential rupturing of ethnoracial U.S. identity caused by Lopez’s global success demands ideological disciplining. The ethnic, class, and physical markers that define her are racialized outside whiteness and therefore open for tabloid journalistic surveillance and discipline. Pointing out the significance of the increased cultural surveillance surrounding Lopez, one British writer explained:

She is seen by many in Hollywood as a little diva in a big hurry: the Puerto Rican girl from the wrong side of the tracks who speaks her mind. They say she is famous for her looks, her bottom, her ex-boyfriend. And her big mouth. Jennifer Lopez knows she is regarded with suspicion. But she also knows that, at 30, she has become the world’s highest-paid Latina actress, with a successful singing career as well. She may be scorned, but she is fast turning herself into the next Madonna.⁵⁸

As the writer suggests, Lopez’s Puerto Rican ethnicity, working-class roots, and body are viewed as globally desirable and culturally dangerous. Lopez’s symbolic currency as a consumable exotic ethnic and racially flexible Nuyorican star ruptures dominant U.S. racial formations, and those moments of instability must be ideologically contained.

Dangerous Flirtations with Whiteness

The end of Lopez’s relationship with Combs in February 2001 introduced a new, more racialized story line about the celebrity—one that was much harder to control. Most of the coverage about the Combs romance focused on his broken heart and by implication Lopez’s heartlessness. It is during this period that tabloid stories about Lopez as an extraordinarily beautiful, hardworking but excessively demanding diva began flooding the tabloids when she quickly rebounded with her marriage to Cris Judd. Tabloid journalists drew a subtle but poignant contrast between Lopez and her romantic partners. Emphasizing Lopez’s difference from the “average” woman, a *People* story about her September 2001 wedding with Judd quoted an old acquaintance, “Cris

always dated straitlaced girls in high school,” says Melissa Dowd Roberts, who shared a locker with Judd at Niceville High, where he was known as a quiet but popular guy. “It’s a surprise that he ended up with Jennifer Lopez with her see-through dresses and all.”⁵⁹ By using the quote, several telling associations are created within the story. Judd likes “straitlaced girls,” and Lopez is the kind of hypersexualized woman that wears “see-through dresses.” He’s quiet, nice, and marrying for the first time. Lopez is a divorcee who married a guy she had dated on the rebound and had known for less than eight months. A cynical interpretation of the relationship might suggest that Lopez’s marriage to the low-profile noncelebrity Judd was a conscious attempt, even celebrity stunt, to recuperate the star from her hypersexualized image. The same *People* story, which raised doubts about Lopez’s marital intentions, also included “evidence” of Judd as the traditional, powerful male patriarch and Lopez, not as the diva, but as the appropriately feminine partner: “In Puerto Rico, where she performed two concerts last month, ‘he was in full control,’ says this source. ‘He was the boss. He was the choreographer. She listened to him, and he was running the show.’”⁶⁰ The conflicting narratives of the relationship circulated in the story create doubts about the relationship, but, more importantly, they reinforce Lopez’s difference from other women.

Questions about Lopez’s motives and morality intensified when her marriage to Judd ended less than a year later under suspicions of a sexual affair with Ben Affleck. Covering the announcement of Lopez and Judd’s split in June 2002, *People*’s story once again questioned Lopez’s behavior by quoting from Lopez’s interview with Oprah to promote her film at the time, *Enough*:

But Lopez herself hinted last month that, when it came to love, her approach is more *c’est la vie* than eternal monogamy. “You do what feels right at the time,” she told Oprah. “And I’ve always been the type that follows my heart and my gut. I still go with those instincts, because I feel like they’ve never steered me wrong.”⁶¹

Lopez used Oprah’s forum to promote the movie while carefully managing information about her personal life that was vague at best. Although other tabloid sources insist on Lopez’s commitment to monogamy and disavow the star’s sexual relationship with Affleck during this period, contradictory tabloid reports of Lopez’s actions and public statements create the public perception that she is untrustworthy, immoral, and sexually promiscuous.

