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Stacey K. Sowards & Richard D. Pineda

Issues related to immigration have long been present in U.S. television and print news cycles. In recent years, those issues have become more prevalent in U.S. popular culture, especially in television and popular music. In this essay, we analyze three representative and diverse examples from U.S. popular media to better understand the representation of immigrant narratives: ABC's Ugly Betty, *the Chicano band, Los Lobos's 2006 album,* The Town and the City, *and CNN Presents "Immigrant Nation." From our analysis, we advance three interconnected arguments: First, personalized narratives of the immigrant experience reify stereotypes through accumulation and repetition that contributes to the construction of border spectacle. Second, audiences interpret individualized accounts through ambivalent readings that function to entrench audience beliefs and attitudes about immigrants and immigration which create unmotivated sympathies. Finally, individual accounts humanize issues related to immigration, but they also individualize responsibility and absolve collective responsibilities by emphasizing immigrants' hard work and pursuit of the U.S. American Dream.*

Keywords: Immigrant Narratives; Los Lobos; Polyvalence; Scapegoating; Ugly Betty; U.S. American Dream

Contemporary debates in the United States over immigration reform echo historical sentiments expressed by advocates and opponents of a reform toward immigration liberalization. However, social actions, namely protests and rallies related to proposed immigration reform legislation in 2006, have been far more expansive than in previous eras. Supporters and opponents of immigration reform came out in massive numbers across the United States, with a large number of the immigration supporters rallied by local radio stations and Spanish-language media (Chavez, 2008[1]; Cisneros, 2011; Pineda & Sowards, 2007). In part because of these rallies, the portrayal of immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented, has become more common in both news reports and in fictionalized media narratives. News coverage tends to focus on immigration as a broad, faceless issue, while fictionalized media narratives focus more on individual immigrants. These representations have a tendency to valorize these immigrants, especially those without documents, and how they survive in mainstream United States society.

In this essay, our exploration of media representations of Latina/os in relationship to immigration issues illustrates the complex nature of mediated messages and audience interpretation of such images and discourse. By humanizing the face of immigration through popular media texts, audiences may interpret these stories in positive ways that invoke sympathy for the plight of the undocumented immigrant in the United States. We argue that these representations, while notable because they offer seemingly sympathetic portrayals of immigrants, can also have a deleterious effect on perceptions toward and about immigration as audiences are exposed to reductionist and stereotypical representations of immigrant narratives. This valorization of undocumented workers in popular media communicates values about individualism, boot strapping, and neo-liberal discourse but fails to account for the lack of effective government policy and accountability in other arenas (Fairclough, 2000; Luibhéid, 2005). We begin this essay by providing an overview of three representative media artifacts and literature on Latina/o media representations, and then move to a specific discussion of immigrant images and representations in contemporary media. We contend that the immigrant stories presented in media narratives: 1) reify stereotypes that shape a mediated border spectacle that embodies both the physical act of border crossing and media framing about the broader implications of immigration; 2) render polyvalent readings of these stories that present mixed messages of empathy and criminality that lead to unmotivated sympathies contributing to both audience inaction and scapegoating; and 3) individualize responsibility which limits broader collective, community, economic, and political responsibilities, through an emphasis on individual hard work and personal responsibility.

Media Artifacts: Television News, Television Comedy, and Popular Music

Three recent U.S. media artifacts are emblematic of immigrant representations in popular media, which we use to illustrate and represent our argument: *CNN Presents* ''Immigrant Nation: Divided Country'' (2006); ABC's *Ugly Betty* television series (2006–2010); and Los Lobos's album, *The Town and The City* (2006). These artifacts

are representative of media that cultivate sympathetic storylines and images of both documented and undocumented immigrants in a cross section of genres, news programming, television comedy, and popular music. Similar stories have played out in other media outlets, such as CBS's *The Good Wife*, National Public Radio's *Latino USA*, HBO's *The Latino List*, CNN's *Latino in America*, numerous Chicana/o and Latina/o artists' music, such as Los Rakas, Ozomatli, El Vez, Molotov, Pistolera, Calexico, Calle 13, Los Ilegales, and Los Tigres del Norte, and films such as *La Misma Luna, Spanglish, A Better Life*, and *Crazy/Beautiful*. Furthermore, the depth and scope of the penetration of immigration into these media spheres suggest the importance of the subject to contemporary social and political space as well as recognition by those in media that immigration is a worthy subject to foreground. As Beltrán, citing Sandoval Sánchez noted, entertainment media are a crucial space in which "ideas, myths, fictions, ideologies, and social models are produced, displayed, negotiated, and contested"; she added that this media space "teaches" identity to other citizens (2009, p. 5). The significance of our project is twofold; we suggest criteria for evaluating these media artifacts as well as a theoretical argument about the nature of these types of narratives.

We used three main criteria in our selection of these artifacts: representative examples, genre and audience differences, and length of narrative. In addition, these artifacts also reflect a wide range across media genres and include both fictionalized and nonfictionalized narratives. This broad scope is important, particularly given Moreman's argument that in an era of globalized media, "audiences of all types . . . interact with symbols and meanings from other cultures while remaining within their own culture" (2008, p. 93). Furthermore, DeChaine contended that mediated rhetoric often casts undocumented immigrants as "legally and morally abject" (2009, p. 44). As Leo Chavez (2008) outlined in his analysis of news stories and magazine covers, Latinos are constructed as a threat to U.S. national security, overpopulation, economy, politics, language, and culture (see also Chavez, 2001; DeChaine, 2009; Hasian & Delgado, 1998; Ono & Sloop, 2002). Chavez contended that magazine covers in particular "rely on metaphors, tropes, and allusions to grand narratives of the nation to draw on shared, but often taken-for-granted understandings of American identity, history, and characteristics of various immigrant groups," providing both alarmist and affirmative narratives (2001, p. 16). These grand narratives, the discourse that tells the contemporary immigrant story, represent a common thread in both liberal and conservative rhetoric. We argue that such stories reinforce the Latina/o threat narrative, even though these narratives attempt to humanize the immigrant experience through positive representations.

