

So, why hasn't J-Lo been nominated for any of the BIG film industry awards?

*Today at Mediático, the morning after both her and Shakira's amazing [Super Bowl half-time show](#) that also featured reggaeton artists Bad Bunny and J Balvin and a BAFTAS ceremony where the lack of diversity in award nominations was commented on by the Duke of Cambridge, we are super excited to present this very timely post. Regular contributor [Niamh Thornton](#), Reader in Latin American Studies at the University of Liverpool, explores why J-Lo hasn't been nominated for any awards this year despite her critically lauded supporting performance in *Hustlers* (Lorene Scafaria 2019). You can read one of Dr Thornton's Mediático posts [here](#) and a talk on González Iñárritu's Mexican Masculinities [here](#), and access her blog on Mexican culture and cinema [here](#).*

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The quick answer: she has a body.

Jennifer Lopez is in the news thanks to her (and Shakira's) "[kinetic and sometimes dizzying](#)" half-time performance at the Super Bowl. Whilst there is no doubt about Lopez's renown, the Super Bowl half-time performance is a marker of superstardom and name recognition across a swathe of the US public.

In a [post](#) on my own blog I reflected on Jennifer Lopez as a star and celebrity. As I researched her persona in order to gauge press attention -a key to her celebrity status- I signed up to Google alerts to get daily emails on press coverage. I also signed up to alerts on Minnie Driver (I compare two different films on the murders in Juarez they star in). The attention Driver gets is subject to her lesser fame, but also inflected by different expectations of the white body, that I deal with elsewhere in my [forthcoming book](#). These Google alerts on press coverage about Lopez coincided with the shooting, pre-publicity, and release of *Hustlers* (Lorene Scafaria, 2019) in which she has a supporting role. *Hustlers* is a film about a scam by strippers that targeted mostly wealthy men and is adapted from a New York Magazine article by [Jessica Pressler](#) The patterns that have emerged from the Google

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alerts is the press's obsession with Lopez's body and also the degree to which she invites this kind of press coverage. Like [Kyle Buchanan](#) in *The New York Times*, I read this as evidence of her ambition and ability to hustle, but it also says a lot about how women's talent - and especially Latina women- are reduced to how they present and move their bodies.

Some of the images of Lopez are "papped" shots of her on the set of *Hustlers*. To what extent Lopez or the production team are complicit in these shots is not clear. Lopez sometimes wears [cover-up clothing](#) as if the photos are intrusive or she has been captured as her "authentic" self (Marwick 2011), but more often she is shot [in character](#). Irrespective of the control involved, what is clear from the repeated reveals of on-set photos is that this press coverage amounts to valuable pre-publicity for the film. As evidence of Lopez's foregrounding of her body, other images that regularly appear in the press are screenshots of Lopez's Instagram account. Some are from the set of *Hustlers*, others are photos of her in the gym doing workouts, alone or with her fiancé, Alex Rodriguez. All of these feed into a press focus on Lopez's body, what shape it is in, and how it is dressed.

None of this is new in coverage of women's bodies, but Lopez as a Latina has been reduced to but has also deployed her body as part of her star-celebrity persona (see, Molina Guzmán and Valdivia 2004 and Mendible 2007). A sense of the trajectory of the press attention she gets can be found in this [InStyle mash-up](#) which provides a compendium of Jennifer's (as they refer to her) which reveals the extent to which Lopez is about her "[to-be-looked-at-ness](#)", what [Laura Mulvey \(1975\)](#) calls the status of women on screen who are inevitably subject to the male gaze. Unlike the women on screen featured in Mulvey's article who functioned only as objects of attention, scroll down the *InStyle* page at the variety of images of Lopez and it is clear that she consistently returns the gaze and presents highly stylized poses. The deliberate artifice of these poses can also be found in Marilyn Monroe's performances (as signalled by Mulvey in her [audiovisual essay](#)), another glamorous star whose acting abilities have been over-looked. One such repeated pose is Lopez's (in)famous

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over-the-shoulder-glance-back whenever the press photographs her rear, where it is clear that she is in on the look and knowingly performs to the waiting press. Lopez invites the look and asserts her control over what part(s) of her is being looked at. This invitation is managed through a carefully chosen wardrobe of clothing that draws attention to particular parts of her physique.

However, for all the control Lopez may have over the image of her body, the amount of press attention her body receives means that she is not taken seriously as an actor and has won no major industry awards for her film performances. Within film industry discourses she is re-framed as a celebrity singer who sometimes acts rather than someone who has an established career as an actor since her first film role in *My Family* (Gregory Nava, 1995). She was nominated for Golden Globes both for *Hustlers* and *Selena* (Gregory Nava 1997) without winning but has not been nominated for an Academy Award for supporting role in *Hustlers*, a fact which was [widely lamented](#) in the press. Furthermore, this problem of her body is redoubled in a film like *Hustlers*, centred as it is on women who use their bodies to make a living. With *Hustlers* it becomes impossible to forget that we are watching Lopez as a Latina woman who has a body.

Perceptions around her celebrity (understood as lower value than stardom) and the problems that persist when rewarding work starring Latinx and people of colour underpin how Lopez is assessed, but there is another pervasive issue. Lopez's body gets in the way of her awards' success because of the patriarchalism and also coloniality of the film industry and the various award bodies which legitimize and celebrate it. Her lack of acclaim for what she does with her body in *Hustlers*, stands in contrast to what happens with (white) male performers who do similar body focused performances. For instance, the kind of labour involved in her physical transformation - which Lopez emphasizes in her Instagram workouts- is the same kind of body transforming labour that is so often rewarded in male actors to the extent that it has become something of an awards season cliché to have an actor receive an Oscar for his body transforming ("groundbreaking") role. Take, for

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example, [Christian Bale's frequent body transformations for roles](#). Bale is a much-lauded for his capacity to become the characters he plays through dramatic physical changes, from the emaciated Trevor Reznik of *The Machinist* (Brad Anderson, 2004) to the muscle-bound Batman of Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). Similarly, Joaquin Phoenix has been [being praised](#) and multiply awarded for his extreme weight loss for *Joker* (Todd Philips, 2019). Where these mens' acting talents are augmented because of these bodily transformations, Lopez's body work is read as the necessary (albeit exemplary) labour of controlling and containing the (Latina) female body, that is integral to her looked-at-ness and is commented upon as part of her celebrity persona.

Her control of the gaze through wardrobe, styling, and posture has some power, but it does not grant her entry into the hierarchy of taste that is the awards season. Her body, because it is female and Latina (something I dealt with in the previously cited post), is read as her primary attribute rather than part of her performed self and, as a result, she is denied the recognition she deserves as an actor.

#### Works Cited and some further reading

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