

---

## Latina Media Studies

---

KEYWORDS hybridity, intersectional, Latinidad, media, transnational

---

It goes without saying that Latina media studies is a feminist endeavor. Taking the intersectional step of including Latinidad, the history and process of being or becoming Latina/o, within media studies and adding the wrinkle of gender takes us into feminism, as these two steps do not naturally happen within our contemporary white masculine normative research environment. Taking the history and experiences of Latinas and the media seriously represents an interventionist and activist impulse that is intersectional at its core.

Latina/o media studies promises to illuminate communications and media studies on historical as well as contemporary issues. As with most subfields focusing on previously omitted or marginalized populations and cultures, the interventions follow a familiar pattern. After omission—which is seldom total, as marginalized populations sign in through absence, their implicit presence a backdrop against which theories implying purity and practices perpetuating homogeneity can be inscribed—there is the tokenistic special sidebar in chapter 8, the conference panel scheduled early Sunday morning, the special issue of a journal (though not of a major journal). “First Latina to do this” or “first scholar to attempt synthesis of the field”—that is, the up-to-now self-homogenizing field—abound in this stage of discovery.<sup>1</sup> Within feminist media studies, the original focus on white middle-class women slowly expands to include women of color. Furthermore, Latina/o studies follows the US focus on African American studies as a constitutive element of the national imaginary that until recently thought of itself in binary black-and-white terms. Eventually the presence of one scholar in an occasional department translates into steady presence in conferences and publications, collaborations, and networking. After that, communication journals allow for a “special issue” on Latinos, and later Latino studies journals publish a special issue on the media.<sup>2</sup> As well, more regular inclusion in journals,

---

*Feminist Media Histories*, Vol. 4, Number 2, pps. 101–106. electronic ISSN 2373-7492. © 2018 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/fmh.2018.4.2.101>.

presses willing to publish this research (for instance the University of Arizona Press, New York University Press, the University of Texas Press) and eventually book series in either Latina/o studies (Rutgers University Press) or critical Latina/o media studies (University of Florida Press) open a space for the circulation of Latina media studies.

Research on Latina media studies predates the acknowledgment of the presence of the subfield. The rise of scholars in the subfield follows a three-stage process, as I have outlined elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> First wave scholars, roughly up to 2000, developed Latina/o media studies research on their own, within departments of English or literature, history, or sociology, yet focusing on communication and media. These include Rosa-Linda Fregoso, Clara Rodriguez, and Frances R. Aparicio.<sup>4</sup> This happens across interdisciplinary approaches to the study of difference and the media. In addition to a wide range of continental intellectuals, including Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, and Antonio Gramsci, US scholars draw on national figures such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Renato Rosaldo, Michael Omi, Harold Winant, and Susan Bordo.<sup>5</sup> Feminist media scholars working on African American women, such as Jacqueline Bobo, Latin American women, such as Michèle Mattelart, and transnational approaches, such as Ella Shohat, also from the first wave of their respective subfields, inform second wave Latina media scholars, underscoring our intersectional and transnational roots.<sup>6</sup>

The second wave, roughly up to 2009, draws on these wide-ranging foundational scholars as we publish, teach, and contribute to the recruitment and retention of fellow scholars, mentoring a new generation of the professoriate, fostering actual departments in Latina/o studies, and creating the institutionalization that allows the subfield to grow.<sup>7</sup> For me, the work of Radha Hegde, Rashmi Luthra, Radhika Parameswaran, and Raka Shome, fellow scholars in my field pursuing transnational gender media studies, informed my ability to explore issues of ethnicity, nation, gender, class, and race with a focus in Latina media studies. In this second generation the special Latino studies issue of *Communication Review* included canonical essays in Latina media studies: “Brain, Brow and Booty: Latina Iconicity in U.S. Popular Culture” and “The Gender of Latinidad: Latinas Speak about Hispanic Television,” the former setting out an antiessentialist mapping of the complicated terrain of gender, media, and Latinidad, and the latter addressing the gap in research of Latinas as audiences.<sup>8</sup> Mari Castañeda Paredes brought together political economy and Latina/o media studies as she began to turn her optic toward gender.<sup>9</sup> Many scholars continued to document representational tropes documenting the

finding of symbolic annihilation as well as media effects research.<sup>10</sup> An overflowing, standing-room-only panel on Latina media studies at the Latin American Studies Association 2006 conference, held in Puerto Rico, led to the edited volume *Latina/o Communication Studies Today* (2008).<sup>11</sup> By the end of the first decade of this new millennium, which had begun with the US Census announcement that Latina/os were the most numerous minority in the country, research in Latina media studies was transitioning from emerging into institutionalized status.