Vejnoska described the CNN documentary "Immigrant Nation: Divided Country" as significant because it "humanizes and contextualizes" the immigration issue (2004, p. 1C). The documentary, hosted and produced by Maria Hinojosa, focuses on several individuals in the state of Georgia, two undocumented immigrants (Rosa and Gabe) and two advocates (D. A. King and Jimmy Herchek) for stronger law enforcement of U.S. immigration laws and the deportation of undocumented immigrants. Our second artifact, ABC's *Ugly Betty*, is an interpretation of the wildly popular Latin

American telenovela originally aired in Colombia, which was remade for Mexican television. The U.S. version focuses on Betty Suarez, a homely personal assistant to a magazine tycoon in New York City. The title character balances working at a high-end fashion magazine while dealing with her personal and family foibles in the New York City borough of Queens. As Lee Hernandez (2010) explained, the program yielded tremendous audience reaction with new episodes reaching audiences as large as 14 million viewers, and in the show's first season it received 11 Emmy nominations, a Peabody award, a Golden Globe award for "Best Comedy", an Emmy award and a Screen Actors Guild award for the show's lead actor, America Ferrera. Of particular interest to our essay is the character played by Tony Plana, Ignacio Suarez, the father of the title character who is also an undocumented immigrant.

The final artifact is the 2006 album by the award winning, Los Angeles–based band, Los Lobos titled, *The Town and the City*, the band's sixteenth album. Los Lobos's album, which was released in late 2006, appeared within months of nationwide rallies undertaken to protest the passage of the controversial Sensenbrenner bill. *The Town* offers a lyrical commentary about the struggles facing immigrants crossing illegally into the United States and is "about journeys to uncertain destinations and what's lost along the way" (Pareles, 2006, para. 2). Steve Berlin, keyboardist and saxophone player for the band, noted about the album and its broad narrative, "We had a notion about an immigrant's journey—it's a story that starts in one place and ends in a different place" (Touzeau, 2006, p. 90). Los Lobos's vocalist Louie Pérez responded to an interviewer's question by noting "I didn't set out for the record to be about immigration, but it started to go into that direction" (Balko, 2007, para. 11).

Our analysis focuses on the representation of the immigrant experience to better understand how different audiences interpret and consume media images and stories related to immigration. We approached these media artifacts in order to clarify what the images and narratives of immigrants may mean to different audiences and what implications result from border spectacle, unmotivated sympathies, and individualized responsibility. In the next section, we contextualize these arguments in broader Latina/o media scholarship.

Latina/os and Media Representation

While our argument in this essay focuses on immigrant representations, it is useful to frame our approach with insight from media scholarship on Latina/os, media, and culture because immigrant narratives have been conflated to the Mexican and/or Latin American experience of undocumented status in the United States. In particular, much media scholarship has focused on historical stereotypes and representations of Latina/os, rather than more contemporary images. As Charles Ramírez Berg (2002) observed, representations of Latinas/os in popular media have been traditionally loaded with negative stereotypes and unflattering images. Delgado and Stefancic contended that historically Mexican Americans have been portrayed as fitting into one of four archetypes, "the greaser, the ... bandido, the happy-go-lucky shiftless lover of song, food, and dance, and the tragic, silent 'Spanish' tall, dark, and handsome

type of romantic fiction'' (Delgado & Stefancic, 1992, p. 1273). Stereotyping and its role in defining Latina/os in the United States had ''a significant role in explaining the historical treatment and current condition of Latinos'' (Sandrino-Glasser, 1998, p. 74; see also Roman, 2000) even as Latina/o contributions to mainstream media have increased over the last several years with more films and television shows featuring more Latina/o characters with more portrayals by Latina/o actors (Rodríguez, 2008). Other media scholarship has explored the trope of Latinidad and Otherness, that is, how media construct (in)authenticity of Latina/o characters and contexts, particularly important in understanding the context and function of immigrant narratives in media (e.g., see Beltrán, 2009; Molina-Guzmán, 2006, 2010; Shugart, 2007; Sowards & Pineda, 2011; Valdivia, 2010). Molina-Guzmán and Valdivia also explored the trope of tropicalism that ''erases specificity and homogenizes all that is identified as Latin and Latina/o'' (2004, p. 211; see also Aparicio & Chavez-Silverman, 1997).