Not surprisingly, Lopez’s peak visibility from 2001 to 2004, with covers for *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *FHM* (*For Him Magazine*), *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Stuff*, *Harper’s*

Returning to U.S. *Latinidad*

The tabloid coverage about Lopez symbolically colonizes Puerto Rican and Latina identity by recuperating the social position of white identity through reaffirming cultural boundaries that cannot be transgressed without penalty. Lopez's potentially rupturing performance of ethnic, racial, sexual, and class identity resulted in the need for gendering and racializing the celebrity. Unlike her contemporaries, such as Halle Berry, Beyoncé Knowles, Jennifer Garner, Angelina Jolie, or Julia Roberts, Lopez's uncategorizable racial body, panethnic identity, overt sexuality, and conspicuous wealth are codified as hot, spicy, excessive, and aberrant. Garner, Jolie, and Roberts maintain their white respectability despite reports of sexual infidelities in the tabloids. Berry and Knowles are multiracial women, but their normative performance of black identity maintains the dominant racial ideology of hypodescent (one drop of black blood makes one black). Lopez's seemingly shifting performance of whiteness, blackness, and brownness, however, adds to a cultural discomfort with the changing formations of ethnoracial identity in the United States. Latinas' place in tabloid celebrity culture and the United States is thus profoundly unstable and contradictory. Visibility in a media environment historically characterized by the erasure of Latina/o actors, characters, writers, and producers is often viewed as progress. It is, however, a story of progress and visibility fraught with cultural perils for ethnoracial minority communities.

Writing about the sociological function of celebrity culture, Christine Gledhill argues that coverage of Hollywood stars is representative of the ideological conflicts in contemporary popular culture.¹¹³ Tabloid coverage and blogs about Lopez and her relationship with Affleck document the limits of *Latinidad*, ethnic ambiguity, and racial flexibility. Initial tabloid constructions of Lopez's beauty/booty as globally desirable become contested as she embodies whiteness by losing weight (in particular her booty), straightening and lightening her hair, flaunting her wealth, and starting a relationship with Affleck. Tabloid coverage about the American dream—about a Puerto Rican woman who beats the odds to make it in a field where few Latinas have succeeded—was replaced by a more gendered and racialized story of *Latinidad*. Coverage of Lopez's relationship with Affleck focused on her not as exotic, desirable, and marketable but as disruptive to white heteronormative masculinity. That a brown-haired, brown-eyed *trigueña* Puerto Rican from the Bronx could captivate the heart of an all-American white boy from the Boston suburbs disturbed conservative notions of white heterosexuality

and the established U.S. racial order that places Puerto Rican identity outside of whiteness. Tabloid coverage unequivocally marked Lopez as nonwhite and outside middle-class respectability.

The tabloid and audience policing of her body is evocative of the continued legal, economic, and political policing of Puerto Rican emigrants to the United States. During the 1950s, Puerto Rican Operation Bootstrap emigrants were encouraged to migrate as agricultural workers, garment manufacturers, and domestic laborers. Their ethnoracial difference and limited English skills made them desirable workers who could be more easily controlled through low wages, unsafe work environments, and unfair labor practices. However, when their numbers swelled and they embraced a racialized political identity in the 1970s, Puerto Ricans became associated with blackness, poverty, and criminality. Such marginalization resulted in Puerto Rican militant social movements on the island and in New York, Chicago, and other major urban centers. Because Puerto Ricans existed outside whiteness and blackness they were constructed as socially and politically threatening to the racial, social, and political order. Their laboring bodies required spatial, cultural, and racial containment from other ethnic and racial minorities.¹¹⁴

Similarly Lopez entered the lucrative stream of global popular culture as a docile, exotic, desirable, commodifiable body, yet she was forbidden to partake in the full rights and economic privileges of whiteness. The anti-climatic end of her relationship with Affleck signaled the restoration of white patriarchal order and racial fixity. Affleck eventually set the rules and terms of their relationship, and Lopez was coded as too different to be associated with whiteness or blackness. Richard Dyer argues that Hollywood stars are their bodies and meanings about their bodies are ultimately created through the complex interactions between artistic performance, media institutions, and public discourse.¹¹⁵ Key physical characteristics—race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class—become particularly important in making sense of the public conversations that surround star bodies. In other words, understanding the bodily discourses that surround ethnoracial women tells something not only about the stars but also about our contemporary racial social structures, norms, and conflicts. Within the world of tabloid celebrity news, the “all-American” boy became the victim during a period when U.S. control of Puerto Rico was being violently contested in Vieques and anti-Latina/o and anti-immigration sentiments were proliferating throughout the United States.