The third wave, in which we find ourselves, consists of a generation of scholars who can draw on an established subfield with its own heterogeneity, efforts toward self-reflexivity, and collaborations with a range of other subfields.<sup>12</sup> This third wave literally explodes with diversity, creativity, and sophistication. Our current generation of scholars not just has taken classes in, but teaches courses in, and even has degrees in ethnic studies, gender studies, and, if fortunate, Latina/o media studies. This generation explores blurred boundaries, queer spaces, hybridities, ambiguities, multiple national identities, and cross-ethnic identifications and alliances.<sup>13</sup> Contextual analyses extend the Latina/o space across global borders as scholars explore a large range of media, platforms, and genres.

In addition to plentiful research on representations, Latina media studies scholars explore production issues as well as audiences.<sup>14</sup> In this third wave, scholars productively examine Latina stars in relation to a long history of presence clouded through assimilationist narratives. Ranging from overviews of a number of stars, such as Mary Beltrán's magisterial *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes* (2009), to monographs that use a single star to launch into complex conjunctural analyses, such as Maria Elena Cepeda's *Musical ImagiNation* (2010), which singles out Shakira, and Deborah Parédez's *Selenidad* (2009), which singles out Selena, this third wave demonstrates confidence and expertise in Latina media studies as its own interdisciplinary field.<sup>15</sup> Single-author books such as Isabel Molina-Guzmán's *Dangerous Curves* (2010) coexist with inclusive edited collections such as Myra Mendible's *From Bananas to Buttocks* (2007) and María Elena Cepeda and Dolores Inés Casillas's *The Routledge Companion to Latina/o Media* (2017).<sup>16</sup> The former is grounded in feminist theory, and the latter represents a wide range of Latina/o media scholars, including many of the gender-focused authors previously mentioned in this entry. Many of the aforementioned scholars work on legacy as well as digital media, and Michelle Rivera's much-awaited *Hate It or Love It: Global Crossover of Reggaetón Music in the Digital Age*, forthcoming from the University Press of Florida's Digital

Latinidades Series, illustrates our subfield's intersectional, transnational, hybrid, gender-focused, and multimedia paradigm coming of age.<sup>17</sup>

#### CODA

This entry sought to provide some of the names, research projects, and productive engagements of the subfield of Latina/o media studies. Following an intersectional, interdisciplinary, and transnational trajectory, this genealogy takes us from legacy media such as film and television to the contemporary post-network and digital culture environment in which hybridity and ambiguous ethnicity promise to open a space for heterogeneity while simultaneously threatening to become yet another vehicle for mainstream co-optation. Latina media studies has been growing exponentially since the early 2000s. Yet we Latina media scholars regularly experience what we have come to call the Gloria Anzaldúa moment, when a mention of her name appears to absolve dominant-culture scholars, including feminist ones, from reading or referencing any of the other work in our field. While all are indebted to the work of this great writer, who passed away in 2004, she would be the first person to urge us to stay abreast of new research. Whereas Anzaldúa wrote foundational material on Chicano studies, gender studies, and queer studies—all of which served to inspire emergent fields such as Latina media studies—she did not write about media studies, something that all of the scholars mentioned above do.<sup>18</sup> ■

---

ANGHARAD N. VALDIVIA is a research professor, former inaugural head of media and cinema studies, and former interim director of the Institute of Communications Research (2009–14) at the University of Illinois. Her books include *A Latina in the Land of Hollywood* (University of Arizona Press, 2000), *Feminism, Multiculturalism and the Media* (Sage, 1995), *A Companion to Media Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2003), *Latina/o Communication Studies Today* (Peter Lang, 2008), *Mapping Latina/o Studies* (Peter Lang, 2012), and *Latina/os and the Media* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). She served as the editor of *Communication Theory* from 2009 to 2012 and edited the seven-volume *International Encyclopedia of Media Studies* (Wiley/Blackwell, 2012–13).