More specifically related to immigration, academic discussion over representations of immigrants has addressed any number of issues from the historical roots of stereotyping of Mexican immigrants as ''docile, diseased, criminal and illegal'' (Flores, 2003, p. 381), public opinion (Chavez, 2001; DeChaine, 2009; DeFina, 2003; Santa Ana, 2002), the controversy over Proposition 187 in California and 2006 protest marches (Chavez, 2008; Cisneros, 2011; Hasian & Delgado, 1998; Jacobson, 2008; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Pantoja & Segura, 2003; Pineda & Sowards, 2007; Santa Ana, 2002), and the role immigration plays in U.S. American popular culture (Molina-Guzmán, 2010; Rubin & Melnick, 2007; Sowards & Pineda, 2011; Tatum, 2001). Jacobson (2008) suggested that anti-immigrant forces position themselves to fight a cultural battle in a post–September 11th era where sensitivity to cultural loss is even more heightened (also see Calafell, 2008). Solís (2008) extended this line of reasoning, arguing that as the fight over culture gains saliency for anti-immigrant sentiment, the rise of technology speeds up and widens the distribution of anti-immigrants messages onto talk radio, television coverage, and ultimately into the language of political campaigns. Santa Ana (2002) added that the discourse surrounding California's Proposition 187, Proposition 209 (the proposal to end affirmative action) and Proposition 227 (the proposal end to bilingual education), all institutionalized metaphors aimed at isolating and subordinating Mexican Americans and other Latina/os in the state. Rubin and Melnick qualified the significance of the mediated representation of immigrants explaining that ''within immigration narratives, even ones written late in the 20th century, certain frameworks and stories are invoked over and over, so that they remain recognizable while being reworked to suit the needs of the latest immigration culture'' (2007, p. 2), such as the Latino threat narrative that Chavez (2001; 2008) identified. The prevalence of images and language categorizing immigrants as criminal, illegal, or less than human, diminishes the burden for the government to develop humane immigration policies (Bender, 2003).

Although contemporary news media conceive of immigration through a broad spectrum of issues, our project focused specifically on the construction of sympathetic narratives, whereas much academic scholarship has examined conservative and neo-liberal rhetoric (e.g., Chavez, 2001, 2008; DeChaine, 2009; Luibhéid, 2005; Ono & Sloop, 2002). This emphasis is particularly important because of how audiences

respond to such discourses and how publics understand immigrant narratives, particularly those from Mexico and other Latin American countries. As we illustrate in the rest of this essay, these individual narratives are consumed by all kinds of audiences and perpetuate stereotypes that contribute to the border spectacle, entrench attitudes and beliefs about immigrants through unmotivated sympathies, and individualize responsibility that absolves greater responsibility in collective, political, and economic discussions and solutions.

Border Spectacle through Border Crossing Narratives

Many of the stories about the immigration process in U.S. news coverage, popular media and culture, and politics relate to how individuals enter the United States. Although these stories are wide ranging, one common theme among these media narratives is the focus on the illegal, undocumented, or unauthorized entry into the United States, reducing the immigrant experience to the act of border crossing and reifying the border spectacle that has come to play out in U.S. news media. This border spectacle has come to signify ideologies related to politics, economics, cultures, nationalities, and globalization, even as media representations simplify these hegemonic power relationships to the border crossings themselves. Many immigrants to the United States arrive with proper documentation and enter with legal status, yet media coverage implies otherwise, suggesting that the vast majority of those coming into the United States do so illegally. The Pew Hispanic Center (2006) estimated that there are 11.5–12 million undocumented individuals in the United States, with approximately 40–50% of those immigrants entering the U.S. legally, using Border Crossing Cards or overstaying entry visas. While producers, directors, journalists, and others have offered these narratives to share the plight of undocumented immigrants, audiences see stories of illegal border crossings, dominated by primarily Mexican immigrants who physically cross the U.S./Mexico border. In effect, these stories have collapsed the immigrant experience to border crossings, even though the motive in telling these stories is often to generate empathy for the plight of border crossers.

Los Lobos's album, *The Town and the City*, presented a stereotypical narrative of entry into the United States by featuring the story of an unnamed immigrant crossing through the Arizona desert in the middle of the night. The album explored the immigrant experience through both a physical and metaphorical border crossing (Pineda, 2009). Although the band never clarified whether this story is about a documented or undocumented immigrant, the crossing through the desert in fear of being caught by law enforcement officials implies that this border crosser does not have legal documents. The story of covert crossing set against the backdrop of pursuit reinforces the typical newspaper stories of the many immigrants who have crossed the border into Arizona. The narrator of the song "The Road to Gila Bend" sings, "Made Nogales over night, through the desert in the yellow light, missing everything I left behind. Will they see me coming? Do they know I'm running?" (Los Lobos, 2006a, track 3). The fear of being discovered is palpable in the lyrics and contributes to the image of the undocumented traveler.

CNN's "Immigrant Nation" (Hinojosa & Hill, 2006) also represented similar discourses about the process of immigration in the United States by prominently featuring the stories of two undocumented immigrants, Gabe and Rosa (and their respective families), both of whom are from Mexico and living in Georgia. As Gabe's migration story unfolded, the audience learned that he came to the United States with his family to go to Disneyland, but then they overstayed their visas. Rosa, in this same *CNN Presents*, offered a different story of immigration. While the special report never identified how Rosa crossed the border, the story emphasized that she is undocumented, and she constantly focused on how she planned to bring her two children to the United States. Maria Hinojosa, the journalist in the news report, traveled to Rosa's hometown of Villa Juanita in Mexico to interview people there, including members of Rosa's family, such as her two children, who lived with their grandmother. As her story progressed, a *CNN* camera crew followed smugglers as they attempted to bring Rosa's children into Texas at the border crossing in Matamoros using falsified documents. Her children's documents did not pass the scrutiny of the border patrol agents, and they were sent home to their grandmother.