Since her marriage to salsa artist and fellow Nuyorican Marc Anthony in 2005, the tabloid stories about Lopez as a demanding, excessive, and hypersexual diva have been relatively silenced. The birth of her twins has been

unilaterally celebrated by the tabloids and entertainment media. No longer the sexualized Latina diva, she has been constructed as a good Puerto Rican wife and mother—so much so that Lopez lost her tabloid title of best Hollywood booty in 2006 to white, although part American Indian, celebrity Jessica Biel.¹⁰⁶ Lopez's "kiss my brown booty" moment of Boricua subversion has been safely contained through a return to a more sexually conservative performance of Latina femininity. In 2007, the cover of *Us Weekly* exclaimed "J.Lo's Dream Comes True. Yes, She's Pregnant! After struggling to conceive, the former diva is 'over the moon,' craving Doritos and pickles and hoping for a girl."¹⁰⁷ The "former diva" is once again a beautiful and socially desirable Puerto Rican woman. Other examples of Lopez's image transformation include *Self* magazine featuring Lopez on the cover of its "2008 Inspiring Women Special" and a 2008 issue of *People* that celebrated the star's athletic achievement, "J.Lo did it! Triathlon After Twins."¹⁰⁸ No longer obsessed with expensive gifts and publicizing her booty, Lopez is framed as a loving and adoring mother and wife. Her 2007 Spanish-language album, *Como Ama Una Mujer*, and related Univisión miniseries finally cemented her safe and welcomed return to a socially acceptable Latina femininity.¹⁰⁹

Tabloid coverage and Internet discussions about Lopez and her romantic relationships illustrate how ethnic women function in symbolically important ways as constitutive of national identity discourses. The cultural status of Latinas is always mediated by the project of U.S. empire-building. Lopez's currency as an ideal commodity that is symbolic of the changing ethnic and racial face of the United States was devalued for its sexual and racial transgressions and was ultimately disciplined. Her relationship with Affleck changed the public discourse about Lopez's body and sexuality, which moved Lopez outside the boundaries of social acceptability. Tensions surrounding Lopez reveal a cultural discomfort with the incorporations of Latinidad, Latinas, and Puerto Ricans as nonwhite bodies that challenge the U.S. national imaginary and dominant notions of citizenship and racial identity.

Becoming Frida

Latinidad and the Production of Latina Authenticity

Central to mainstream media representations of Latinidad is the production of ethnic authenticity, of an authentic ethnic or panethnic identity often grounded in familiar and marketable characteristics. Furthermore, media produced by U.S. ethnic and racial minorities equally depend on a mode of "strategic essentialism" to produce authenticity. In the next two chapters, I build on Juana María Rodríguez's discussion of strategic essentialism as the reduction of "identity categories to the most readily decipherable marker around which to mobilize" to map out the discourse of Latinidad in global film and television shows produced by Latinas.¹ While the notion of strategic essentialism was initially coined by Gayatri Spivak² and has most readily been used by postcolonial scholars interested in studying how identity is used by activists to disrupt Western ethnic, racial, and gender hierarchies, I engage contemporary media to think through the uneasy deployment of strategic essentialism by Latina mainstream media producers, such as Mexican actor Salma Hayek, to manufacture ethnic authenticity as a representational intervention in to the mainstream.

In the case of the movie *Frida*, I examine Hayek's use of strategic essentialism to mobilize Mexican ethnic authenticity, which must then be negotiated by U.S. and Mexican media and audiences that foreground their identity discourses. That is to say, the movie itself, publicity about the movie, and Salma Hayek's role as lead actor and producer were all invested in promoting a definition of Mexican authenticity that situated the movie and Hayek's performance as unique and different from traditional Hollywood fare about Latinas and Latinidad. Nevertheless, analysis of English- and Spanish-language media coverage and Internet discussion boards about the movie illustrates a more complex reading of Latina identity and Mexican authenticity.

The reduction of complexity embedded in the "myth of authenticity," to borrow Gareth Griffiths' words, is a problematic but integral signifying practice in the effective global commodification of Latinidad.³ Media stories