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Dragging Oscar

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Celebrities struggle with having their images distorted and played with, particularly in this age of digitized images and the inevitable Photoshopping of images spread virally through the Internet. The ubiquitous role of celebrities in contemporary society makes it difficult for them to hide from the photographers, videographers, reporter, bloggers, and eyewitnesses who dot a multimedia environment driven by speculation and exploitation. While celebrity magazines and Web sites engage in intertextual play, other sites use celebrities as fodder for both fantasy and profit. The more prurient role of the Internet (in particular) in using and repurposing celebrity images is well documented. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that Oscar De La Hoya, the purported Golden Boy of boxing and one of the most notable Latino celebrities over the past two decades, would find himself in the midst of a “scandal” over the alleged misappropriation of his visage by editing it onto pictures of the body of a cross-dressing male clad in fishnets.

Of course, for De La Hoya the challenge to eradicating any misappropriation of his visage or to squashing truer rumors and visual evidence of any misstep is the prevalence of linking and archiving sites, links, and images. Thus, though this and other pictures originally surfaced on the site www.x17online.com, they could then (and now) be easily searched and linked on a variety of other sites (e.g., <http://www.evilbeetgossip.com>; <http://www.ninjadude.com>). So even when a gossip site offers the opinion that “if you look at the pictures with a critical eye, they seem Photoshopped, with his head appearing too big for his body in some of the shops” (http://www.celebitchy.com/6060/oscar_de_la_hoya_tranny_pics_are_fake/), the erroneous and offending images recur.

Nevertheless, De La Hoya’s public and legal position that the images were doctored was also vindicated through a variety of online gossip sites (see <http://www>

[.celebritymound.com](http://www.celebritymound.com)). Though the pictures emerged on the [x17online.com](http://www.x17online.com) Web site and the *New York Post* in the fall of 2007, they were allegedly procured through an exotic dancer and “friend” of De La Hoya. Not surprisingly, De La Hoya and his various lawyers immediately attacked the pictures’ veracity. And by the summer of 2008 the images were deemed to be the product of Photoshop editing, something not unlike what happens to female celebrities whose heads and faces are transposed onto nude and pornographic images. The testimony of experts in Manhattan Federal Court put paid to the story of De La Hoya and his fishnets. What is left, however, is the substantial residue of the case.

While there is much to be mined here regarding the role of online journalism, the prevalence of celebrity-driven Web sites, and the longer history of questionable ethics in the media, I am most interested in the sediment of other cultural discourses regarding De La Hoya and his masculinity. Though I previously delved into the continuities and discontinuities of his persona as boxer, icon, and Mexican American (Delgado), the trajectory of Oscar De La Hoya’s image as a boxer and his Mexican American identity extends well beyond the period addressed in that essay. Indeed, the struggle over De La Hoya’s image is complicated by the fact that he is a boxer and a metrosexual, a pugilist and a celebrity, hawking beauty products and producing ballad-driven records. He is a Latin boxer famously interested in protecting his visage for a potential run at Hollywood fame and a fighter who was often more popular with teenage girls than with the core male audience for boxing. His goals run counter to the traditional arc of Latino expectations for boxers, thus violating expectations as he largely prosecuted his career in and out of the ring (see Delgado; Holling; Rodríguez). Unlike the appropriate masculine tactics of a Julio Cesar Chavez or a Roberto Duran, De La Hoya was not a puncher willing to take hits in order to deliver hits, let alone take hits to

prove his masculinity, his strength, his stamina, his capacity to *aguantar* (withstand) the punishing demands of boxing by demonstrating *coraje* (heart) in the middle of the ring.

Thus it is ironic that the Golden Boy, in his last years as a professional boxer, should be embroiled in a public

Figure 1. De La Hoya brandishes his fists in fishnets (x17online.com, 2007).

battle over pictures purporting to prove his interest in cross-dressing and kink. For boxing fans who have withheld their respect for De La Hoya precisely because he did not fight “like a man,” the images would seem to reinforce their views of his masculinity and sexuality. For others, the pictures “at play” could reinforce the feminized view of De La Hoya that appealed to other segments of his fan base. De La Hoya, the erstwhile actor/salsero boxing champion, only received larger measures of credibility through the fights he lost when he showed heart and character by going toe-to-toe with some of the best fighters of this generation (Bernard Hopkins, Floyd Mayweather, Manny Pacquiao).

My own reactions to the images first circulated around confusion of whom the face belonged to, and then, having confirmed that it was an image of De La Hoya, I was surprised at how easy it was to believe that it could be true. In examining this image and its companions I vacillated between thoughts of how one might assume a costume for play versus being serious about what the British call “fancy dress.” Still, I could not shake notions that the images could be real. On the one hand, I recall the cover of an older *Ring* magazine with De La Hoya’s perfect face marred by the inscription of “Fag” written across the top. On the other hand, a decade or more of insistent and multiplatform coverage of celebrity misdeeds and debauchery has inured me to any sense of shock when it comes to the alleged misdeeds of our heroes and icons. Oscar in fishnets? Sure, why not. Oscar the *maricon*? Well, isn’t that what a generation of detractors have been saying about him?

In the end, the images are proved false. De La Hoya largely has his reputation intact, and his legacy in the ring (as a champion across multiple weight divisions) is without question. Still, the images remind us that, culturally, there remains a “right” way to be Latin and male, and fishnets and panties certainly fall short of a macho identity *y como debemos ser hombres* (and how we should be men).

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