Rosa's story was further complicated by ideologies of race, class, and gender through her status as a single mother, separated from her children by the border. For every attempted border crossing, she said that she had to save money for months to bring her children across the border in addition to her travel expenses from Georgia to the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas. These attempted border crossings were expensive, dangerous, and fraught with gendered, racialized, and classed assessments of Rosa's motherhood from the audience's perspective. Luibhéid (2005) argued that U.S. immigration, welfare policy and culture reinforce patriarchal and heteronormative institutions, in which women are expected to marry out of poverty and/or into legal, documented immigration status, leaving Rosa very few options.

In the fictionalized *Ugly Betty*, a different narrative account of border crossing emerged. Although Betty is a U.S. citizen of Mexican descent, it becomes clear that her father, Ignacio Suarez (played by the Cuban American actor, Tony Plana) has been in the United States illegally. Starting with the fourth episode in season one of the series and continuing through the second season, Betty and her family needed to deal with her father's undocumented immigration status. He eventually admitted that he was in the United States illegally (Todd & Flender, 2006), and Betty and her sister had to find a lawyer who could prevent his impending deportation to Mexico. As Betty helped her father prepare his defense, she collected his birth certificate, passport, and other documents, and said, "You know dad, there's enough here, you could've applied for a green card. I mean, you were here in '86 and Reagan offered the amnesty" (Litvack & Babbit, 2006). At the end of this episode however, Betty showed her father a picture of her mother with another man, and asks who it is. He responded that her mother was married to a man named Ramiro Vásquez who used to beat her. Ignacio informed his daughter that he fled to the United States, along with Betty's mother, because he beat up Ramiro Vásquez: "I never applied for a green card or amnesty because I was afraid they'd send me back. I killed Ramiro Vásquez" (Litvack & Babbit, 2006). Although Ignacio never quite explained how he

crossed the border or entered the United States, his account here clarified that he entered illegally under duress and fear for his life.

In each case, these four narratives illustrate the different complexities of border crossings, yet also reduce these crossings to the illegality of the act itself. And in each case, the story presented is about Mexican immigrants, limiting the audiences' understanding of the many people who enter the United States both legally and illegally. The Mexican immigrant comes to represent all of the so-called problems associated with immigration through the representation of these border crossings, even as they are sympathetic portrayals. These images reify and reinforce the common association of border crossers with being Mexican, being Other, being undocumented, and being poor. Even though these narratives do not directly blame these border crossers with the so-called problems connected to immigration, the stories remind audiences that these immigrants are undocumented, thereby connecting audiences to broader media narratives of illegal immigration.

Moreover the images in these cases fetishize class, race, ethnicity, and gender through the emphasis on Mexicanidad. For instance, in the CNN documentary, Rosa and Gabe speak in accented English that is understandable and yet, CNN produced their segments with English subtitles. Although Rosa and Gabe both speak in English, the inclusion of the subtitles reifies their status as Other. Rosa's story is further complicated by her status as a low-wage earning single mother, continuously saving money to have her children participate in their own border crossings into the United States. In each story, the immigrants are poor, working class, and undocumented, which collapse these narratives into a continued border spectacle, that is, the act of poor Mexicans crossing the border illegally. The reaction to such border crossings reinforces the Latino threat narrative (Chavez, 2008). As Sara Ahmed contended, ''Such narratives work by generating a subject that is endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject'' (2004, p. 43). The images and stories of the border spectacle, even as told to generate audience sympathy, reinforce the constructed threat and hatred of such immigrants.

The cumulative effect of the many media narratives that emphasize the illegal or undocumented status of immigrants, and in particular, poor Mexican immigrants, reifies these stereotypes for audiences. Some audiences come to see the poor Mexican immigrant as the common symbol that represents social, economic, and political ills in the United States. Hasian and Delgado (1998) also contended that the undocumented immigrant is culturally and nationally symbolized as Mexican. According to Kenneth Burke, when societies become divided on an issue or topic such as immigration, that ''discontinuity,'' ''sets up the conditions for its particular kind of scapegoat, as a device that unifies all those who share the same enemy'' (1968, p. 51). Burke, in his analysis of Adolf Hitler's rhetoric, illustrated a process that is very similar to how stereotypes of Mexican immigrants have become reified and consequently, scapegoated. Burke explained that Hitler used an effective unification strategy for the development of ''the symbol of a *common enemy*,'' (1973, p. 193, italics in original). In the case of media representations of immigration, the Mexican immigrant

becomes that symbol as enemy through reification and accumulation of exposure. Immigration rhetoric that draws upon the illegal border crossings constructs the Mexican immigrant in a similar fashion that Burke describes, relying on inborn dignity (U.S. citizenship), purification by dissociation (undocumented status), symbolic rebirth (identification of undocumented immigrants as the common enemy), and commercial use (assigning blame to the Mexican immigrant for economic problems in the U.S.). In particular, as DeChaine (2009) argued, "Rhetorical victimage relies on reductive categories and stereotypical modes of representation in its rendering of the subject-scapegoat it designates" (p. 50). Ultimately, sympathetic accounts of illegal status reify conservative media narratives that scapegoat undocumented immigrants and contribute to the growing hatred of the undocumented immigrant who crosses the border illegally.

Empathy and Criminality: Ambivalence through Unmotivated Sympathy

Although media narratives may reify stereotypes of illegal border crossings and scapegoat Mexican immigrants, these narratives also attempt to create empathic stories by humanizing the issue of immigration (Molina-Guzmán, 2010). By focusing on individual stories, audiences come to understand the undocumented immigrant as a real person with a real family. Salma Hayek, Fernando Gaitán, and Silvio Horta, producers of *Ugly Betty*, Maria Hinojosa, the journalist who conducts the interviews on *CNN*'s "Immigrant Nation," and Louie Pérez and David Hidalgo of Los Lobos have all been vocal about their support of undocumented immigrants both in the texts explored here and in other contexts.