#### NOTES

1. Lana F. Rakow, "Feminist Approaches to Popular Culture: Giving Patriarchy Its Due," *Communication Review* 9, no. 1 (1986): 19–42.
2. Angharad N. Valdivia, ed., "Latina/o Studies," special issue of *Communication Review* 7, no. 2 (2004); Maggie Rivas, ed., "Media Studies," special issue of *Latino Studies* 9, nos. 2/3 (2011).
3. Angharad N. Valdivia, *Latina/os and the Media* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010).
4. Rosa-Linda Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen: Chicano and Chicano Film Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Clara Rodriguez, *Latin Looks:*

*Images of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. Media* (Boulder, CO: Westview), 1997; Frances R. Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998).

5. This is not an exhaustive list, but rather an indication of the fact that the genealogies informing Latina media studies are wide and global.

6. Jacqueline Bobo, "The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers," in *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, ed. E. Deidre Pribram (London: Verso, 1988), 90–109; Michèle Mattelart, *Women, Media, Crisis: Femininity and Disorder* (London: Comedia, 1986); Ella Shohat, "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 13, nos. 1/2/3 (1991): 45–84.

7. Angharad N. Valdivia, ed., *Feminism, Multiculturalism and the Media: Global Diversities* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1995).

8. Isabel Molina Guzmán and Angharad N. Valdivia, "Brain, Brow and Booty: Latina Iconicity in U.S. Popular Culture," and Viviana Rojas, "The Gender of Latinidad: Latinas Speak about Hispanic Television," *Communication Review* 7, no. 2 (2004): 125–53, 205–21.

9. Mari Castañeda Paredes, "The Reorganization of Spanish-Language Media Marketing in the United States," in *Continental Order? Integrating North America for Cybercapitalism*, ed. Vincent Mosco and Dan Schiller (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001); Mari Castañeda Paredes, "The Transformation of Spanish-Language Radio in the United States," *Journal of Radio Studies* 10, no. 1 (2003): 5–16; Mari Castañeda Paredes, "The Importance of Spanish Language and Latino Media," in *Latina/o Communication Studies Today*, ed. A. N. Valdivia (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 51–67.

10. Debra Merskin, "Three Faces of Eva: Perpetuation of the Hot-Latina Stereotype in *Desperate Housewives*," *Howard Journal of Communication* 18, no. 2 (2007): 133–51; Dana E. Mastro and Susannah R. Stern, "Representations of Race in Television Commercials: A Content Analysis of Prime-Time Advertising," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 47, no. 4 (2003): 638–47; Dana E. Mastro, Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, and Michelle Ortiz, "The Cultivation of Social Perceptions of Latinos: A Mental Models Approach," *Media Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2007): 347–65.

11. Valdivia, *Latina/o Communication Studies Today*.

12. María Elena Cepeda, "Beyond 'Filling in the Gap': The State and Status of Latina/o Feminist Media Studies," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 2 (2015): 344–60.

13. Isabel Molina-Guzmán and Lisa M. Cacho, "Historically Mapping Intersectional Feminist Media Studies," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, ed. Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin (New York: Routledge, 2013): 71–80.

14. Mari Castañeda Paredes, "Feeling Good while Buying Goods: Promoting Commodity Activism to Latina Consumers," in *Commodity Activism*, ed. Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 273–91; Dolores Inés Casillas, *Sounds of Belonging: A Cultural History of Spanish-Language Radio in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Jillian M. Báez, "Latina/o Audiences as Citizens: Bridging Culture," in *Contemporary Latina/o Media: Production, Circulation, Politics*, ed. Arlene Davila and Yeidy M. Rivero (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 267–84; Jillian M. Báez, "Television for All

Women? Watching Lifetime's Devious Maids," in *Cupcakes, Pinterest, Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First century*, ed. Elana Levine (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 51–70.

15. Mary Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meaning of Film and TV Stardom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); María Elena Cepeda, *Musical ImagiNation: U.S. Colombians and the Latin(o) Music "Boom"* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Deborah Parédez, *Selenidad: Selena, Latinos, and the Performance of Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

16. Isabel Molina-Guzmán, *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies and the Media* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Myra Mendible, ed., *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); María Elena Cepeda and Dolores Inés Casillas, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Latina/o Media* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

17. Michelle Rivera, *Hate It or Love It: Global Crossover of Reggaetón Music in the Digital Age* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, forthcoming).

18. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza la Frontera*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987/1999); Gloria Anzaldúa, ed., *Making Face, Making Soul, Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990); Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Brooklyn: Kitchen Table, 1981).