Another reading of these texts reveals the imperfections of rhetorical intention, and may lead viewers to understand the immigrant experience in different and unexpected ways. That is, the focus on the undocumented status of the immigrants, and the exploration of topics related to health care, education, driver's licenses and other legal documents, and family life highlight hot button issues in debates about immigration that not all audiences understand in the same way. For these audiences, the specifics of the immigrant narrative may mitigate a more sympathetic reading. As Celeste Condit concluded, audiences may engage in polyvalent readings, rather than polysemic readings: "Polyvalence occurs when audience members share understandings of the denotations of a text but disagree about the valuation of those denotations to such a degree that they produce notably different interpretations" (Condit, 1989, p. 106). Dana Cloud (1992) claimed that many polyvalent readings are actually *ambi*valent readings, that is, there is a dichotomous interpretation of a central discourse, such as narratives related to immigration. Indeed, the four perspectives presented in *CNN*'s "Immigrant Nation" suggest *ambi*valent understandings that emerge from the same denotative text that seems meant to generate empathy from audiences.

These ambivalent readings create unmotivated sympathy for undocumented immigrants for all kinds of audiences. As audiences empathize with the characters in these stories, they also are not motivated to understand immigrants in new ways,

to take action to address how immigration has played an important role in the U.S. economy, culture, and politics, or to end scapegoating rhetoric in interpersonal and broader media contexts. In part, unmotivated sympathy results from identifying with the struggle of the undocumented immigrant, but such narratives fail to provide a resonant experience with which audiences can identify. Media narratives reinforce this interpretation through the continued focus on the border spectacle of illegality and criminality.

Immigrants' illegal border crossings are not experiences that most U.S. audiences identify with, so the undocumented immigrant story is reduced to the illegality of the border crossing and subsequent acts that benefit the undocumented immigrant through health care, education, and other areas that are frequently discussed in media narratives. As Ahmed observed, even as audiences sympathize with such stories,

> The narrative works through othering; the 'illegal immigrants' and 'bogus asylum seekers' are those who are 'not us', and who in not being us, endanger what is ours. Such others threaten to take away from what 'you' have, as the legitimate subject of the nation, as the one who is the true recipient of national benefits. (2004, p. 1)

As immigrants are coded as Other through class, race, and ethnicity, it becomes easier for audiences to reject or accept their stories and to insist that they not receive benefits or that they go home. These sentiments construct unmotivated sympathy by reducing political, cultural, and economic action to the individual rather than the system.

One of the primary concerns in immigration debates relates to the use of the health care and education systems by undocumented immigrants who may or may not pay for such services (Santa Ana, 2002). In "Immigrant Nation," Maria Hinojosa provided a sympathetic look at Gabe and his family, especially related to his wife's health. As his story unfolded, the audience discovered that his wife had ovarian cancer, and they had no health insurance to pay for her medical care. Some of her care was covered by Medicaid and they owed close to $80,000 to the hospital in uncovered expenses. In several scenes, Gabe and his wife were shown in hospital settings to receive treatments for which Gabe admitted he did not know how he would pay. Gabe's son, Gabe Junior, has also attended U.S. public schools as an undocumented immigrant, and had just graduated from high school and started college.

In Rosa's story, she was trying to bring her kids to the United States, because she wanted them to be educated in the U.S. Viewers were reminded that the opportunities in her home town (where her kids were living) were very limited both in terms of jobs and education. From one perspective, these narratives might move the audience to understand the difficulties of life, that no one can plan for cancer, that it was better for Gabe Junior to attend college than to do nothing, or that Rosa had every right to be concerned about the education of her children. Yet another polyvalent reading of this same story illustrates what some call the exploitation of health and education systems by undocumented immigrants who are viewed as contributing very little or nothing to the U.S. tax base to pay for these services. In particular, the women's stories here are relatable to U.S. audiences, but because their

undocumented status was connected to their health and motherhood, they were sca-pegoated through class, race, and gender. Audiences may react with sympathy, but lack motivation for immigration reform, particularly as related to health care or education issues that arise for women and their greater responsibilities for their children. Hondagneu-Sotelo observed that

> Mexican undocumented immigrants must leap over a veritable obstacle course to establish themselves in the United States [including] daily encounters with language difficulties, racism, poverty, vulnerability at the workplace and harassment in public areas due to the lack of legal status, the problems associated with missing loved ones ''back home'' and becoming accustomed to new social circles in a foreign environment. (1994, p. 198)

Yet these challenges are difficult to relate to audiences, particularly those who have never left the United States and cannot identify with such experiences.

Another central debate related to immigration is legal documentation, and especially whether states should issue driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants. Again, in "Immigrant Nation," Rosa's story highlighted this controversy. The audience learned that Rosa had been driving to work without a U.S. driver's license, although she did have a Mexican license. Later in the news program, Rosa related that she was arrested for driving without a license and was taken to jail, costing her $600 in bail money. Both Gabe from "Immigrant Nation" and Betty's father in *Ugly Betty* also admit that they had not acquired their social security cards legally. Gabe acknowledged that he paid around $120 for his green card and social security card so that he could work. A health care worker told Betty that ''according to our records, Ignacio Suarez is 117 years old, and dead. The social security number that your father has been using belongs to somebody else'' (Lawrence & Brock, 2006). As Betty's father later confirms: ''I've been using someone else's social security number for years because I don't have one. You can't get one if you're in this country illegally. And I am'' (Todd & Flender, 2006). At first glance, it seems as though these narratives are intended to garner audience sympathy, yet the powerful effect of individual stories is mitigated by the illegality of these other acts, depending on one's perspectives related to immigration issues. The primary narrative focuses on the illegality of entry, the use of false documents, or the so-called exploitation of health care and education systems.

A final example related to family life also illustrates how audiences may evaluate undocumented immigrants as community members and parents, particularly as mothers. The separation of parents from children is one such issue. Rosa had left Mexico to pursue a better life for herself and her children who were left behind in Mexico with her parents. One reading demonstrates how audience members might be unable to understand how Rosa believed she was taking the best approach for her children's upbringing by leaving them in Mexico. In one scene, her kids talked about how Rosa always sends them things, but they also said that they just want to be with their mother. This scene in particular illustrates how audiences may read Rosa as a bad mother because her primary concern seems to be to provide meaningless items for her children, rather than a loving and stable family life.

Similarly, in the Los Lobos song "If You Were Only Here Tonight" the narrator speaks of a crime or infidelity that might not have been committed had he not been alone in a strange new world. The narrator sings, "I wouldn't have did what I just done, if you were only here tonight . . . . If you were only here tonight, it wouldn't have been such a fight" (2006b, track 5). In the context of the album, the narrator has embarked on a journey and as with many immigrants, that move has resulted in leaving some part of their family behind. The stories represented in these media artifacts demonstrate the complexities and difficulties of split families living in different countries and lacking the legal documentation and financial means to come and go as they please.

According to Cloud (1992), different audiences might read these narratives in *ambi*valent ways, either sympathetically or negatively. Because these stories are presented simplistically and stereotypically, audiences engage in ambivalent readings that either generate sympathy for or further criminalize these immigrants. In particular, the CNN documentary features four characters: two undocumented immigrants (Rosa and Gabe) and two anti-immigrant advocates (D. A. King and Jimmy Herchek) who represent polarized perspectives. While the Los Lobos album and Ugly Betty presented immigrant narratives in a more nuanced approach, these storylines reduced the immigrant experience to problems associated with health care, drivers' licenses, and social security cards. Such audience readings are situated in broader mediated contexts in which the Latino threat narrative thrives (Chavez, 2001, 2008). Although *Ugly Betty* was well known for its use of camp and satire for comedic effect (unlike the narratives in Los Lobos or CNN's documentary), the storyline of Ignacio Suarez's undocumented status was not parodied like other storylines in the television show. There were funny moments related to his immigration status, but ultimately, his problem complicated Betty's life as she became responsible for dealing with it. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) noted that "the phenomenon of undocumented immigrants who are homeowners, taxpayers, school attendees, and small-business owners presents a challenge to the traditional dichotomous fashion in which we think about citizenship and 'illegal aliens'" (p. 205). In short, as in the other narratives, the storyline of undocumented immigration is reduced to Ignacio's exploitation of the health care system by using someone else's social security card, which is not satirized.

In effect, the denotative presentation of two sides related to immigration issues renders ambivalent readings that reify and entrench the positions of immigrants' rights supporters and detractors, rather than allowing for a more nuanced discussion of policy and cultural considerations. A polyvalent or ambivalent reading of these texts mean that audiences likely create "different *evaluations* of a text, rather than different meanings" (Dow, 1996, p. 15, emphasis in original). Cultivation theorists have concluded that heavy television viewing can create a mainstreaming effect in which viewers' viewpoints and values increase in commonality, and often, political conservativism (Gross, 2001). In particular, these neo-liberal and conservative media discourses work to reinforce heteronormative and gendered accounts of how we understand family, community, and work in a broader globalized context (Luibhéid, 2005). Fairclough (2000) contended that government fixation on global economies "has led to radical attacks on social welfare" (p. 147), and has "construct[ed] social

problems as problems for individuals'' (p. 148). Gross noted that ''vulnerability to media stereotyping and political attack derives in large part from our isolation and pervasive invisibility'' (2001, p. 15). Although he was discussing the gay community's invisibility in media, the same could be said of undocumented immigrants. Condit (1993) explained that we need to seek narratives, theories, ideas, and perspectives that move away from totalized and simplified understandings of such issues.

Individualizing Responsibilities, Absolving Collective Responsibilities

Part of the appeal in telling the narratives of these individuals who are undocumented immigrants is that the stories personalize accounts of their life experiences that can have the effect of generating audience empathy. However, individualizing these stories also emphasizes the American dream, Protestant work ethic, and bootstrapping metaphors so commonly found in contemporary U.S. American popular culture and immigration rhetoric, that particularly effect women, the working class, and other marginalized groups. As Eithne Luibhéid noted, such neoliberal politics in immigration discourse have come to demand that individuals provide for themselves and their families to protect against economic risk. Neoliberal politics mean that ''such statuses as race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality significantly shape who is likely to be deemed 'at risk' or 'risky''' (2005, p. 73). These understandings of how success is achieved in the United States are particularly problematic in these immigrants' stories for two reasons. First, while the narratives individualize the problems and issues related to immigration status, they also highlight how these immigrants address their own problems through their own solutions, namely, by working harder than they already are. Second, because audiences see that these individuals are capable of solving their own problems, these portrayals erode and absolve a sense of collective responsibility and reduce the need for discussion at the policy level (global, federal, state, and/or local). In part, understanding the role of individual responsibility, that is, the idea that a person should take care of him/herself in these immigrants' narratives fosters more vitriolic rhetoric related to immigration policy.

The valorization and fetishization of hard work performed by immigrant workers counter earlier narratives from the 1920s and 1930s in which immigrants (especially Mexican immigrants) were portrayed as docile or lacking in ambition (Flores, 2003). Those involved in the production of these more contemporary narratives offer sympathetic accounts through their illustrations of how hard recent immigrants work. For instance, in ''Immigrant Nation,'' Maria Hinojosa described Rosa's readiness for work, but with no legal protections: ''At a local Mexican restaurant, Rosa was willing to work for $5 an hour . . . . But without warning, she was fired. And because she was working illegally, she can't question why.'' Similarly, Gabe, in the same news report is portrayed as an extremely hard worker: ''Ask Gabe about hard work. 43 years old, he works 14 to 16 hours a day, six days a week.'' The camera then turned to Gabe, who said

> I work 6:00 in the morning to 10:00, 11:00 all day. But for me, it's normal. In my time that I work here, I don't see American people in the kitchen . . . . The American people say 'Oh no, I like for me $15, $18, $20.' But the Mexican people, it's $6, $7, $8 per hour. (Hinojosa & Hill, 2006, para. 136)

The video footage of Gabe showed him working in the restaurant and directing various employees, with no time to speak with the CNN camera crew whereas the restaurant's owner, who was coded as White and upper class, had time to sit down at a restaurant table and speak with the CNN crew about his workforce in the restaurant. In another scene, ostensibly middle class (and White) Georgians celebrated the 4th of July, while Gabe and his coworkers served the customers and commented on how happy they are to be in the United States on Independence Day. These narratives represent classed and racialized accounts of Otherized immigrants in the U.S. workforce, often invisible to those who are their customers or employers, valorizing the pursuit of the American Dream through their work ethic.

In addition to representations of undocumented immigrants as hard workers, these portrayals also contribute to audience understanding of how hard work solves both an individual's and a family's problems. In *Ugly Betty*, for instance, the implication is that Betty's father was too ill to work, so his daughters provided the family's income, invoking the dutiful Latina daughter who lives at home and takes care of her parents (e.g., see González Martínez, 2002). When it became apparent that the family needed to hire a lawyer to deal with Ignacio Suarez's immigration status, they found out it would cost $20,000 for the retainer. Ignacio said, "Look, I'm sorry I am putting you through all this. But maybe if we tighten our belts, got second jobs . . . " and Betty replied, "Dad, I really want to help, but my first job is hard enough as it is!" Hilda, who sold Herbalux, a weight loss drug or supplement, suggested that Betty could also sell Herbalux. After much cajoling, Betty responded "Fine, I'll sell Herbalux at *Mode* [the magazine for which Betty works]. I mean, I'll do anything I have to" (Litvack & Babbit, 2006).

In resolution to Ignacio Suarez's immigration problem, Betty agreed to keep a secret from her boss about Wilhelmina Slater, the style editor, related to Slater's infidelities and upcoming nuptials to Betty's boss's father. Wilhelmina talked to Betty about her father:

> Oh, I know he's stuck in México. Shame. My father is a United States Senator. He helps people get their visas all the time . . . . Come on girl, I'm black, you're Mexican, let's not talk around it like a couple of dull white people. Keep your mouth shut and your old man comes home. (Wrubel & Nelli, 2007)

In the following episodes, Betty's father came home from Mexico, obtained his U.S. citizenship, and the family's problem was solved quickly and conveniently (Horta, Pennette, & Hayman, 2007). While satirical, this example suggests that one's immigration status is easily resolved by knowing the right people or through hard work to pay for a lawyer that can address one's immigration positionality. Interestingly, Betty and her father are coded as working class throughout the series, further valorizing their hard work and pursuit of the American Dream. In the series finale, Betty moved to London for her dream job, representing her success in achieving the American dream, albeit in another country.

On Los Lobos's *The Town and The City*, the lyrics continue this trend and present a unique construction of hard work framed as part of the broader journey. Starting with the lead track "The Valley" the album's narrator sang about reaching a new

home and the reward of working the land in this new place: "Here in the valley, bread on the table, work through the day for as long as we are able" (Los Lobos, 2006c, track 1). Similarly the more somber "Hold On" qualifies the monotony of labor; the narrator sang of an endless cycle repeated daily, "Do it all over again, I'm killing myself to survive" (Los Lobos, 2006d, track 2). As immigrants' work ethic is held up in one regard, the pursuit of the American Dream often remains the end goal justifying the struggle. On the track "Little Things" there is a bittersweet acknowledgement of this pursuit, suggesting that accomplishment, "[chasing] that mighty mighty dollar," and standing on the "golden tower" ultimately means sacrificing love and more simple pleasures (Los Lobos, 2006e, track 8).

Through ambition, hard work, and belief in the American dream, each of these narratives represents the individualizing aspect of responsibility and discussions related to immigration. Isabel Molina-Guzmán argued that *Ugly Betty* and other similar narratives rely on "the trope of the 'American dream,' a familiar story grounded in the ideological belief that free choice, individualism, equality, and hard work under limited government intervention will allow all to succeed according to their abilities" (2010, p. 120). Portraying undocumented immigrants as hard working and capable of dealing with their own problems would at first glance seem to valorize their efforts in contributing to the U.S. economy and society in a positive way. Yet, the fetishization of hard work also individualizes responsibility, especially as immigrants work harder to make ends meet and to provide for their families, like Rosa, Gabe, and Betty. Jacqueline Martinez (2000) explained that this American Dream narrative is problematic because people's social and economic positions are determined by hard work, rather than understanding the effects of systematic discrimination and poverty. In *Ugly Betty*, the Suarez family "becomes a site for scapegoating social problems and privatizing social responsibility of issues such as poverty, immigration, health care, and single motherhood" (Sowards & Pineda, 2011, p. 141).

Individualized narratives thus have the effect of absolving collective responsibility, minimizing problems, and erasing the need for more in-depth discussion about such issues. As Cornel West argued, such interpretations are the result of dichotomous liberal structuralist and conservative behaviorist attitudes towards members of the underclass. Although he was writing about Black communities in the United States, his discussion of conservative behaviorists, those who focus on the behavior of hard work to beget success is of interest in this context:

> Conservative behaviorists talk about values and attitudes as if political and economic structures hardly exist. They rarely, if ever, examine the innumerable cases in which black people do act on the Protestant ethic and still remain at the bottom of the social ladder. Instead, they highlight the few instances in which blacks ascend to the top, as if such success is available to all blacks, regardless of circumstances. (West, 1993, p. 21)

In the context of contemporary immigrant narratives in *Ugly Betty*, "Immigrant Nation," and Los Lobos's *The Town and the City*, immigrant families are represented through their (successful) hard work to make ends meet and to address their financial difficulties, in essence, taking responsibility for their own problems and reinforcing neoliberal politics of immigration.

Conclusion: Immigration Policy, Media Representations, and Civic Engagement

Immigration into the United States, through legal or illegal means, will not likely subside in the near future, which means that immigration policy reform and media representation will continue to be an issue for policy makers, activists, U.S. citizens, and undocumented immigrants. While we have explored very different media texts here, the ways in which each text weaves together a story of the immigrant experience is remarkably similar. *Ugly Betty* relies on satire, parody, and camp to tell the story of a hard-working Mexican American woman in the fashion industry, yet her father's immigrant experience is reduced to illegal border crossings and the misuse of someone else's social security card. Los Lobos use a more melancholic approach in their music which provides a very different tone and genre in comparison to *Ugly Betty*, and yet their music tells the story of an immigrant making his/her way through the Arizona desert. The CNN documentary, ''Immigrant Nation,'' relates the stories of four very different people, but in the end, presents polarized views on immigration. All three texts reinforce the border spectacle through border crossings, generate unmotivated sympathy through the emphasis on criminality, and individualize responsibility with the American dream narrative.

The representations of immigrants remain simplistic to a fault and reify stereotypes about immigrants as well as of Latinas/os, especially Mexicans and Mexican Americans. While more Latina/o images reflect a growth in demographic terms, the increased appearance of such representations alone has created empty expressive space that is portrayed as simplistic, and dichotomous; with an assumption that audiences will fall on either side of a pro- or anti- immigration schism. And yet the portrayals in our examples could be far more complex and yield multiple points of ambivalence for the audience. These ambivalences are rooted in the complexity of immigration and the conditions and circumstances which influence individual's decisions about coming to the United States in the first place. Audiences face ambivalence by registering sympathy with the circumstances or experiences facing immigrants, but perhaps find themselves disconnected by the legality of how individuals come into the country. Amaya (2010) suggested that with *Ugly Betty*, for example, ambivalence is fueled by the different experiences with citizenship as portrayed in the show and with how audiences situate and contextualize their position to that theme.

In a sense, these representations create a way for audiences to consume the message and to feel sympathy for the subjects but to act or think no further. Sympathy becomes a fait accompli assuaging guilt about immigrant struggles but not prompting a reaction to act on behalf of immigrants. Conversely, other audiences read these same texts and use them to support their anti-immigrant positions because of the representations of criminalization, taking advantage of public services, or split families and relationships. In both cases, there is no motive to do anything beyond listening to these stories. Furthermore, as Betty and her family solve their own problems related to immigration status, the audience is absolved of responsibility. Sara Ahmed contended that we have

seen the risks of justice defined in terms of sympathy or compassion: justice then becomes a sign of what I can give to others, and works to elevate some subjects over others, through the reification of their capacity for love or 'fellow-feeling' . . . . Not only does this model work to conceal the power relations at stake in defining what is good-in-itself, but it also works to individuate, personalise and privatise the social relation of (in)justice. (2004, p. 195)

Finally, the scapegoating of immigrants is dehumanizing and even in cases where benevolent images of immigrants are portrayed in the media, they ferment the image of immigrants as "the Other." This othering legitimizes inaction on the part of policy makers and jeopardizes immigrants to mistreatment and harm in society. It is important to consider that as immigrants are stigmatized and otherized, the potential that such treatment impacts many Latinas/os is very real. Calafell (2007) related the story of her friend, who was asked repeatedly about his proficient, yet accented English language skills. His

story demonstrates the pervasiveness of dominant discourses that continue to position Latina/os as Others. Evident in this narrative is the way Mexican and Mexican-American identities are conflated and how they are denied citizenship by their continually being positioned as outsiders or Others. (p. 39)

This kind of treatment illustrates the pernicious and pervasive nature of media stereotypes that shape how audiences understand immigrant experiences in ways that are simplified and reductionist.

Note

[1]   Throughout this essay, we use accents on names only when those individuals use accents themselves. For example, Chavez's name is not accented in his book or other public material.

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